



LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY  
APPLETON, WISCONSIN

## *General Information about Optional Practical Training*

### **Purpose of the Application:**

Certain non-immigrants may file a Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, to request an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The EAD is evidence that the bearer is authorized to work in the United States. The USCIS adjudicates a request for employment authorization by determining whether an applicant (1) is eligible, and (2) has submitted the required information and documentation. Application is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Click “file online” to start an on-line application (recommended) or follow the print instructions.

Optional Practical Training (OPT), granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), allows an F-1 student in the U.S. to be authorized for temporary work or training, directly related to his/her major area of study. OPT can be authorized before (pre-) or after (post-) completion of studies. The total period of authorization cannot exceed the equivalent of 12 full months. Part-time practical training (20 hours a week or less) is subtracted from the available 12 months at *half* the full-time rate; full-time authorization is 21-40 hours a week.

### **Pre-completion:**

- When classes are not in session, you may request full-time or part-time work authorization.
  - For term vacation periods, (e.g. Thanksgiving and Spring Break) you must be enrolled full-time during the term. This option is not advisable for Lawrence University students because of the brief length of our term breaks.
  - Authorization during winter and/or summer vacation periods require that you 1) were enrolled full time during the past term, and 2) enroll full-time for the next term.
- While school is in session, a full-time student working on course requirements may be eligible for part-time work authorization. Total employment, including on-campus work and any OPT, cannot exceed 20 hours per week.

### **Post-completion:**

- This is available after completion\* of all degree requirements. **Authorization is only available on a full-time basis.**

\*Completion of studies only occurs when you complete all the requirements for your degree; this is designated by the date of completion. For undergraduates, it is the date of your last exam or



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graduation date. **Your completion date is not the date you receive your diploma.** Check with International Student Services if your case varies.

**Eligibility:**

If you have been a full-time student for at least one academic year in lawful F-1 status, you are eligible to apply for OPT. If you have previously been granted a full 12 months of OPT as an undergraduate, you are **not** eligible for further authorization while you are an undergraduate. If you were previously granted less than 12 months of OPT, you may apply for the remaining time available. Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT per degree level (12 months for Bachelor's, 12 months for Master's, etc.). If your major is a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) major, it is possible to have a two-time 24-month extension if your employer is part of E-verify, a U.S. government employee verification database. Please note that not all employers are part of E-verify at this time.

**Job offer:**

An offer of employment is **not required** for standard post-completion OPT. However, many students choose to find an employer before applying for pre-completion OPT. **Note:** Once authorized, the time period is deducted from your total eligibility regardless if it was *used* or not.

**Dates of employment authorization:**

In your OPT application you will designate your *preferred* start and end dates of the authorization. USCIS will authorize your start date as either the date you stated on your application or the date the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) is approved, whichever is **later**.

- If you apply for pre-completion OPT, your end date will be as designated on your application.
- If you are applying for post-completion OPT, the authorization will be for the time period (i.e. duration) requested on your application. You may request a start date within 60 days after your date of completion.

You may not begin work until you receive the **valid** EAD card and its start date has commenced. However, if you were granted OPT based on a post-completion OPT application and you were delayed in your completion of studies, you must wait until you officially complete before beginning your employment.

**Changing OPT starting and ending dates**

When you meet with the ISS advisor, the advisor will submit into SEVIS the OPT starting and ending dates you request. If you decide you want to change the dates **BEFORE** you submit your application to USCIS, ISS can help you. However, after you submit the application, ISS cannot change the dates itself and instead must follow a lengthy procedure with the USCIS Service

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Center, which could significantly delay your OPT authorization. Therefore, before you submit your application you should be very certain that you have the dates you want.

**Required Documentation and Fee:**

Review the OPT Application Submission Process Checklist from International Student Services (ISS) to review the documents and fees necessary for your application. The ISS resource page for Optional Practical Training is located at on the ISS Canvas class website under “Work Authorization Options”: <https://lawrence.instructure.com/courses/2538>

**Where to file and mail the application:**

Filing can be done on-line (recommended to avoid mail delays), by mailing which is based on physical address and applicant type, verify this on-line at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>.



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**Filing Timeline:**

Your application must be filed **no sooner than 90 days prior to the end date** on your I-20 and received **no later than 60 days** after the end date on your I-20. In addition, make sure you **mail your application to the USCIS within 30 days of the OPT recommendation**. *If you delay beyond 30 days, ISS will need to issue an updated I-20. If your delay also causes you to need to change the requested starting and ending dates, please refer to the section on changing dates above.*

Pre-completion: you can apply for this authorization up to 90 days before the beginning date of your proposed employment

Post-completion: you can submit your application to USCIS up to 90 days before your degree completion date. USCIS requires that the application be received by their office within 60 days after the date of completion on your I-20 or you will lose your OPT opportunity.

Processing time at USCIS can be up to four months or more. Current processing time averages 90+ days. Students are encouraged to apply for OPT in advance of the proposed employment date or the anticipated completion of studies, as long as the **date of completion** is certain.

**Retaining Application and Mailing Records:**

ISS strongly recommends that you make a photocopy of your entire application and (if mailing) that you send it by USPS as "**certified mail, with return receipt**." Alternatively, you can send by FedEx, UPS, or DHL with tracking and delivery confirmation. In the event that there is a delay in the processing of your application, ISS will not be able to help you if you do not have a photocopy of your application and a U.S. Postal Service certified mail return receipt.

**You are advised to keep copies of all documentation submitted to and received from USCIS.**

**USCIS Processing Timeline:**

About 3-4 weeks after you mail your application, you should get a special receipt letter from the USCIS called an **I-797C, Notice of Action**. This letter will be mailed to the address on your application. Remember to keep this letter, since it will contain a special number beginning with three letters such as "LIN..." or "YSC..." that refers to your specific application.

The Notice of Action also has a phone number that you can call to **check on the status of your application**. This number is generally busy during the day, so you may have more success getting through late at night. You now also have the option of checking online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/>. To do so you must have the receipt number from your Notice of Action.



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***If you do not receive a Notice of Action within five weeks, please provide ISS with a photocopy of the front and back of your U.S. Postal Service receipt and a photocopy of the front and back of your canceled check or money order.***



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**Decision on Your Application:**

If your application is approved, your EAD will be mailed to the mailing address on the application. If you have listed ISS as the mailing address, the advisor will notify you by email that it has arrived. In the very unlikely event that your application cannot be granted, you will receive an explanation for the denial.

*If you do not receive your EAD within 90 days of the date your Notice of Action gives as the "Received Date," contact the ISS advisor.*

**Travel outside the USA:**

Students assume minor risk of issues with re-entry, anytime they travel outside of the United States. ISS does not recommend travel outside the U.S. prior to your securing a job or job offer. If you do travel, upon re-entering the U.S, you should have an unexpired EAD card, a valid I-20 signed for re-entry on OPT, and a letter from your employer confirming employment or a job offer, in order to avoid difficulty returning to the United States to assume (or reassume) your employment. If your visa is expired, you will need to apply for a new one while you are abroad (for exceptions to this rule, please see your international student advisor). Travel that does not fall under the parameters listed above should be discussed with the international student advisor prior to making arrangements to depart the U.S.