

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is OPT?

OPT is a temporary employment authorization allowing 12 months of full-time work authorization related to a student's academic program. A student may request OPT during an academic program as well as after completion of the academic program. It is not necessary to have an offer of employment in order to apply for OPT.

Eligibility:

To be eligible for 12 months of Post-Completion OPT, a student must:

- be in good immigration status for a full academic school year
- be in a degree-seeking academic program

When can I participate in Post-completion OPT and when should I apply?

You can participate in Post-Completion OPT (full time work authorization):

- after the completion of a degree or certificate program
- after a successful defense (PhD only)

USCIS takes up to 90 days to process OPT Authorization. Please plan to apply accordingly.

- You can apply up to 90 days before your program end date
- USCIS must receive your application no later than 60 days after your program end date (This means that we should receive your application no later than **30 days** after your program end date.)

Please note: there is no expedited application process

When can I begin working?

1. You may not begin working until you receive an Employment Authorization Document (**EAD**) card and its starting date is current.
 - You will request this start date on the OPT Authorization form (in this packet)
 - USCIS will authorize your OPT from the date you requested on the OPT Authorization Form or the USCIS approval date, whichever is later.
2. **If you work on campus you may not continue working after the program end date on your I-20.** This is when you complete your studies and when you lose your benefit to work on campus without work authorization. If you choose to continue working on campus for OPT, you can only begin working again on the start date listed on your EAD Card.

What happens after I apply?

1. Receiving your EAD Card:
 - USCIS will mail your card to the address you provide on the Form I-765. **The U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from USCIS.** Therefore, the address you choose should

not change for the next several months. If you are moving, agree with a responsible friend (who will not be moving) to use his/her address.

- The expiration date on the card is your employment end date. It should be exactly 1 year from your start date or 14 months after your program end date, whichever is first (unless you participated in Pre Completion OPT).

2. 90 day unemployment limit:

- During Post-Completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue a total of more than 90 days of unemployment during the 12 months of Post-Completion OPT carried out under the initial OPT authorization.

3. Student reporting requirements:

- Both while your OPT application is pending with USCIS and after your OPT application is approved, your nonimmigrant status remains F-1. As long as you are in the US and on OPT, you are required to update the following to GEO, at geois@vcu.edu within 10 days of any change:
 - your residential address
 - employer name, employer address, supervisor name, email, and telephone number
 - job title and how the job relates to your major
 - change or loss of employment

Please note, that if you do not inform us of your employment within 90 days of your start date, SEVIS will automatically terminate your F-1 record. Please request an OPT EMPLOYMENT form to update us of your employment.

Traveling abroad? Please read carefully:

The procedures for leaving from and returning to the US differ depending on whether your OPT has been approved yet. You will be in one of two categories:

1. Travel outside of the US **before your OPT is approved:**

Student departure from the U.S. before OPT is approved does not abandon the application. In order to reenter before the OPT is approved, the student will need:

- a valid passport and F-1 visa stamp
- the I-20 endorsed for OPT and signed for travel
- an I-797 receipt notice indicating USCIS receipt of the OPT application
- documentation that you have a job offer, or have been looking for a job

Note: If your OPT is approved while you are outside the U.S. you will be required to have the card in order to reenter the U.S.

2. Travel outside the U.S. **after your OPT has been approved:**

Port of entry (POE) guards will ask for proof of employment from all F-1 students returning using an OPT card. If you travel you will need to take:

- a letter from your supervisor indicating that you are still working, a summary of what you are doing, and that he or she expects you to return to continue working
- two of your most recent pay stubs
- your signed I-20 (**signature cannot be older than six months** regardless of text above signature line stating that signatures are good for one year)
- a valid passport
- a valid F-1 visa

If you have not found a job yet, take clear documentation of your job search. Remember that you travel at your own risk. It is possible the GEO will not be able to help you return if you are stopped at the POE.

OPT Process and Application Checklist

To apply for OPT, please submit the following documents to the GEO-Immigration Advising **no later than 30 days** after the date of completion for your degree. Use this checklist to ensure that your application is complete prior to submission:

- Form I-765 <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf>. On number 16, **write (C)(3)(B) for Post-Completion OPT**
- Form G-1145 <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf> (for email/text receipt confirmation)
- VCU's Optional Practical Training Authorization Form completed by you and your academic adviser (see F-1 Forms for a fillable PDF version of this form online)
- Copy of passport information page, visa page, most current entry stamp and I-94 <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>
- Front and back copies of **all** previously issued I-20s and OPT I-20 (to be issued by Immigration Advisor)
- If you were authorized for OPT previously, copies of previous OPT I-20, OPT card, and OPT approval notice
- Check or money order for \$410 made payable to "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services"
- Two passport-style photos (to see examples go here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/first-time.html>)

Procedure:

Once these documents have been submitted, the Immigration Advisor will review the application. The advisor will make a new I-20 that recommends you for OPT, and you will be emailed to come in and sign it. When you are notified that your new I-20 is ready, we will also let you know if your application is missing any documents.

Please note: Once GEO processes your OPT request and creates an I-20 for OPT, you must file the I-20 with an I-765 within 30 days. If USCIS receives your I-20 more than 30 days after we process your OPT request, USCIS will deny the I-765 even if you are otherwise eligible for OPT.

As soon as you have signed your new I-20, you need to submit your complete OPT application to USCIS via FedEx or UPS. The 90-day processing time starts the date that USCIS receives your application. Notifications regarding your case, such as a receipt notice, will come directly to you from USCIS.



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Global Education Office

VCU Immigration Advising
912 W Grace St. 4th Floor
P.O. Box 843043
Richmond, VA 23284
Phone: (804) 828-0595
geois@vcu.edu

Optional Practical Training – Authorization Form

Part A: To be completed by student:

Personal Information:

Last name	First	Middle
SEVIS Number N	V Number V	Date of Birth (MM/DD/YY)

Contact Information:

Street Address		Apartment number
City	State	Zip Code
Phone Number	VCU Email Address	Alternate Email Address

Employment Information:

Choose a start date for your employment authorization: _____

**Note: for Post Completion OPT, this must be within 60 days of the last day of your program)*

If you work for VCU now, will you continue to work for VCU while on OPT? _____

Please read and initial each statement:

- _____ I will provide VCU Immigration Services with a copy of my Employment Authorization card
- _____ I understand that any employment I accept while on OPT must be directly related to my field of study
- _____ I will update VCU Immigration Services with the following information within 10 days of any changes
 - The date of any loss or end of employment
 - Changes in my living address or legal name
 - New employer and start date of employment
 - Any changes in my employer's address/contact information

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

See reverse for part B

Part B: To be completed by academic advisor

Department/program of study: _____

Student will have completed all academic requirements for degree by: _____

NOTE: student will lose on-campus work authorization this day. Please keep this in mind if student has a grad assistantship, etc.

Anticipated graduation date: _____

Additional Comments: _____

Advisor Name	Email	Telephone Number
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Advisor Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

If you have any questions, please contact us at GEOIS@vcu.edu