F-1 Optional Practical Training Application Guide

Everything you need to know to prepare your application materials for submission to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).
What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training is an F-1 student employment benefit.

- Allows for off campus work authorization in a student’s major field of study.

- Students must be in full-time F-1 status for at least one academic year.
Are you eligible for OPT?

Pre-Completion OPT
For most students, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a better option. It allows for off-campus work authorization in your field of study without using any of the 12 months of OPT time. See our web site for a detailed description of Curricular Practical Training.

Post-Completion OPT
Have you been in a valid student status for one academic year?
At UC Berkeley, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive:
  • Fall – spring semesters
  • Spring – fall semesters
  • Spring – summer semesters
  • Summer (minimum of 12 units) – fall semesters

Will you be completing your program of study at UC Berkeley in the next 90 days?
The application for OPT cannot be submitted more than 90 days before your program completion date.
The Application Process: An Overview

1. Request an OPT I-20
   The I-20 will be ready for pick up 3 business days after submitting the OPT request form and $75 Post-Completion Services Fee payment to Berkeley International Office.

2. Prepare and mail your application materials
   Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize the required documents. After USCIS has received your application, allow approximately 90 days for processing.

Step 1: Request your OPT I-20

Complete the OPT Request Form [pdf]:

- Confirm your expected program completion date.
- Get the required signature from your academic advisor.
- Choose your OPT start date.

**Effective February 12th, 2016:** Include payment for Post-Completion Services fee ($75). *Check or money order can be made payable to “UC Regents”. Include your Student ID number in memo section of check or money order.*

- Attach fee payment to form and submit to Berkeley International Office.
Confirm your expected program completion date.

The “Expected Completion Date” for OPT purposes is the day you complete your final degree requirements.

For Undergraduate Students:
Last day of the semester in which program requirements are completed.

For Graduate Students:
• Last day of the semester in which program requirements are completed, OR
• The date the thesis or dissertation is filed with the Graduate Division

Speak with a BIO advisor if you have a job offer beginning before the last day of the semester. Graduate students who only have a dissertation/thesis remaining may be eligible to begin their post-completion OPT before filing.
Confirm your expected program completion date.

For Undergraduates Completing in Summer Session

To qualify for a summer completion date, students must:

- Have a final course requirement to be completed in summer.
- Be enrolled full time during Summer Session or receive Reduced Course Load approval from BIO for final term.
- Use the end date of your specific Summer Session as your program completion date (i.e. Summer Session A end date), OR
- Use the general Summer Session end date (i.e. last date of Summer Session E)

Note: If summer is your final semester, any on campus employment or Curricular Practical Training is limited to 20 hours per week.
Confirm your expected program completion date.  
*For Graduate Students filing thesis/dissertation May through August*

*Please speak with a BIO advisor about your program completion date and choosing an OPT start date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use Spring Semester program completion date*</td>
<td>Use Summer Session program completion date*</td>
<td>Use Fall Semester completion date*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No summer enrollment required</td>
<td>Enrollment for Summer Session required (no unit minimum)</td>
<td>Be on Fall Filing Fee and submit thesis/dissertation after Summer Session end date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree conferred in Summer</td>
<td>Degree conferred in Summer</td>
<td>Degree conferred in Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT start date must be within 60 days of Spring Semester program completion date</td>
<td>OPT start date must be within 60 days of Summer program completion date</td>
<td>OPT start date needs to be within 60 days of Fall program completion date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Obtain required signature.

- **Undergraduates:**
  Obtain the signature from a **College Advisor**, (i.e. College of Letters and Science) or **Department Advisor**

- **Graduates:**
  Obtain the signature from a **Faculty Advisor** or **Graduate Student Affairs Officer (GSAO)**
Choose your OPT start date.

- Your OPT start date is the date that your 12 months of work authorization begins.
- Your OPT start date must be within your 60-day grace period after the program completion date.
- The requested start date will be noted on page 3 of the new OPT I-20.

**NOTE:**
Once USCIS receives the OPT application, it is not possible to change the requested start and end dates.
Timeline

**OPT Application Timeline**

BIO processing time = 3 business days
USCIS Processing Time = 3 months

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First Day to Apply

02/12/2016 *

Apply to USCIS up to 90 days before program completion

OPT must begin within 60 days of program completion date

Final Deadline:
OPT Received by USCIS

07/12/2016

Program Completion Date

05/13/2016

Apply to USCIS up to 60 days after program completion

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*BIO can accept applications starting 2/12. 2/15 is a holiday. OPT I-20s will be ready 2/18.
On Feb 19, 2016, Sue mails her application for OPT to the USCIS. She is completing her program on May 13 and chooses July 1 as the OPT start date because she has a job offer beginning that day. She receives the EAD on May 19. Her employer is pleased to see proof of the work permission early even though she cannot start working until July 1, as noted on the EAD. Sue decides to go home for one month to celebrate her program completion.
George is busy with his final semester, and receives a job offer with start date July 10. He requests July 10 as his start date, and submits his OPT application to USCIS on May 10. On July 10, George still hasn’t received his EAD, so he can’t work. George receives his EAD on August 10 and it expires the following year on July 9th. George has lost 1 month of his 12 month OPT because his application was approved after the latest available OPT start date.
Check your OPT I-20 for accuracy!

After receiving your OPT I-20, notify BIO immediately if there are any errors.

**Education Level**
Education Level may have changed. (ex. PhD candidate decides to graduate with a Master’s)

**Program End Date**
Program completion date will be updated to the program completion date on the OPT request form. (I-20 will remain valid through OPT authorization period on page 3 or the approved EAD card dates)

**School Attestation**
Make sure there is a BIO advisor signature. Check the date – USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of this date.

**Student Attestation**
You should sign & date I-20.
OPT start and end dates requested
(OPT start date may be adjusted if USCIS does not complete the processing of your OPT by the requested date. Apply at least 90 days before requested start date, if possible.)

The last sentence indicates that the OPT expiration date will be no more than 14 months after program completion date.

OPT applications must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after this date. Please see an advisor at BIO if there are concerns that the application will not arrive on time.

Check your OPT I-20 for accuracy!
Step 2: Prepare & Mail Your Application Materials
Required documents for OPT Application

- 2 U.S. Passport Photos (with name and I-94 number written lightly in pencil on back of each), taken within the past 30 days.
- Check or Money Order for $380 made payable to: “U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”
- Photocopy of OPT I-20 that was issued by BIO within the past 30 days (page 1-3). Don’t forget to sign it!
- Photocopy of passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp, if applicable.
- Photocopy of paper Form I-94 (both sides) or electronic I-94 record. (The electronic I-94 record is available ONLY to those with passport admission stamp.)
- Photocopies of all previous UC Berkeley I-20s.
- Photocopy of previous EAD card, if applicable.

No documents are required for F-2 dependents.
Passport Photo Requirements

The photos required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of U.S. style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the U.S. Department of State web site.

- Passport photos must be 2”x2” and taken within the past 30 days.
- Write your name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo.

Professional Photography

USCIS has been examining passport photos more strictly. BIO recommends students have their photos taken professionally. Recently, students have been visiting the following locations to obtain their photos.

Metro Publishing
2440 Bancroft Way
Berkeley, CA 94704
http://www.yelp.com/biz/metro-publishing-berkeley

Foto Shop
131 Berkeley Sq
Berkeley, CA 94704
http://www.yelp.com/biz/foto-shop-berkeley
Gather the required documentation.

Check or Money Order:

- Use a personal check or money order made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”.
- Money orders can be purchased at banks, post office and some local grocery stores.
- Make sure a name and address are printed on the check. If the address has changed, that is fine.
  - Do not use “temporary checks” often issued by the bank when opening a new account. These checks have no name or address in the upper left hand corner.
  - In the memo line, write your SEVIS ID number.

Money orders and cashier checks should include the same information as a personal check.
**Gather the required documentation.**

**Form I-765**

Download it from the [USCIS web site](https://www.uscis.gov).

**Important:** Use the most current version of the I-765.

BIO does not recommend completing the e-file option of the I-765.

The tips in the following slides will answer any “tricky” questions to avoid delays in receiving the EAD.
Complete the Form I-765.

Check the box for “Permission to accept employment.”

#1: Entire family name should be in CAPITAL LETTERS. Use upper and lower case for the first name.

#3: Put an address* where you would like to receive the receipt notice and EAD card.

The address needs to be valid for at least 3 months from the date you mail the application.

If you plan to move during this time, use a reliable friend or family member’s address. Write their name and the C/O notation to ensure delivery.

*If the address listed is outside of California, talk to an advisor at Berkeley International Office.
Complete the Form I-765.

#9: Social Security Number (SSN)
Leave this space blank if you do not have an SSN. Students can apply for an SSN after receiving the EAD or on/after their OPT start date, whichever comes later.

#10: I-94 Number
11-digit number found on the electronic I-94 record or on the paper I-94 card (see example on slide 26).

#11: Previous Employment Authorization
Check “no”, if you have never applied for an EAD. This does not apply to on-campus employment or CPT.

Check “yes” if you have applied for an EAD in the past. Fill the next two lines (show below) with the information related to the previous EAD. Include a photocopy of the EAD in the application package. (If the EAD has been lost, write “lost EAD” under Results).
Complete the Form I-765.

#12: Date of Last Entry into the U.S.
Your most recent entry date can be found on your passport admission stamp, electronic I-94 record, or paper I-94 card.

#13: Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
Name of the Port of Entry city from your most recent entry. This information can be found on your passport admission stamp, electronic I-94 record, or paper I-94 card (usually as a code, i.e. “SFR” for San Francisco). If you drove across the border, write the name of the city where entered the U.S.

#14: Manner of Last Entry
Status in which you entered the U.S. If you entered with an I-20 as a student, write “F-1 Student.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. Date of Last Entry into the U.S., on or about (mm/dd/yyyy)</th>
<th>08/27/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Place of Last Entry into the U.S.</td>
<td>SFR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Status at Last Entry (B-2 Visitor, F-1 Student, No Lawful Status, etc.)</td>
<td>F-1 Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the Form I-765.

### 15. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)
- **F-1 Student**

### 16. Eligibility Category
Go to the “Who May File Form I-765?” section of the Instructions. In the space below, place the letter and number of the eligibility category you selected from the instructions. For example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii), etc.

- (C) (3) (B)

### 17. (c)(3)(C) Eligibility Category
If you entered the eligibility category (c)(3)(C) in Question 16 above, list your degree, your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer’s E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in the space below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leave this area blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a Valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave this area blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 18. (c)(26) Eligibility Category
If you entered the eligibility category (c)(26) in Question 16 above, please provide the receipt number of your H-1B principal spouse's most recent Form I-797 Notice of Approval for Form I-129.

- Leave this area blank
Complete the Form I-765.

- Sign your name
- Fill in the date of signature
- Fill in your telephone number

**Important!**

*Your signature must be above the line* and fit in the white area of the form. If the signature is too big or touches the text above, your application could be delayed.

Be conservative and use a signature smaller than normal. Please see the example.
Gather the required documentation.

**Photocopy of OPT I-20 (all pages):**

- Must be received by USCIS within 30 days of being issued by BIO (see number 10 on I-20).
- Original must be signed by the student at the bottom of page 1.
- The requested OPT start and end dates will appear on page 3.
- Do not mail the original I-20.
Gather the required documentation.

Photocopy of Passport and Visa:

• Photocopy the passport biographic page (with photo and passport expiration date); passport must be valid.

• Photocopy the F-1 visa, if applicable; visa does not need to be valid.
Gather the required documentation.

Photocopy of I-94 Information:

The I-94 can be either:


OR

• a paper I-94 card stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides, even though the back side may be blank.
Gather the required documentation.

Photocopy of ALL Previous UC Berkeley I-20s:

- Old and new versions of the I-20 are acceptable.
- Copy all 3 pages.
- Keep the originals for records.
- This is especially important if you have been authorized for CPT in the past.
Gather the required documentation.

Photocopy of Previous EAD, if applicable:

- If an EAD was received in the past, include a copy of the front and back of the card.
- Can be from OPT approved at a prior institution or different education level.
Gather the required documentation.

**Form G-1145**

- This is an optional form. Use this form to request text and email notification(s) regarding your application. Download the form at http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf
- Attach to the top of the OPT application packet.

**WARNING!**

USCIS will rarely contact you by phone regarding the status of your OPT application.

If you receive a phone call from a person claiming to work for USCIS or any other government agency, do not provide your personal information to them. Note the person’s name and phone number and contact a BIO advisor before responding.
Mail the OPT application.

USCIS Mailing Addresses
for people who live in California*

Express Mail:
USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor, Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

FedEx
UPS

BIO recommends FedEx as a reliable option. If using FedEx or UPS, use the above address.

U.S. Postal Service Mail
USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

If using USPS, choose the Priority Mail option and use the above address.

* If your address on the I-765 is NOT in California, speak with a BIO Advisor. The OPT application may need to be mailed to a different address.
### The Application Deadline

- **USCIS must receive** your complete OPT application no later than **30 days after the OPT I-20 has been issued**.

- The issue date is located next to the advisor’s signature on page 1 of the OPT I-20. Please account for mailing time.

- Additionally, USCIS must receive your application before the end of your 60 day grace period.

Your application must be submitted to USCIS from within the U.S. If you exit the U.S. after your program completion date without applying for OPT, you cannot return and will lose your option for OPT.
I-797 Notice of Action

You should receive the notice by mail within 2-4 weeks after mailing the OPT application to USCIS.

- **The I-797 is very important.**
  If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.

- **The I-797 is necessary if you want to:**
  1) inquire about the status of your OPT application.
  2) travel outside the U.S when your OPT is pending.

**Receipt Number**
The case number for the OPT application at USCIS. Check the status of the case on the USCIS web site at [https://www.uscis.gov](https://www.uscis.gov).

**Received Date**
Date when USCIS begins processing the application. (It may not be the actual the application was received, but it is when the case was entered into the system.)

**Address Information**
Verify your name, date of birth, and address on the I-765 receipt notice. If incorrect, contact BIO immediately.

**Contacting USCIS**
If you have any problems or questions with the OPT application, contact a BIO advisor before calling the USCIS Customer Service.
The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

• Review card to make sure the information is accurate. If not, contact a BIO advisor.

• Present your EAD to employers as proof of your legal work authorization in the US.

• The EAD is a required document for entry to the US during OPT (refer to slide 38).
Your Responsibilities during OPT

1. Reporting Requirements
2. Employment Requirements
3. Travel Documents for Re-entry
4. Applying for an F-1 Visa on OPT
1. Reporting Requirements

- You must report any changes to your employment, address, and/or name within 10 days.
  You can do this online at io.berkeley.edu/ssu

2. Employment Requirements

- You must work a minimum of **20 hours per week** in a position related to your field of study. For more information, visit “Qualifying OPT Employment.”

- You cannot exceed more than **90 days of unemployment** while on OPT. Days of unemployment prior to your EAD start date do not count towards the 90 days. It is your responsibility to keep records of your employment and any periods of unemployment.
## 3. Travel Documents for Re-entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>Before Completing Program &amp; Before EAD issuance</th>
<th>After Completing Program &amp; Before EAD issuance</th>
<th>After Completing Program &amp; After EAD issuance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid passport</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid F-1 visa stamp (if applicable)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed within 6 months by a BIO Advisor (page 3)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of continued enrollment (e.g. Enrollment Verification from Bear Facts)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of financial support</td>
<td>Strongly recommended</td>
<td>Strongly recommended</td>
<td>Strongly recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT receipt: I-797 Notice of Action</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job offer letter from employer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly recommended</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAD (Employment Authorization Document)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your admission to the US is always at the discretion of the Customs and Border Protection Officers. To avoid problems, you must have the required documents outlined above.
Important Information on Travel

• Avoid long absences from the US during the OPT period. Time spent outside of the US while unemployed by a US employer counts toward your 90 days of unemployment.
• Attempting to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT can be risky.
• You must not enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1. This may result in the loss of your OPT eligibility.

Travel after Program Completion, But Before OPT Card is received
• There is a higher risk associated with travel and return while your OPT is pending after the program completion date. If there are any problems with your application, you may not be able to respond to USCIS in a timely manner, which could delay processing of your EAD.
• If your OPT application is denied while outside the US, you will not be able to re-enter the US in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply.
4. Applying for an F-1 Visa on OPT

If you are traveling abroad and your F-1 visa has expired, you must obtain a new F-1 visa before returning to the U.S. When going to your visa interview, bring the documents below. For more information, visit: [http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/visa_application](http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/visa_application)

1. Valid passport

2. Valid I-20 with travel endorsement from a Berkeley International Office advisor within the past 6 months

3. EAD Card

4. Job offer in field of study

5. Evidence of sufficient funds (e.g. a bank statement, a letter from a sponsor or a job offer letter)

Check the U.S. Department of State web site for more information about getting a visa and specific requirements at the local embassy or consulate at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
More Information!

Consult the Berkeley International Office website for detailed information related to:

- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**
- **Address and Employer Reporting System**
- **Types of Qualifying Employment**
- **90-Day Unemployment Rule**
- **Beginning a New Program of Study**
- **Taking Classes While on OPT**
- **Traveling Outside the U.S.**
- **Early Completion of OPT**
- **OPT STEM Extension**
- **Cap-Gap Extension**
Final check of your OPT application

Want to review all your documents in detail before mailing them to USCIS?

See our online video

OPT Application Checklist

A review guide before you mail your application!

Still have questions?
Come see a BIO Advisor in person at Berkeley International Office.
internationaloffice.berkeley.edu
internationaloffice@berkeley.edu

510-642-2818
Office Hours: Monday-Friday
10am-12pm & 1pm-4pm