What is Optional Practical Training (OPT?)

• Optional Practical Training is a benefit of the F-1 student visa status. It allows students to have work authorization for off-campus employment in their fields of study. To be eligible, you must be in valid F-1 status for one academic year.

• The name of the work permit for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
OPT Application Process

1. Prepare and mail your application materials. Allow approximately 2 weeks to organize your materials for mailing. Refer to instructions on the first page of the OPT Application.

2. Receive your Employment Authorization Document. It takes about three (3) months on average after your application has been received by USCIS.
Points to Remember

Highlights

- One year of OPT is available after completing each degree program at a higher level. For example, you may use 12 months of OPT after completion of your associate’s degree, then again after your bachelor’s degree, then again after your master’s degree = 3 years total.
- OPT is available both before or after completing a degree program.
- A job offer is not required to apply for OPT.
- The employment may occur anywhere in the US.
- No special permission is needed from USCIS to quit a job or change employers. However, you must notify the Director of International Programs of these changes.
- During OPT a student remains in F-1 status.
- An extension of OPT is allowed for up to 17 months if at the time of the extension you have a degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) field and your employer is enrolled in E-Verify. See https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/17-month-opt-stem-extension

Caveats

- The application for post-completion OPT must be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before the program completion and no later than 60 days after your date of completion.
- The average processing time to issue the EAD is 90 days.
- More than 90 days of unemployment during OPT is a violation of F-1 status, and will result in automatic termination. Failure to report employment within 90 days will carry the same consequences.
- Once you complete your degree and your I-20 has expired, you must have a valid EAD to begin working on or off campus.
- Once the OPT application is submitted to USCIS, it is impossible to change your selected authorization dates.
- Canceling OPT is very difficult and must be discussed with the Director of International Programs.
- OPT can only be extended beyond 12 months in limited circumstances (see STEM extension on the left.)
- Employment must be related to the degree on your I-20.
- Students are required to report the following information within 10 days of any change: name, residential address, employer name, employer address, or employment status.
Types of OPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When employment occurs</th>
<th>Hours per week allowed to work</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer or Winter Break (pre-completion)</td>
<td>There is no minimum or maximum hours per week a student is required to work on pre-completion OPT.</td>
<td>The amount of time you use for pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the 12-month allowance. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50%. For example, if you work part-time for 4 months, only 2 months will be deducted. You will retain 10 months to use at another time. Students on pre-completion OPT are not eligible for STEM Extension OPT or the H-1B cap gap extension. Curricular Practical Training is a better option in most cases for working prior to your degree completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall or Spring Semester (pre-completion)</td>
<td>Must not exceed 20 hours per week. Graduate students who have advanced to candidacy may work up to 40 hours per week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After degree completion (post-completion)</td>
<td>Students must work an average of 20 hours per week during post-completion OPT to be considered “employed” and maintaining F-1 status.</td>
<td>No more than 3 months of unemployment are allowed during the 12-month post-completion OPT period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Application deadlines

Pre-completion OPT: 90 days before desired start date.

Post-completion OPT: You can submit your application to USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date of your program or 60 days after completion as long as you have not left the U.S. We recommend you apply as early as possible to avoid unexpected delays.
Is OPT right for you?

**Pre-Completion OPT**

*Have you considered using Curricular Practical Training (CPT) instead?* For most students, CPT is a better option. It allows you to get work experience in your field of study without using any of the 12 months of OPT time.

*Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year?* At UC, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters. You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to UC as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to UC.

*Will your job offer still be valid three months from now?* Getting the OPT permit can take three months. If your employer is not willing to wait for you, then it’s not worth the effort to apply for OPT.

*Do you plan on applying for STEM extension or H1B cap gap extension?* Only post-completion OPT students are eligible for these two extensions. If you want to apply for either of these extensions, you must submit a second application for post-completion OPT.

*If you plan to work part-time during a fall or spring semester, will you also be enrolled in full time courses?*

*Are you willing to use some of the 12 months you are allowed for OPT?* You will not have a full year of OPT after you graduate if you choose to use some of it for pre-completion employment.

**Post-Completion OPT**

*Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year?* You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to UC as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to UC. At UC, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters.

*Will you be completing your program of study at UC within the next three months?* The application for OPT cannot be submitted earlier than 90 days before your completion date.

*Are you enrolled full-time this semester or authorized by the International Student Advisor to have a reduced course load?*
The OPT Application Timeline

- You can submit your application to the USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date of your program or during the 60-day grace period after completion.
- If you leave the US during your 60-day grace period and you haven't applied for OPT, you lose your opportunity to apply for OPT.
- The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued or your application may be denied.
- It can take 3 months or more to receive the EAD from the USCIS.
- Your OPT start date can be no later than 60 days beyond your degree completion date.
- You cannot start working until you have received the EAD and your start date is current.
- If you receive the EAD before your start date has arrived, you cannot work until the start date (noted on the EAD).
- You cannot change your start date once the OPT I-20 has been mailed.
- As long as you have applied for OPT, your F-1 status remains valid while you are waiting for the EAD even if there is a gap between your completion date and the start date of OPT. During this “gap,” you can remain in the U.S. or travel abroad and re-enter as an F-1.
Choosing Authorization Dates – Typical Scenarios

Scenario 1:  **Student with a job offer submits her OPT application early**

On Feb. 18, Xingyuan mails her application for OPT to the USCIS. She is completing her program on May 18 and chooses Jun 15 as the OPT start date because she has a job offer beginning that day. She receives the EAD on May 1. Her employer is pleased to see proof of the work permission early even though she cannot start working until June 15, as noted on the EAD. Xingyuan decides to go home for one month to celebrate her program completion.
Choosing Authorization Dates – Typical Scenarios

Scenario 2: Student with no job offer submits his OPT application rather late

George doesn’t have a job offer or time to search for one until after he finishes school. He chooses the latest date possible to start his OPT -- July 17 --- which is the 60th day after his completion on May 18. He knows that he will be legal to stay in the U.S. as long as he has submitted the OPT application on time. He finally mails his OPT application on May 1. On July 17, George still hasn’t received his EAD, so he can’t work. George receives his EAD on August 1 and it expires the following year on July 16. George has lost 13 days of his 12 month OPT because his application was approved after the latest available OPT start date.
Gather the following documents for the Application Packet

- Form G-1145 (e-Notification of Application)
- Completed form I-765
- Two passport-sized photos (see page 5 of Form I-765)
- $380 check or money order payable to the Department of Homeland Security
- Copy of Current I-20 that reflects OPT recommendation (see note below)
- Copy of ALL previous I-20 documents
- Copy of I-94, Passport and Visa
- Photocopy of EAD (Employment Authorization Document, if applicable)
The OPT Application Timeline

Form I-765:
Application for Employment Authorization

The I-765 is the USCIS form needed to submit with the OPT application. A sample I-765 form is shown here.

Form I-765 can be downloaded from the USCIS website. See the link on the application.

Important: You are required to use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 right before you mail your application since the USCIS updates forms frequently.

How to Complete the I-765

Completing the I-765 for OPT is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The next two pages will cover how to complete those “tricky” questions so you can avoid any delays in receiving your work authorization.

Please note if you are completing the form online, not all information will fit (address information and I-94 number). For these areas, please hand write the information.
Completing the I-765

**Items 1-2**

1. Please note the table at the top of the form where it says “Do not write in this block.” You do not need to complete that area since it is reserved for the USCIS use only.

2. Check the box indicating that you are requesting “Permission to accept employment.”
Completing the I-765

Items 3-11

Item #3: Address in the United States
The address you put here is where the EAD will be mailed. This address needs to be valid for at least 3 months, the length of time it will take to process the OPT application. If you think you may move in the months after you mail the application, use a reliable friend or family member’s address to receive your EAD. (Click your mouse again to see how to complete #3 if you are using an alternative address. “C/O” means “in care of”)

Item #9: Social Security Number (SSN)
If you have never worked in the U.S., you may not have a SSN. If this is the case, you can leave this space blank. You will be able to apply for a SSN after you receive the EAD.

Item #10: I-94 Number
Use your current I-94 number. This is an 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your paper I-94 card or on the electronic I-94 record (see sample on page 19). As an F-1, you will not have an Alien Registration Number.

Item #11: Previous Employment Authorization
Check “yes” if you have ever received an EAD previously. Fill in the next two lines (at the top of the right column—shown on next page) with the information related to that previous work permit. A photocopy of that EAD must be included with your application package. (If you have lost it, write “lost EAD” in this space).

If you have never had an EAD, check the “no” box here. If you have worked on campus or have used CPT, you will still check “no” here.
Completing the I-765

Items 12-17

**Item #12: Date of Last Entry into the U.S.**
This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your paper I-94 card or passport admission stamp.

**Item #13: Place of Last Entry into the U.S.**
This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is also on the paper I-94 card or passport admission stamp (usually as a code like “SFR” for San Francisco). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, write the name and the city where you entered in the blank.

**Item #14: Manner of Last Entry**
This is the status you had upon entering the U.S. For example, you may have initially entered with an H-1B work visa.

**Item #15: Current Immigration Status**
Your current status should be F-1 student.

**Item #16: Eligibility Category**
Use the following codes depending on the type of OPT you are requesting:

- **(c) (3) (A)** Pre-Completion OPT
- **(c) (3) (B)** Post –Completion OPT

Please note: the code **(c) (3) (C)** should only be used for 17-month STEM Extensions of OPT for eligible students. You can apply for the STEM Extension only after your 12-month OPT EAD has been issued.

**Item #17: 17-Month Extension**
Only those individuals who are eligible for the 17-month extension need to complete this section. If you entered **(c) (3) (A) or (c) (3) (B)** on item #16, you are not required to fill out this item.
Completing the I-765

Finishing the I-765

Sign your name, fill in your telephone number and the date of your signature at the bottom of the form.

**Please note that your signature must fit between the lines on the form. If your signature is too big or touches the lines, the application will be returned to you and delay the processing time of your application. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than your normal handwriting.

If You Get “Request for Evidence (RFE)”

We strongly advise you to see the Director of International Programs if you receive an RFE. In most cases, the USCIS will not call you at the telephone number you put on the I-765. If there is a problem with your application, they will send you a notice by mail called the “Request for Evidence (RFE).” An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejected. It simply means that you need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued. Please note the deadline to respond to the RFE. If you fail to meet this deadline, your application will be automatically canceled.

Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT usually by about one month. For this reason, it is important to make sure that you have completed the I-765 correctly and sent the proper documents to the USCIS.
The photos you are 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 link provided on the application.

Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications. However, you may want to print this page, or the pages from the website above to take with you when you get your photo taken.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What type of paper are the photographs to be printed on?**
The photos should be printed on thin photo-quality paper.

**Do the photos have to be in color?**
Yes, the photos must be in color.

**How big must the photos be?**
The photos must measure exactly 2 inches by 2 inches.

**Can hats or religious headgear be worn for the photo?**
Unless worn daily for religious reasons, all hats or headgear should be removed for the photo. In all cases, no item or attire should cover or otherwise obscure any part of the face.

**Can eyeglasses be worn for the photo?**
Eyeglasses worn on a daily basis can be worn for the photo. However, there should be no reflections from the eyeglasses that obscure the eyes. Dark glasses or nonprescription glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable unless you need them for medical reasons.

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**7 Steps to Successful Photos:**

1. Your photo should show your full face, front view, eyes open.
2. Make sure the photo shows your full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).
3. Your head should be centered within the frame
4. Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
5. The background should be plain white or off-white.
6. There should be no distracting shadows on the face or in the background
7. Make sure you have a natural expression
Mailing the OPT Application

Express Mail (Federal Express)
We recommend Federal Express as the best, most reliable option.
If you use express mail, use the express mail (courier) address at the USCIS, which is different from the regular mail address (see next page). Federal Express mail service costs about $10.

Certified Mail / Return Receipt
"Certified Mail / return receipt" service is available through the U.S. Postal Service. You can request this service at the post office and pay a minimal fee (approx. $2). With certified mail, you will get a receipt showing what date the USCIS got your application.
A sample of the Certified Mail form and receipt is shown here.
In some cases, it may take up to 10 days for your application sent through the U.S. Postal Service to be officially received.

E-Filing your OPT Application
We highly recommend mailing a paper OPT application to the USCIS.

Kermit T. Frog
2300 MacCorkle Ave. SE
Charleston, WV 25304
Final Review Before Mailing

Checklist Review

Put the following items in an 8.5” x 11” envelope.

- Form G-1145 (e-Notification of Application)
- Completed form I-765
- Two passport-sized photos (see page 5 of Form I-765)
- $380 check or money order payable to the Department of Homeland Security
- Copy of Current I-20 that reflects OPT recommendation (see note below)
- Copy of ALL previous I-20 documents
- Copy of I-94, Passport and Visa
- Photocopy of EAD (Employment Authorization Document, if applicable)

Application Deadline

The USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued. The issue date is located next to the Adviser’s signature on Page 1 of the OPT I-120. Please account for mailing time.

See the OPT Application for mailing addresses for West Virginia students.
Receiving your EAD

The Notice of Action

This is your OPT application receipt from USCIS. It normally takes about 2 to 6 weeks to get it in the mail. You may receive a digital copy in lieu of a paper copy if you signed up for e-Notification.

The Notice of Action is a very important document. You will need it to inquire about the status of your OPT application and for travel outside the U.S. If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.

Your Address Information

Verify the address on your I-765 receipt notices to make sure your name and address are correct. If it is incorrect, contact the Director of International Programs immediately.

The “Receipt Number”

This is your case number at the USCIS. You should check the status of your case online through the USCIS website at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do.

It’s important to sign up for automatic email updates or check the status regularly. If the Service Center sends you a Request for Further Evidence (RFE), you’ll see the notification on this website and look for it in the mail. The case status site will alert you if there is any mail delivery problems.

If you do not get your Notice of Action within 6 weeks after mailing your application to the USCIS, contact the Director of International Programs.

The Received Date

This is the date when the USCIS begins processing your application. It may not be the actual date they received your application but it is when your case was entered into the system.

The Notice Date

This is the date your Notice of Action was produced.
The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
Traveling Abroad on OPT

Since you will remain in F-1 status during your 12-month OPT authorization period, traveling abroad and re-entering the U.S. as an F-1 is allowed (In fact, if you re-enter in a status other than F-1, you will lose your OPT eligibility). However, be aware that any time you leave the U.S., there is no guarantee that you will be allowed to re-enter. Being denied entry is more probable for some people than others. To avoid problems, make sure you have the proper documents as listed here.

Note: travel during OPT carries significantly more risk than travel before degree completion.

Documents Required for Re-entry to the U.S.

**Before Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by the International Student Advisor
- Evidence of continued enrollment (e.g. print-out from Bear Facts)
- Evidence of financial support

**After Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by the International Student Advisor. The travel endorsement is valid for 6 months while on OPT
- The OPT receipt - Notice of Action
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- If you have employment, a job offer letter from the employer is strongly recommended.

**After Completing Your Program and After Getting Your EAD**
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by the International Student Advisor. The travel endorsement is valid for 6 months while on OPT
- The EAD (Employment Authorization Document)
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- A job offer letter is required.
Applying for a Visa

If you are traveling abroad and the F-1 visa in your passport has expired, you must obtain a new one before re-entering the U.S. To apply for a new visa during OPT, the basic documents you will need are:

- A valid passport
- A valid I-20 with travel endorsement from the International Student Advisor within the past six months
- The EAD
- A job offer in your field of study
- Evidence of sufficient funds (e.g. a bank statement, a letter from a sponsor or a job offer letter)

Tips for Travelers

- Be prepared to tell the U.S. immigration officer at the U.S. port-of-entry your plans for the OPT year. They may want to know:
  - What have you done to find a job?
  - What kind of job do you plan to look for?
  - What will you do after the OPT is expired?
  - How will you support yourself while you are job-seeking?
- If you travel after getting your EAD, you must have a job offer letter to be able to re-enter the U.S.
- Don’t leave the U.S. for long periods of time during the OPT year. A few weeks of vacation is reasonable, but if you are gone for several months, you may encounter difficulty in re-entering. Remember, unemployment is limited to 90 days.
- Be careful about trying to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT. You may not be allowed to re-enter as an F-1.
- Students who need to apply for a new visa should contact the Center for International Programs prior to travel to discuss the visa application process and possible risks.
- Don’t attempt to re-enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1 unless you are willing to forfeit your OPT permanently.
Frequently Asked Questions

How can I know the status of my OPT application? As soon as you have your Notice of Action, check the USCIS website at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do and click on the “Case Status Online” button. The main information you can get from this is whether your application has been approved yet or is still in process. The processing time indicated is a standard message that often has no connection with actual processing times.

When will I get my EAD? The USCIS will mail the EAD to you at the address you gave on the I-765 form. It should arrive approximately three to five months from the “received” date indicated on the USCIS “Notice of Action.”

I never received a “Notice of Action.” The USCIS usually sends this within two to six weeks of their receipt of the EAD application. If you have not received the Notice of Action after this time, check your bank account to see if USCIS cashed your check. If so, you can request a copy of the check from your bank that should have your USCIS tracking number printed on it (ten digits beginning with “WAC...”). Keep in mind that it may take up to two weeks to get a copy from the bank. check the status of your application online at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do with the WAC.

How do I contact the USCIS? The number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Be sure to have your “WAC” receipt number ready before you call. Inquiries through the National Customer Service line may delay the processing of your application. Contact the Director of International Programs first.

Is there any way to change the information on the EAD application (address, dates, etc.) once I have mailed the application? After you have mailed your application to USCIS no changes can be made except for address updates.

How long can I stay in the US after the end date of my OPT? You have 60 days after your OPT ends to leave the US, request a transfer of your I-20, or change your status. You cannot work.

Does my wife or kids get a new OPT I-20 too? When your new OPT I-20 is printed, you should also get an I-20 for your family members with the updated information on it.

90 days have passed since the Notice of Action receipt date. What can I do? First, verify your status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do. If your EAD application has been approved you will need to wait until the card arrives (2-4 weeks after it is approved).

USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet – can I start working? No. Employers are required to verify that you are eligible to work before they can put you on payroll. You must be able to show them the EAD when you begin employment.

USCIS said that my application was approved over six weeks ago and I still haven’t received it. Is there a problem? There may be. Have you moved? If so, did you update your OPT address? See the Director of International Programs.

How do I get an extension of my EAD? Only students who have completed certain STEM majors and have an employer who is enrolled in E-Verify are eligible for the 17 month extension.

I lost my EAD. How can I get it replaced? If you lose your EAD the only way to replace it is with a new EAD application. You must submit the same items as the initial application to USCIS (fee, photos, forms, etc.) and it will take 3 to 5 months. It is impossible to replace an EAD if you are outside the U.S.

My EAD says “not valid for re-entry” on it. Does that mean I cannot travel abroad and re-enter on OPT? All EADs are marked with this notation. It simply means that you must carry other documents to show proof of your eligibility to re-enter the U.S. such as your I-20 and valid F-1 visa stamp. The EAD alone is not enough to re-enter the U.S.
Frequently Asked Questions

What counts as employment? Immigration has provided many options to satisfy the employment requirement including paid, unpaid, and volunteer work related to your field of study.

Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work? There is no minimum for students on Pre-Completion OPT. All students on Post-Completion OPT, whether they have completed their degree or not, are required to work at least 20 hours per week. Students who do not work an average of 20 hours per week are not meeting the employment requirement.

I have been unemployed for 80 days. What is going to happen on the 90th day?

If you accumulate 90 days or more of unemployment, you are in violation of status which will result in an automatic termination of your F-1 status.

To avoid the status violation, you may do one of the following before the 90th day:

1. Secure unpaid or volunteer work related to your field of study at least 20 hours per week;
2. Request a ‘transfer out’ of your I-20 to a new school;
3. Leave the US and report your departure date to the Director of International Programs.

NOTE: Failure to report employment information to the Director of International Programs will have the same effect as 90 days of unemployment. If your SEVIS record is not updated to reflect employment within 90 days of the OPT start date, your record will terminate automatically.

Do I need a Social Security Number to work in the US? Yes. If you plan to work in the U.S. you will need a valid Social Security Number (SSN). To apply, please obtain instructions and directions to the Social Security Office from the Center for International Programs. The Social Security Administration will process your application and mail your Social Security number to you.

Do I need to complete any forms with my employer to begin working? Yes. Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form entitled Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your employer will provide this form and assist you in its completion.

Can I change employers while on OPT? Yes. OPT work authorization is not job-specific. Therefore, you may change employers, or have multiple employers at the same time, provided that each position is directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level. You will need to update the employer information with the Center for International Programs within 10 days of the changes.
Frequently Asked Questions

Do I pay taxes while working on OPT? Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply. Check the IRS’ web site, www.irs.gov for tax information and to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the US allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation. In general, however, F-1 students who have been present in the US for no more than five calendar years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are unfamiliar with this provision of the tax laws. See publication 519 available for download from the IRS web site www.irs.gov for information on how to claim salary incorrectly deducted for FICA or Medicare.

What if I am not able to complete my degree program by the completion date noted on the OPT I-20? If your application has not been adjudicated, you can withdraw your OPT and request a program extension of your I-20. Your fee will not be refunded if you are:

- An undergraduate student: You must extend your I-20 end date if you still have course work to complete. Your OPT will be limited to part time during the semester until you finish your degree. You are still held to the 90 day unemployment rule.

- A graduate student: Graduate students finishing their dissertation or thesis cannot change their program end date. They are eligible to work full time before filing and are held to the 90 day unemployment rule. It is important that the student finish their degree before their OPT ends.

What status do I have between my degree completion date and the start of my OPT (EAD start date)? If you have chosen a start date well after your degree completion date, you will still remain in F-1 status. Even though there seems to be a gap in your status, you are still legally allowed to remain in the U.S. or re-enter the U.S. from abroad during this time.

Can I go to school while on OPT? Time spent going to school should only be an incidental part of your stay in the U.S. If you decide to go back to school full-time, you must get a new I-20 from the school and forfeit the remainder of your OPT time.

Do I need to do anything with the University of Charleston while on OPT? Yes. As a condition of your F-1 status, all students must report any changes in address and employment information within 10 days of any changes to the Center for International Programs.

Can I start working without pay while waiting for my EAD? This is generally not a good idea. The USCIS may see it as "employment without authorization” and is a risky situation for you and your employer.

Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT? Your visa only needs to be valid to re-enter the U.S. from abroad. Thus, if it expires while you are still in the U.S., there is no problem. Your F-1 immigration status remains valid as long as you have an EAD that has not expired.