

Wabash College

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information

What is OPT?

OPT is an employment benefit for F-1 students who will be completing a program of study. To be eligible, you must have been enrolled full-time at Wabash College for the 2 semesters leading up to your OPT application.

- **You do NOT need a job offer to apply for OPT!**
- You must apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to request OPT.
- Once your application is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization (EAD) card, also called an OPT card. **You will be authorized to work in the US for up to 12 months.**
- **You are not allowed to work until you receive your OPT card, AND** you may only work during the dates listed on the card (unless your employer has submitted an H-1B petition on your behalf).
- **ALL** OPT employment **MUST** be related to your major field of study. If you have more than one major, then you can search for jobs relating to any of your majors. You do **NOT** have employment authorization for jobs related to your minor/s!
- **You must work at least 21 hours per week to meet the OPT full-time employment requirement.** There is **no maximum** number of hours you can work per week.
- Students on F-1 OPT are limited to a total of **90 days of unemployment** for the 12 months of OPT. This counts Saturdays and Sundays and any days you spend abroad while unemployed and on OPT. You'll want to track days of unemployment closely; the clock starts counting on the first day your EAD card is valid.

When should I apply for OPT?

There's a 5-month filing window for OPT. A student may apply for OPT **up to 90 days before** his graduation date, and **no later than 60 days after** his graduation date.

In addition, once Amy has recommended OPT in your SEVIS record and made you a new I-20, your OPT application must be received by USCIS within 30 days.

Choosing an OPT start date:

The start date you select must fall into a 2-month window. The window opens the first day **AFTER** your graduation from Wabash and runs for 60 days. If you're worried about finding a job, be sure to pick a date closer to the 60th day.

How long will it take for my OPT application to be processed?

It will probably take USCIS around 90 days (3 months) to process your application. This is why it's imperative to plan ahead!

Wabash College

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Request Form

The purpose of this form is to confirm a Wabash College international student's pending academic program completion so he may apply for an employment benefit from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

PART I: To be completed by the student:

Name: _____

Non-Wabash email address: _____

Major 1: _____ Major 2: _____

Expected date of graduation: ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Requested OPT start date: _____

Do you intend to travel abroad before you begin OPT? YES NO

Please list below any previously-authorized periods of OPT and CPT:

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____

PART II: To be completed by the student's academic advisor:

Please confirm the information provided above by the student and complete the following fields. You may either return this form to the student or scan and email to Amy Weir in the International Center at weira@wabash.edu.

Academic advisor's name and department: _____

When will this student complete his studies? ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Advisor's signature: _____ Date : _____

Registrar's signature: _____ Date: _____

Required Items for an OPT Application

- Completed USCIS Form I-765—see the tips below for more information
- \$410 check or money order made payable to “USCIS” —see the tips below for more information
- 2 passport-style photographs of yourself, taken within the past 30 days—see the tips below for more information
- Completed F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Request Form
- Copy of your current I-20 form, pages 1 and 2
- Copy of the identity/validity page/s of your current passport
- Copy of your most recently-issued F-1 visa stamp
- Recent printout of your I-94 information—see the tips below for more information
- Copy of previously-issued I-20s you received for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization
- Copy of your job offer letter, if any
- Copy of any previously-issued Employment Authorization (EAD) card
- Form G-1145, if you’d like to be notified by the USCIS when your application is received and later approved

- You will be able to take passport-sized photos that are appropriate for an OPT application at pharmacies and discount stores (Like CVS, Walgreens, and Wal-Mart). These stores generally charge around \$8 to \$10 for two photos. No appointment is necessary. **Remove your glasses for the photo.**
- When taking the photos, be sure to wear clothing that is *different* from the clothing you wore in your passport and visa photos. **The photos must be taken within 30 days of making your OPT application,** and if the USCIS suspects they may be older they will reject them. To help ensure your photographs are acceptable, compare the new photos to those used on your passport and F-1 visa.

I-94 Information:

- Google “I-94 retrieval,” and the entry at the top is the link you want to use—it’s the US Department of Homeland Security’s site. The web address ends in “cbp.dhs.gov.”
- At the bottom of the page, click **“Yes, I have read and understand the information and agree to these terms.”**
- Then you’ll need to enter the following details on yourself to find your I-94 information:
 - Last/Surname
 - First (Given) Name
 - Birth Date
 - Passport Number
 - Country of Issuance
- You may have to try different name combinations to find your record, especially if you have more than one family name or first name or if it’s unclear which name is your first or middle name.

I've Got the Application Ready...Now What?

Finalizing your application:

Once you turn in all the required materials to Amy Weir, she can make you a new I-20 which recommends OPT on page 2. You will need to sign the new I-20, make a copy, and include the copy of the new I-20 with the rest of the application. **You will then need to mail the application to the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).**

Mailing your application:

I suggest sending it by **US Postal Service Priority Mail** or **FedEx**. Since you will be mailing your application by courier (rather than by regular mail), you will need to use this address for the mailing:

USCIS

Attention: I-765

1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100

Phoenix, AZ 85034

Please note: ***It is imperative that you mail your OPT application right away upon completion.*** Once Amy makes you a new I-20, the OPT application must be on file with the USCIS within 30 days, or your application will be refused.

Checking the status of your application:

If you completed G-1145 as part of your application, then USCIS should notify you by email, text, or both when your application has been received. Later, you should also receive a hard-copy Receipt Notice (USCIS Form I-797) by mail. If you used Amy's address, it will come to her. **If you receive the Receipt Notice, please share a copy with Amy, so she can enter it into her portfolio and track it for you.**

On these correspondences from the USCIS, you will receive a **Receipt Number** that starts with the letters, LIN. You may use that Receipt Number to track your case online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>.

Please note: ***The USCIS cannot tell you exactly when your OPT will be approved.*** Amy also cannot predict when it will be approved. You must understand that this process is outside of our control, and your application will be adjudicated in roughly 90 days. If you're lucky, it may be sooner than that.

Travel abroad after graduation while awaiting OPT approval:

After you finish up your final exams and attend graduation, do NOT plan to leave the US without first speaking with Amy. Travel abroad while OPT is pending can be risky, particularly if you have an expired F-1 visa stamp. There is a chance that you would not be approved for a new F-1 visa to reenter the US and begin OPT. Then you must decide how urgent the need to travel is—is it urgent enough to jeopardize your OPT?

If you feel strongly that you need to travel abroad and your F-1 visa is expired, the safest thing to do is wait until your OPT is approved, work for a month or two to establish a relationship with your employer and build proof of employment, and then travel, only with the support of your employer. Amy will be glad to advise you further.

Once You've Received Your Card

You may only begin your OPT employment once you have the actual card in your possession. Neither the OPT Approval Notice nor a web confirmation will suffice as evidence of eligibility for employment. **You must have your OPT card in hand to complete the I-9 form for your OPT employer.**

- In addition, you may only work within the dates that are printed toward the bottom of your OPT card (also called an EAD card).
- Graduating students are NOT permitted to work on campus after graduation, unless the job qualifies under OPT AND falls within the dates listed on the OPT card.

OPT reporting requirements:

During your approved period of OPT, you continue to be in F-1 status sponsored by Wabash College. Though your I-20 may appear to be expired, your OPT card effectively serves as the extension of your F-1 status. As an F-1 student, there are still updates that you are required to make to SEVIS, even though you are no longer attending classes. You must report the following to Amy:

- Your current address (where you physically reside) within 10 days of any move
- Your current telephone number
- Your current email address
- The name of your OPT employer
- The address of your OPT employer (the physical address where you actually work—not the company headquarters' address)
- Your job title
- The start date of your OPT employment with this employer
- If you change employers, then you also need to report the end date of the previous employment, as well as the start date of the new employment
- Any impending change in your immigration status (likely filed through your employer)

Travelling while on OPT:

If traveling outside the U.S., it is very important for you to have with you all of the following documents:

- valid passport
- valid SEVIS I-20 signed by Amy Weir or Jon Jump **within the past 6 months**
- valid F-1 visa
- your EAD card
- a job offer letter (or job confirmation letter)

If you do not have one of these items it is possible that you will be denied entry back into the U.S. If you need to apply for a new visa while you are abroad, please remember that there is always a chance that your visa will be denied.

Travel outside the U.S. while **unemployed** will count towards your 90-day unemployment limit. If you travel while **employed** either during a period of leave authorized by your employer or as part of your employment, the time spent outside the U.S. does not count as unemployment.

Studying while on OPT:

Part Time

You may study part time while on OPT, but you should be cautious. Any courses taken should not apply towards a degree program and should be “incidental” to your OPT employment; that is, you need to continue full-time OPT employment as your primary activity.

New Degree Program

You may not engage in study towards a new degree program while on OPT. If you are admitted to a new degree program that begins during the dates listed on your EAD, you will be expected to transfer your SEVIS record to the new school so a new program I-20 can be issued for you. On the day your SEVIS record is released, your OPT will be terminated.

Options at the end of OPT:

You automatically receive a 60-day grace period following the expiration of your EAD. During this time, you may stay in the U.S., but may not study, work, or leave and re-enter. You have the following options at the end of your OPT period:

- **Depart the US:** If you do not plan to stay in the US, you must depart by the end of the 60-day grace period.
- **Begin a new degree program:** If you begin a new degree program at another school, you must be accepted to the new school and request that Wabash College release your SEVIS record to that school before the end of the 60-day grace period. You can wait a maximum of 5 months from your OPT end date before you must begin classes.
- **Change to a new visa type:** You must file the proper paperwork prior to the end of the 60-day grace period. If you hope to obtain an employment-based visa (H-1B visa) you should be aware of the process early so that you can plan many months in advance.
- **Extend your OPT for 24 months:** This option is not available to everyone. The government has identified certain degrees in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) that are eligible. If your degree is on this list, you may be eligible. Ask Amy Weir for confirmation.
 - In order to qualify for the STEM extension, you must be employed by a company that uses the **E-Verify** database to verify the status of employees.
 - Unpaid employment does not support the 24-month extension.
 - During the 24-month extension you may only work for employers who use E-Verify.
 - You must apply for the extension **prior** to the expiration of your current OPT.