



Optional Practical Training Information for Students Who Have Never Had OPT Before

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training allows F-1 students to accept paid, off-campus employment that is directly related to their field of study and commensurate with the level of education being sought. This type of work authorization is granted by U.S.C.I.S. and can take up to three months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT is 12 months per degree level plus a possible 17 month extension for those who qualify.

You can use OPT before and after completion of your RIT degree in the following circumstances:

Pre-completion

- During the academic year while coursework is being taken, part-time (20 hours per week or less) only.
- During the annual vacation period – full or part time.

Post-completion

- After completion of all degree requirements, excluding thesis or project – full or part time.
- After completion of all degree requirements – full time only.

A student is eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT with each degree level. OPT can be used pre-completion, post-completion, or in a combination of the two, with part-time employment counting 50% (for example, two months of part-time OPT is equivalent to 1 month of full-time OPT).

When to Apply

You may apply up to 90 days before your desired start date and **NO LATER THAN 60 days** beyond your graduation date or end date of your I-20, **whichever is earlier**.

How to Apply

Once you have read this OPT packet and gathered all of the required application materials listed on page 2, you must make an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor;

Upon review of your materials, an ISS staff member will issue a new I-20 for you with a recommendation for OPT on page 3. A copy of this I-20 and all application materials will be made for your file in ISS.

The final step in the OPT application process is for the materials to be mailed to the Vermont Service Center by an ISS staff member.

After mailing in the documents, you will receive a notice (Form I-797) stating you need to wait for 60 to 90 days to receive your EAD. With the receipt notice, you can check your case status on line at <http://uscis.gov>. In general, it can take about 2 or 3 months to get your card.

Materials Needed to Apply for a First Period of Optional Practical Training

1. Completed Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. This form is available in ISS or online at: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>

We strongly recommend that you use our office address on the Form I-765.

**42 Lomb Memorial Drive 04-2330
Rochester, NY 14623**

In question #16, you will mark either:

**(c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT, or
(c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT.**

2. A check or money order for \$380.00 payable to **Department of Homeland Security**.
3. A photo copy of a new SEVIS I-20 issued by an ISS staff member with the recommendation for OPT on page 3.
4. Photocopies of all previous I-20s.
5. A photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 card.
6. Photocopies of the picture page of your passport, the page with the visa, and the page with dates of extension of your passport if applicable.
7. Two photos of you (see criteria below). Print your name and I-94 number on the back of the pictures.

Criteria for Photos

All photos must be of just you. The two photos must be identical. They must meet the specifications for **full-frontal/passport photos**.

http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html



The following businesses are able to provide the correct photographs by appointment:

Clix Portrait Studios
1425 Jefferson Road
Rochester, NY 14623
292-1660

FedEx Kinko's
941 Jefferson Road
Rochester, NY 14623
240-2679

Park Avenue Photo
2199 East Henrietta Road
Rochester, NY 14623
359-2250

Additional Information about Optional Practical Training

Completion of OPT

If you change to another status, such as another non-immigrant status like H-1B, your OPT eligibility ends. In addition, if you begin studies as a full-time student in another degree program, your OPT is terminated.

Program Extensions

Once you apply for post completion Optional Practical Training, you are no longer eligible for a program extension for your current degree program. It is particularly important for graduate students to realize that after completing Optional Practical Training their I-20 may not be extended for the purpose of returning to RIT to complete a thesis.

Traveling Abroad While on OPT

You must obtain a travel signature from the ISO on your I-20 every six months while on OPT.

If you plan to travel abroad, you must carry your

- I-20s,
- passport valid for at least 6 months,
- valid U.S. F-1 visa,
- I-94 card,
- EAD card and
- a letter from your employer.

You may travel outside the United States while the OPT application is pending, if you can present the USCIS Processing Center Receipt, proving that the application for employment has been filed.

However, once the EAD card for OPT is issued to you, and you decide to travel abroad, you can only re-enter the United States to **resume employment**. DHS has clarified that the F-1 student does not need to have already begun actual employment before leaving, as long as the student has a job offer to which to return.

There are still a number of un-answered questions regarding this guidance, including, how does it impact students with an approved EAD having a start date in the future (i.e., a start date that is after the date of re-entry)? Can such a student still reenter the United States to continue their search for employment? Our office will update this information as we learn more from the DHS.

The best general advice is that an F-1 student on OPT, who has received the EAD card, and has to travel abroad make sure that there is documentation from his or her employer confirming the employment or their job offer. Otherwise the student assumes a risk that he/she may not be allowed to re-enter the United States.

If you plan to travel to Canada, Mexico or Adjacent Islands¹ and you received your EAD card but your F-1 visa stamp in your passport is expired, you may do so², if you travel less than 30 days, and you carry with you the documents mentioned above.

Before you travel, make sure you check the U.S. Consulate website in your home country to find out the requirements: <http://travel.state.gov/links.html>

¹ Adjacent Islands: Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, [Cuba], Curacao, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Marie-Galante, Martinique, Miquelon, Montserrat, Saba, Saint-Barthelemy, Saint Christopher, Saint Eustatius, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Maarten, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, other British, French and Netherlands territory or possession bordering on the Caribbean Sea.

¹ You are not allowed to travel with an expired U.S. visa if you are from one of the following countries: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba

Insurance While on OPT

Please note that once you stop enrolling at RIT, you are not longer automatically enrolled in the Student Accident and Sickness Insurance Program. Unless you have an employer who will enroll you in their plan, we recommend that you purchase coverage. You may enroll in three or six months of additional coverage by calling University Health Plans at (800) 437-6448. If you are graduating at the end of fall or winter quarter you will need to buy continuation coverage prior to **March 1st**. If you are graduating at the end of spring or summer quarter, you will need to purchase it before **August 15th**.

Frequently Asked Questions about OPT

How long does it take to get OPT authorization and when should I apply?

Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS and can take up to three months to obtain. Therefore it is very important to apply for authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working.

If I graduate with a bachelor's degree, work on OPT for 12 months, and then begin a new degree program, am I eligible for another year of OPT?

You are eligible for another year of OPT if you begin a higher level degree. This means you could have a year of OPT after a bachelor's degree and another year after a Master's degree. You may not apply for another year of OPT if you do a second Bachelor's degree.

Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?

You do not need to have a job offer before applying for OPT.

Do I need to have a job while I am on OPT?

Yes. The new regulation requires that you do have employment while on OPT. You are required to notify ISS if you do not have a job, and you are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment during your 12 months of OPT. Please update our office by completing the online form available at <http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/OPTreporting.html>

Can I begin working before I receive the EAD (Optional Practical Training card)?

You may NOT begin working before you receive your EAD from USCIS. Working before your OPT has been authorized constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training?

In general, F-1 student who have been in the U.S. for fewer than five calendar years are exempt from social security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. This is something you should discuss with your employer because many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax law. You will need to pay all other taxes that may apply: federal, state, and local. You should check to see if your country has a tax treaty with the U.S. allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

After I've applied for OPT can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to arrive?

After you graduate you will NOT be allowed to re-enter the U.S. without your OPT card in addition to your valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp and the I-20 signed within the past six months.

Before you graduate, you should be able to return to the U.S without your OPT card as long as it is still long in advance of your graduation. If you need to travel before receiving your EAD card, please talk with an ISS advisor before leaving the U.S.

What should I take into consideration when choosing a start date for my OPT?

You are allowed to pick a start date any time within the 60 days following the completion of all of your degree requirements. When choosing your start date, the most important things to think about are:

- **What is the earliest date you might want to start working?** What if you are offered a position with a company that wants you to start as soon as you complete your degree?
- **If you want to travel outside the U.S. before you start working**, you should choose a date that is at least early enough to allow you to apply as soon as possible. This will give you the best chance of receiving the card before you need to leave the U.S.
- **If you want the latest possible date to start working** (you are not going to travel and you are not going to start working), the latest day is 60 days after you complete your degree requirements.
- **You may not change your OPT dates after your application is sent to USCIS.**

Can I change my job while I'm on OPT?

Yes, you may work for more than one employer and /or change your employers during the period of authorized optional practical training provided that each position is directly related to your field of study and commensurate with your educational level.

REMINDERS

- **Required Updates** – Immigration regulations require that while on OPT, you must notify RIT International Student Services when you change your address and/or when your employment situation changes. You must do this by completing the online form available at: <http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/OPTreporting.html>
- **Traveling Abroad** –
 - To re-enter the U.S. while you are on OPT, you must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the EAD (OPT card), and your job offer letter.
 - Never enter the U.S. in any visa status other than F-1 while you are on OPT (it will invalidate your OPT)