

Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training is a benefit to students on F-1 visas that allows them to work up to 12 full months in their fields of study. You are eligible to participate in one year of OPT after each degree level completed. **OPT can be applied for 90 days prior to your graduation date or up to 60 days after.**

To be eligible for OPT:

You must be an F-1 student in lawful academic standing at CSU for one full academic year (nine months) before submitting an OPT application. Student's time in any Visa status that is valid for study can count towards the one full academic year requirement.

You must not have participated in full-time Curricular Practical Training for more than 12 months. You must submit your application for OPT before your program completion date (the day of your last final)

You must maintain a valid:

- Passport
- I-94 card
- I-20

Applying for OPT

Once you are ready to apply for OPT:

- Complete the OPT Checklist below (to make sure that you have all the necessary documents)
- Send the OPT Recommendation Form below to your advisor
- Make an appointment with the International Student and Scholar Services Coordinator for assistance in submitting the OPT request:
 - **Christine Shaw**
 - Center for Global Engagement
 - (706) 507-8544
 - shaw_christine@columbusstate.edu

You should apply **two to three months before completion** of your studies to ensure that you receive your Employment Authorization (EAD) Card in a timely fashion. The latest you may apply is 60 days after your program end date, but to ensure that there are no delays, we do not suggest waiting that late.

Complete the following prior to submitting your OPT application online and prior to your appointment:

- [OPT Checklist](#) – to be completed by student
- [OPT Advisor Form](#) – to be completed by student and student's advisor
- [Review the I-765 form and create a USCIS account](#) – do this *before* your appointment.

In order to apply, you will need to be ready to pay the **\$470** OPT filing fee online at the time of your appointment.

STEM OPT

STEM OPT allows for an additional 24 months of OPT if you are in the specified degree fields that are approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program. STEM OPT requires all of the same information and fee payment as regular OPT except a copy of your degree or diploma and an employer training plan must be included. STEM OPT must be applied for

and the application must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration of your current OPT. More information about STEM OPT may be found at: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>

Pre Completion OPT - OPT prior to completion of degree

- Students must be enrolled in school full time
- Students may only work 20 hours per week while school is in session
- Students may work full time during summer and other breaks (as long as student will return to school after the break)
- Student may work full-time after completion of all coursework, if a thesis or dissertation is still required and student is making normal progress towards the degree
- Employment must be related to degree field
- Must submit payment and documents the same as post completion OPT
- Approval times are the same as regular OPT

Important things to know about OPT

- You must begin your OPT within 60 days of course completion
- Once you complete your OPT, you have 60 days to leave the country
- You may only work during the dates that are specified on your EAD card
- You must actively search for, and obtain employment within 90 days of your OPT start date or you will be considered out of status and your I-20 will be terminated
- You must work in your area of study