

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Definition:

“Temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.”
[8 C.F.R. 214.2 (f)(10)(ii)]

Eligibility:

- Must have been lawfully enrolled in a BCIS approved school on a full-time basis for 9 consecutive months as an F-1 student, or, as a student under another nonimmigrant status, such as J-1 status, or as a dependent of a nonimmigrant visa holding guardian.
- Employment must be directly related to student’s major area of study.

Authorization:

OPT may only be authorized:

- ▶ During annual vacations as long as the student is enrolled in school or intends to register for the following term;
 - ▶ On a part-time basis during the academic term, but limited to 20 hours a week while maintaining a full course of study;
 - ▶ On a full-time basis after completion of course requirements, excluding thesis or equivalent; or
 - ▶ Only on a full-time following completion of a bachelor’s, master’s, or PhD degree.
- OPT is limited to a **total** of 12 months during/after each level of degree obtained.
 - Part-time OPT pre-completion of studies is deducted from the 12-month limit at 50% post-graduation.
 - Students who have engaged in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) on a full-time basis, for a consecutive 12 or more, are ineligible to participate in OPT

Application Time:

- Students may apply for post-graduation 120 days prior to graduation.
- Students must submit an OPT application to the BCIS **BEFORE** the completion date of their studies. *Students forfeit their eligibility to participate in OPT if they fail to submit an application for OPT before the completion date of their studies.*

Approval Time:

- Estimated 90 days

After 90 days of receiving a “Notice of Action” receipt from the BCIS, students may appear at the Charlotte BCIS District Office to receive a temporary Employment Authorization Card (EAD), which will allow them to work until their EAD card arrives.

OPT Limitations:

- Any employment during OPT must be **directly** related to student field of study.
- OPT is terminated upon entrance into another program of study.
- Upon completion of OPT, students have 60 days to depart the US unless they have entered another program of study or secured another visa status.
- OPT must be completed within 14 months from the date of graduation. Students receiving employment authorization 3 months after graduation will only be able to participate in 11 months of OPT.

SEVIS Reporting Requirement:

Students participating in OPT are required to report the following to a Designate School Official (DSO):

1. Physical address
2. Employer
3. Employer’s address
4. Start and end dates of employment
5. Brief description of how employment directly relates to major field of study