

Resource 3-bi Quick-reference: Characteristics of F-1 optional practical training (OPT)

Preconditions	Student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis at a DHS-approved school for one full academic year before being eligible for OPT. Available both before and after completion of the educational objective, but different rules apply to pre- and post- completion OPT. Students in English language training programs are not eligible for OPT. Part-time F-1 "border commuter students" are eligible only for OPT following completion of the course of study. OPT must be "directly related to the student's major area of study."
Location	Students may engage in OPT for any employer for the duration of OPT authorization, as long as the employment qualifies under OPT standards.
Duration	Standard OPT is available for a cumulative maximum of 12 months per educational level. A one-time extension of 17 months (for a total of 29 months) is available to certain STEM degree recipients.
Hours per week	20 hours/week limit for pre-completion OPT done while school is in session and student still has coursework to complete. Full-time employment can be requested for pre-completion OPT done during official school breaks, and for students who have completed all requirements for their degree except for thesis or dissertation. For post-completion OPT, according to SEVP guidance a student must be adequately employed to avoid limits on unemployment [see AM § 3.54]
Field/level of work	Must be directly related to the student's course of study.

<p>Offer of employment</p>	<p>No offer of employment is required to apply for standard OPT, but the student is expected to work during the OPT EAD validity period. Students on post-completion OPT are limited to a maximum of 90 days of unemployment. To apply for a 17-month STEM extension, student must have an offer of employment from an employer registered with E-Verify.</p>
<p>Effect on other work</p>	<p>Prior use of full-time Curricular Practical Training for one year or more eliminates eligibility for Optional Practical Training (Also See AM § 3.39 "Effect of use of CPT on eligibility for OPT").</p>
<p>Approval process</p>	<p>DSO recommends OPT in SEVIS. Student files I-765 application for EAD with USCIS Lockbox Facility. Work can begin only after receiving EAD issued by USCIS, and on or after the start date on the EAD. Special rules govern applications for the 17-month STEM OPT extension.</p>
<p>Miscellaneous</p>	<p>If doing pre-completion OPT, must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment (unless done during school breaks). Degree candidates that have completed all coursework must continue to make normal progress towards completing the thesis or dissertation required for their degree.</p>