

# GUIDE FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT

## MANAGING YOUR F-1 STATUS AFTER APPLYING FOR OPT

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### **File your application with USCIS either by mail or online.**

- You must file while you are in the US.
- The Form I-765 and the OPT I-20 and other supporting documents must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation of OPT in SEVIS (refer to the date the I-20 is issued).
- You may file an OPT application no earlier than 90 days before your program completion date or within 60 days after your program completion date.

### **Finish your program on time.**

Your I-20 and SEVIS record has been shortened to reflect your program completion date.

- If you will not successfully complete your studies in the semester for which you have applied for OPT, contact our office.
- Your F-1 status may be in jeopardy if you wait to notify us of this situation.

### **Check your case status online.**

If OPT is approved, you will receive an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The processing time for USCIS is approximately three months; however, it may take longer.

You may check your status at <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>.

### **Check for errors!**

Review the information on your USCIS I-797 Receipt Notice and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Speak with an International Student Advisor if you find any errors.

### **End student employment.**

Student employment, including CPT and on-campus employment, including TA/RA employment, must end on or before your program end date (this is the program end date listed on page 1 of your I-20). You may not lawfully begin or resume employment until after you receive your OPT EAD card AND the OPT start date listed on your EAD has been reached.

### **Search for appropriate OPT employment.**

Acceptable employment during OPT can include standard employment, contract employment, self-employment and unpaid positions, if the activity does not violate any labor laws. If you are considering an unpaid position, please review the guide, "Volunteering and Unpaid Internships for F-1 and J-1 Students" available on our website

[www.uakron.edu/international/forms](http://www.uakron.edu/international/forms).

- All employment must average at least 20 hours per week to count as "full time" for purposes of OPT.
- All employment must be directly related to your major and educational level that is on your current I-20. You and the employer make this determination.
- You may change employers as long as each job is directly related to your current major and educational level.

### **Stay within unemployment limits.**

Students on post-completion OPT may have up to 90 days of unemployment.

- Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- OPT authorization begins on the employment start date shown on your EAD.

### **Required reporting.**

Submit the OPT Reporting Form within 10 days of changing your legal name or employment. The first time you submit the form, attach a copy of the front and back of your EAD card to the International Center. These can be scanned and emailed to [immigration@uakron.edu](mailto:immigration@uakron.edu). The OPT Reporting form may be found at <http://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/index.dot>. You may also use the SEVP Portal to update your contact information and employment. For more information on the portal, please go to <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/create-an-sevp-portal-account>. Contact us to print your updated I-20.

**Change of address.** You are required to update your MyAkron account with your home and mailing address within 10 days of the change. You may also update the SEVP Portal. If you move while your OPT application is pending, contact our office for further guidance.

### **Document your job search and keep employment records.**

You may be asked for detailed proof of OPT employment or job search activities for future immigration applications or interviews including:

- Copies of job-specific cover letters and resumes, job descriptions, and offer letters;
- Any letter or email that contains info about interviews, testing, or information sessions; and
- Timesheets, paystubs, or logs of hours.

### **Learn what is needed to re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad.**

Do not attempt to reenter the U.S. on a B visa or visa waiver while awaiting OPT processing, as this will forfeit your OPT.

- **Before** the program end date and while you are still taking classes or completing thesis/dissertation research, while your OPT application is pending:
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - OPT I-20 signed for travel within 6 months of your expected reentry date to the U.S.
  - Copy of receipt notice from USCIS (Form I-797C)
  - Job offer letter (recommended)
  
- **After** the program completion date present all of the following documents upon re-entry:
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa\*\*
  - OPT I-20 signed for travel within 6 months of your expected reentry date to the U.S.
  - Valid OPT EAD\*\*
  - Proof of employment (for example, pay stubs, letter from your employer indicating where you work, your position, the hours you work, etc.)
  - If you have a pending petition before USCIS such as an H-1B petition, consult with legal counsel.

\*\*We recommend that you do not travel after your program completion date if:

- You will need to renew your F-1 visa, or
- Your OPT application is pending.

### **Attending classes.**

You may not take classes toward a new degree while on OPT. You may take part-time classes that are avocational or recreational in nature if you are not pursuing a degree. We urge you to discuss your plans with an International Student Advisor.

If you wish to begin a new degree program, you will need to request a new I-20 for the new degree program (if you will be studying at UA) or request the transfer of your SEVIS record (if you will be studying at another school). Even if the EAD card still appears valid, your OPT authorization will end when you begin the new academic program at UA or when UA releases your SEVIS record to the new institution.

**Health insurance.**

Once you are no longer enrolled as a student, you will not have or be required to have UA health insurance. We strongly advise you contact [oop-insurance@uakron.edu](mailto:oop-insurance@uakron.edu) to purchase a private health insurance plan or contact our office for information on other insurance companies. If you have UA’s international student health insurance plan, you will not qualify for extension of the plan during OPT if you have a gap in dates of coverage.

**Determine if you are eligible for the 24-Month OPT Extension.**

The U.S Department of Homeland Security (DHS) limits this benefit to selected programs. Download our application for the STEM extension at <http://www.uakron.edu/international/forms/index.dot> for additional information.

**Learn options available at the end of OPT.**

After the OPT end date, there is a 60 day grace period in which you can:

- Start another academic program at UA,
- Transfer to another school, or
- Leave the U.S.

During your grace period, you may not work and you may not leave and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. Please *notify our office* of your departure by submitting an OPT Reporting form so that a note can be placed in your immigration record.

**H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.**

The cap gap extension allows certain students with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions to remain in the U.S. until the start date of their approved H-1B employment period, even if the OPT authorization or F-1 grace period would have otherwise expired before October 1.

You are eligible for the cap-gap extension if:

- Your employer files a cap-subject H-1B petition on your behalf and requests a change of status to H-1B to begin October 1, and
- The employer files the H-1B petition on your behalf within your OPT authorization period or the 60-day grace period.

If your employer files your application during your OPT period, then you will have an extension of employment authorization until September 30. If your employer filed the application during your grace period, then you will only have an extension of F-1 status (not employment authorization) until September 30. Contact an International Student Advisor if you have questions or need to request a new I-20 listing your cap-gap extension. Please note that only your employer can provide accurate, official updates regarding your H-1B application.

Disclaimer: The International Center is able to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this packet, should not be construed as legal advice. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, the USCIS may change its interpretation of these immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits, at any time. We will do our best to provide you with the most current guidance. Each case is fact-specific and it is advised that you contact an experienced immigration attorney if you have questions regarding your situation.

**Student Certification:**

I have read and understand the information in this guide. It is my responsibility to maintain my F-1 status while on OPT.

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Signature

Date