



Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is OPT?

- OPT is training that is directly related to an F-1 academic student's major area of study. It is intended to provide students with practical experience in their field of study upon completion of a degree program (post-completion OPT) at National Louis University.

Eligibility

- F-1 academic students who have attended National Louis University on a full-time basis for at least one academic year may be authorized up to 12 months of post-completion OPT (*Transfer students, please see Office of International Student and Scholar Services*). However, F-1 students who have one year or more of full-time curricular practical training (internship) are not eligible for OPT. A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following completion of study.
- Training must be related to student's major area of study.
- A student seeking OPT may not begin employment until they have been issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by USCIS.
- No specific job offer is required to request the OPT.

Issues to Remember

- F-1 students are encouraged to apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before their program end date. In addition, the application must be filed within 30 days of the date the DSO recommends OPT in the SEVIS system and provides the I-20 to the student with the OPT recommendation on page 2. The application cannot be submitted later than 60 days after the completion of studies. Sixty days reflects the period of time F-1 students are still in status before departing from the U.S.
- Each day a student is not employed in a qualifying job is counted toward the limit on unemployment time. During post-completion OPT; the unemployment time limit is 90 days. (See **Unemployment time** for details.)
- A student may change employers during the period of authorized practical training as long as the new employment continues to be directly related to the student's field of study and commensurate with their educational level.
- If the student leaves the country after completion of studies and before applying for OPT, they will not be able to obtain permission for practical training after returning to the U.S. even if the student is permitted to reenter the country.
- Authorization for practical training is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school. The student would have to reapply for authorization.
- Students are exempt from paying Social Security and Medicare taxes during the first 5 years in the U.S. These taxes should not be withheld from the student's pay while they maintain F-1 status. After 5 years, students become "residents" for tax purposes only and are subject to paying all taxes.
- **How do students show that employment is directly related to their degree program?** The Student Exchange and Visitor Information Program (SEVP) is a division of the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). SEVP recommends that students maintain evidence — for each job — of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for the student's supervisor or manager, and a description of the work. If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to the student's degree, SEVP highly recommends that the student obtain a signed letter from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how the student's degree is related to the work performed.



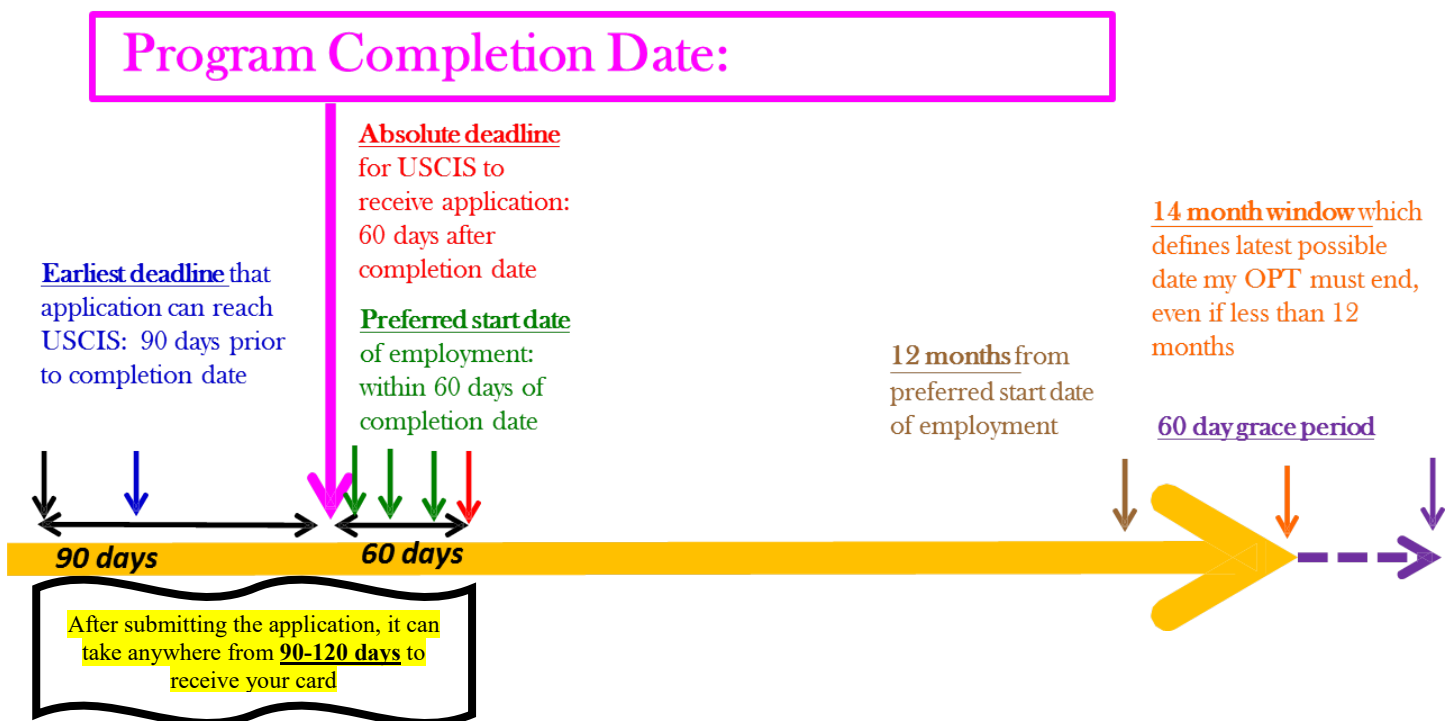
Choosing your Start Date

(See OPT Timeline illustrated)

- You are allowed to pick a start date any time within the 60 days following your graduation. There are many overlapping time constraints which affect your OPT application (see OPT Time-line illustrated below). When choosing the start date for your EAD card, the most important priorities to weigh are:
 - Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you cannot begin working BEFORE the start date on the EAD card and until you receive the card). What if someone offers you a job with the stipulation that you start the day after graduation? Plan for any possibility.
 - If you want the latest possible day to start your work authorization, the latest day you may choose as your start date for the EAD card is 60 days after your program completion date.

Remember: You may NOT change these dates after you apply for OPT

OPT Timeline



Unemployment Time

- The time spent without a qualifying job during post-completion OPT. Each day that the student is not employed in a qualifying job is counted toward the limit on unemployment time. The limit is 90 days for students on post-completion OPT and is accumulative over the entire period of authorized employment.



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What should students report to ensure that their status does not expire due to excessive unemployment time?

- Students are encouraged to report changes in employment in their SEVP Portal or to the Designated School Official as soon as possible. SEVP recommends that students report changes within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official may determine the student is out of status.
- SEVP recommends using e-mail as it provides both evidence of reporting and the date reported. Students should keep a record of all reports made to the DSO and the method by which the report is made.

What counts as time unemployed?

- Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.

How does travel outside the United States impact the period of unemployment?

- If the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment. Please note that a student may be denied entry to the U.S. if he travels outside the U.S. while on OPT without authorization from his/her employer.
- If a student travels while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.



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Report Employment and a Change in Employment:

Situation	Report
New job	• Name of the employer • Position • Start date of employment • Mailing address for the employer
Change to a new job	• Name of the previous employer • Ending date of the employment with the previous employer • Name of the employer • Start date of employment • Mailing address for the employer
Multiple short-term gigs in one period with less than 10 days between gigs	• Report at the beginning of the first gig and indicate "Multiple short-term gigs"
Work for hire (start)	• Indicate "Self-employed work for hire" • Indicate the start date of the contract
Work for hire (ending more than 10 days between the end of one contract and the beginning of another contract or a new job)	• Indicate "Self-employed work for hire" • Indicate you have no current contract • Ending date of the last contract worked
More than 10 days of unemployment	• Indicate "unemployed" • Ending date of last job
Self-employed business owner (start)	• Indicate "Self-employed business owner" • Indicated date went into business
Self-employed business owner (end)	• Indicate "Self-employed business owner" • Indicate date business closed or student no longer worked for the business full time
Student decides to exit the United States and complete his or her F-1 status prior to the end date of OPT	• Indicate "Completing OPT and exiting the United States" • Date of exit