INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES
Pacific Lutheran University
iss@plu.edu | Phone: 253-535-7264

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students

PLEASE READ ALL OF THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CAREFULLY!!

Instruction on how to fill out Form I-765 is available here:
https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765instr.pdf

GENERAL INFORMATION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) provides F-1 students with an opportunity for hands-on work experience related to the academic field of study. You are eligible to apply if you meet the following criteria:

- You are currently in F-1 status.
- You have been enrolled in a full course of study for one academic year (two semesters) or will complete one academic year by the date the OPT approval begins.
- You have not exceeded 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization. (Part-time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility.)
- You are eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT per academic level. For example, you may apply for 12 months of OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and then another 12 months after completing a master's degree. You may apply for OPT during your academic program (pre-completion) or after your academic program (post-completion). An additional 24-month extension may be possible depending on your field of study.

While approved for OPT, you are still in F-1 status and must report address changes and employment information to International Student Services (ISS).

At the end of your approved OPT, you have a 60-day grace period. During this grace period you must either depart the U.S., be issued an I-20 for a new program of study, or change to a different immigration status.

12 months of OPT
You may apply to use your 12 months of OPT, at different rates, during your academic program, after your program completion, or a combination of both.

Pre-completion OPT
OPT used during your academic program, and ending before your program is completed, is called "pre-completion" OPT. It can be approved for different rates:

- Full-time (more than 20 hours per week) or part-time (20 hours per week or less) during J-term and Summer Semester and between breaks, provided you are eligible and intend to register the following semester
- Part-time (20 hours per week or less) while enrolled in a full course of study

Post-completion OPT
OPT that follows completion of your program requirements is called "post-completion" OPT. It can be approved in two ways:

- Full-time after the completion of all course requirements for your degree (excluding thesis or equivalent)
- Full-time after completion of your degree

24-month STEM Extension of OPT
You are eligible to apply for a 24-month extension, beyond the initial 12 months of OPT, if you meet all of the following conditions:

- You are currently approved for post-completion OPT.
- You completed an undergraduate or graduate degree in a science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) field. Visit the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement website for the STEM Designated Degree Program List, https://www.ice.gov/sevis/students.
- You have a job or job offer from an E-Verify employer, https://www.e-verify.gov/

WHEN TO APPLY

For pre-completion OPT
- You can apply up to 90 days before being enrolled for one academic year.

For post-completion OPT
- Apply early! Processing by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) takes three months.
- You may apply up to 90 days before your program end date and up to 60 days after your program end date. Your program end date is the last day of your final semester, including final exams week.
- You are strongly encouraged to apply prior to your program end date. Though recent rule changes allow you to apply up to 60 days after your program end date, you cannot begin work until the application is processed. This may result in a loss of full eligibility (12 months) due to the 3-month processing time.

For 24-month STEM extension
- Apply BEFORE your current EAD expires. USCIS recommends you apply up to 90 days before its expiration. You can continue to work for up to 180 days while the application is pending.
- ISS is NOT going to remind you to apply for STEM extension. It is your responsibly to initiate.

HOW TO APPLY

For Pre- and Post-completion OPT
Step 1: Prepare the following before meeting with the advisor in ISS:

- ✓ Completed I-765 Form, https://www.uscis.gov/i-765 .
- ✓ Photocopy of valid passport photo page and passport expiration date
- ✓ Two passport-style photos
- ✓ Photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 card or print-out of I-94, https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/.

- ✓ Photocopy of previously issued EAD (if applicable)
- ✓ $550 application fee in one of the following formats:
    - o check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security". In "For" section, write "I-765 fee." If the check does not have your name on it, write your full name on the check.
    - o Form G-1450: Authorization for Credit Card Transaction, https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450
- ✓ Photocopy of previously issued I-20s with CPT or OPT authorization (if lost, include a print-out of Event History page in SEVIS—ask ISS for assistance).

Choosing a start date:
- If you are applying for post-completion OPT, your start date must be within 60 days after your program completion date. In other words, if you graduate or complete your exchange program June 13, your start date can be no later than August 12.
- If you are applying for pre-completion OPT, your start date can be any date.
- Changing the requested OPT dates after the application is mailed can be very difficult. Choose your dates carefully.

Photo specifications:
- U.S. Department of State Guidelines, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html
- The two photos should have a white or off-white background.
- They should be unmounted, printed on thin paper, glossy, and not re-touched.
- The photos should show a passport-style, full-face image, with both ears visible.
- Taken with a neutral facial expression or a natural smile, with both eyes open.
- No glasses allowed.
- No hats or head coverings, unless you wear it daily for religious purposes.
- The photo should not be larger than 2 x 2 inches, with the distance from the top of the head to just below the chin about 1 3/8 inches.
- Lightly print your name and your I-94 number in pencil or felt-tip pen on the back of each photo.
- Photographs must have been taken within the last 30 days and not previously used

Tips for completing Form I-765

Type or print legibly in black ink. When leaving any section blank, put N/A (not applicable).

- Part 1, Item 1:
    - o Check box 1.a. Initial permission to accept employment

- Part 2, Items 5.a. - 5.f.:
    - o Your Notice of Action and EAD will be mailed to the address you provide. If your mail will be sent to someone other than yourself, please include an "In Care Of Name."

- Part 2, Item 12:
    - o Check "yes" only if you have previously received an EAD card from USCIS.

- Part 2, Items 16 and 17:
    - o Only fill these items in if you are requesting a Social Security card (answered Yes to 14 & 15).

- Part 2, Item 21.a.:
    - o Find your 11-digit I-94 number at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/ Some students may have been issued an I-94 card (a small white card in your passport) upon their arrival in the U.S.

- Part 2, Items 22, 23, 24, 25:
    - Use the information from your I-94 record. In some cases, you may have made recent short trips to Canada or Mexico, which are not reflected in your current I-94 record. This is standard and it will be fine to use your existing I-94 information. If you have changed to F-1 status within the U.S., include a copy of your Approval Notice.

- Part 2, Item 27:
    - Use one of the three following codes:
        - Pre-completion OPT: (c)(3)(A)
        - Post-completion OPT: (c)(3)(B)
        - 24-month extension for STEM degree recipients: (c)(3)(C)

- Part 2, Item 28 (for 24-month extension for STEM degree recipients only):
    - On "Degree" section, list your degree level and major as it appears on your I-20, as best you can in the available space (for example, BS Computer Sci, or Master Fin Math).
    - You must fill out "Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify" and "Client Company Identification Number" sections.

- Part 3, Applicant's Statement:
    - Check box 1.a.

- Part 3, Applicant's Contact Information: Provide phone number(s) and email address

- Part 3, Applicant's Signature: Sign the form in black ink.

Step 2: At the final meeting with the ISS advisor you will review the OPT application and the advisor will issue a new, updated I-20 with an OPT recommendation printed on the back page. Within 30 days of the new I-20 being issued, mail the application, including the following documents, to USCIS:
- ✓ Completed I-765 Form, https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
- ✓ $550 application fee
    - check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" <u>OR</u>
    - Form G-1450: Authorization for Credit Card Transaction
- ✓ Photocopy of signed I-20 with OPT endorsement on the back page
- ✓ Photocopy of passport ID page
- ✓ Two passport-style photos (lightly print your name and I-94# on back with a pencil or felt-tip pen)
- ✓ Photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 card or print-out of I-94
- ✓ Photocopies of any previously issued EAD (if applicable)
- ✓ Photocopy of previously issued I-20s with CPT or OPT authorization (if lost, include a print-out of Event History page in SEVIS).

- Mail the entire application to:

<u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u>

USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

<u>For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:</u>

USCIS
Attn : AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S.
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

- Within two weeks of having received your application, USCIS will send you a Notice of Action (I-797).
  - Carefully review the notice to make sure your name is spelled correctly. If it is not, contact your ISS advisor immediately.
  - **Please bring the original copy of your Notice of Action to ISS to create a copy in your student file.**
  - You may use the case number on your receipt notice to check the status of your application online, https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do .
- You cannot begin employment until USCIS approves the OPT application and you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- **Please email a copy of your EAD card to ISS to save in your student file.**

For 24-month Extension
Step 1: Submit the following to ISS (by mail or in person):

- ✓ Completed Form I-765, https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
- ✓ Completed Form I-983, Training Plan: https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf
- ✓ Your current mailing address.

Step 2: The ISS advisor will issue a new I-20 with a recommendation for the extension and will mail it back to you. Mail to USCIS the following:

- ✓ Form I-765
- ✓ $550 application fee
  - check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" OR
  - Form G-1450: Authorization for Credit Card Transaction
- ✓ Two passport-style photos (lightly print your name and I-94 # on back with a pencil or felt-tip pen)
- ✓ Photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 card or print-out of I-94 record, https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/
- ✓ Photocopy of valid passport photo page and passport expiration date
- ✓ Photocopy of all previous EAD cards (front and back)
- ✓ Photocopy of previously issued I-20s with CPT or OPT authorization
- ✓ Photocopy of new I-20 (make sure to sign the first page in BLUE ink before copying!)
- ✓ Original employment confirmation letter on company letter head
- ✓ Copy of STEM degree (official transcript or unofficial transcript)
  - To request an official transcript, visit this link: http://studentclearinghouse.org/
  - To print out unofficial transcript, log-in to Banner:
    https://banweb.plu.edu/pls/pap/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin
    - Click on Student Services
      Click on Student Records
      Click on Academic Transcript

Be sure to mail your application to the USCIS Service Center, https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses
serving the area of your current residence.

Before sending out your application, make a copy of everything!

IMPORTANT: While engaged in STEM extension, students are required to update ISS with name and address of employer every 6 months. If you fail to report, your OPT will be cancelled. ISS will NOT remind you about this. Learn more about STEM reporting requirements at: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-stem-opt-reporting-requirements

Recommendations:
Utilize resources of the Alumni & Student Connections office. They can assist you with the following aspects:
- Job search
- Resume & Cover Letters
- Interviews & Follow-up

Office location: Nesvig Alumni Center
Phone: 253-535-7415 (to make an appointment)

Going Global: a special job search engine for PLU students. This website is only accessible through PLU network.

http://online.usacareerguides.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What if I have international travel plans?
   a. Traveling outside of the U.S. is always a risk. EAD does not serve as a reentry permit. So you must have a valid F-1 valid visa to return to the U.S. Moreover, it can be helpful to have an employment confirmation or offer letter from your employer to show at the port of entry along with your valid EAD card.

2. What type of job can I accept?
   a. You may accept paid or unpaid position. You can work part-time or full time. Your job needs to be relevant to the degree that you gained at PLU.

3. How long can I be unemployed?
   a. On standard 12-month OPT, you can accumulate up to 90 days for unemployment. With a 24-month OPT extension, students are allowed to collect up to 150 days of unemployment.

4. What happens if I move after I mail my OPT application?
   a. Consider using the address of a friend if you think you may move while your OPT application is pending. If your mailing address changes while your application is pending, notify USCIS of your new address here: https://egov.uscis.gov/coa/displayCOAForm.do Make sure that you have also notified the U.S. Postal Service at https://moversguide.usps.com/mgo/whos-moving To help track delivery of your EAD card you can register for Informed Delivery through U.S. Postal Service: https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action

5. How long does it take to get approved for OPT?
   a. Approximately three months.

6. If I change my mind and decide not to work, can I cancel my OPT authorization?
   a. The answer depends on your situation. If you were issued a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation but have not yet mailed your application to USCIS, you must notify the ISS adviser of your change in plans. If you have already mailed your application to USCIS, a request can be submitted to USCIS to halt processing. Your application fee will not be returned and we cannot guarantee that your request will be honored. Contact the ISS adviser for assistance. If you have received your EAD card and wish to cancel authorization, contact the ISS adviser.

7. When I receive my EAD card, should I give a copy to ISS?
   a. Yes. ISS needs a copy of your EAD card.

8. What happens if my EAD card never arrives, or has incorrect information on it?
   a. Contact ISS for assistance.

9. What if I lose my EAD card?
   a. If you lose your card, you will need to apply for a replacement. Complete a new Form I-765 and resubmit it with all supporting documents, including the fee, to USCIS.

Still have more questions? Please contact ISS.

Heather Jacobson
International Student Services
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, WA 98447
Email: jacobsha@plu.edu
Phone: 253-535-7122
To make an appointment: https://hjacobson.youcanbook.me/