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Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Office of International Engagement



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Agenda

- What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- Who is eligible to apply
- How to apply
- Employment and Reporting Requirements
- Travel
- Options after OPT
- Next steps in the application process
- Questions

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Optional Practical Training

A period in which undergraduate and graduate students with an F-1 or border commuter status who have completed or have been pursuing a degree for one full year may be permitted by USCIS to work towards getting practical training to complement their field of study. Post-completion OPT is temporary employment that is **directly related to your major field of study.**

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Who Qualifies for Post-Completion OPT?

- To qualify, you must have been enrolled full-time for one consecutive academic year (e.g., fall/spring, spring/fall)
- You must be in valid immigration status
- You must be in your final semester
- You must be a candidate for graduation

*PhD students pending dissertation only must make an appointment with International Engagement to discuss options.

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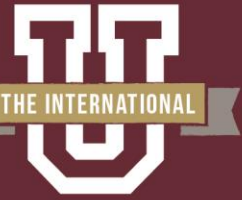
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Points to Remember

- A job offer is **NOT** required
- More than 90 days of unemployment will automatically cancel your OPT
- You may work anywhere in the US*
- During OPT your status is F-1 student
- You can apply as early as 90 days before your program end date and 60 days after your program completion
- Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on/off campus until you receive your OPT card
- The average OPT application processing time is 90 days so you are encouraged to apply early

*F-3 visa holders or **Border Commuter** students cannot reside in the U.S.; therefore you are limited to the Laredo area.

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What is considered employment?

- All OPT employment should be related to the student's major field of study and degree level
- Students must work at least 20 hours a week in a qualifying position to be considered OPT employment
- Types of employment allowed include:
 - Paid Employment: at least 20 hours a week
 - Multiple employers are allowed
 - Short-term employers
 - Work for hire
 - Self-employed business owner*
 - Employment through an agency or consulting firm
 - Unpaid employment: can work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, as long as it doesn't violate labor laws. Must work at least 20 hours a week and is related to your degree.
 - We recommend to keep documentation of the nature of employment for your records

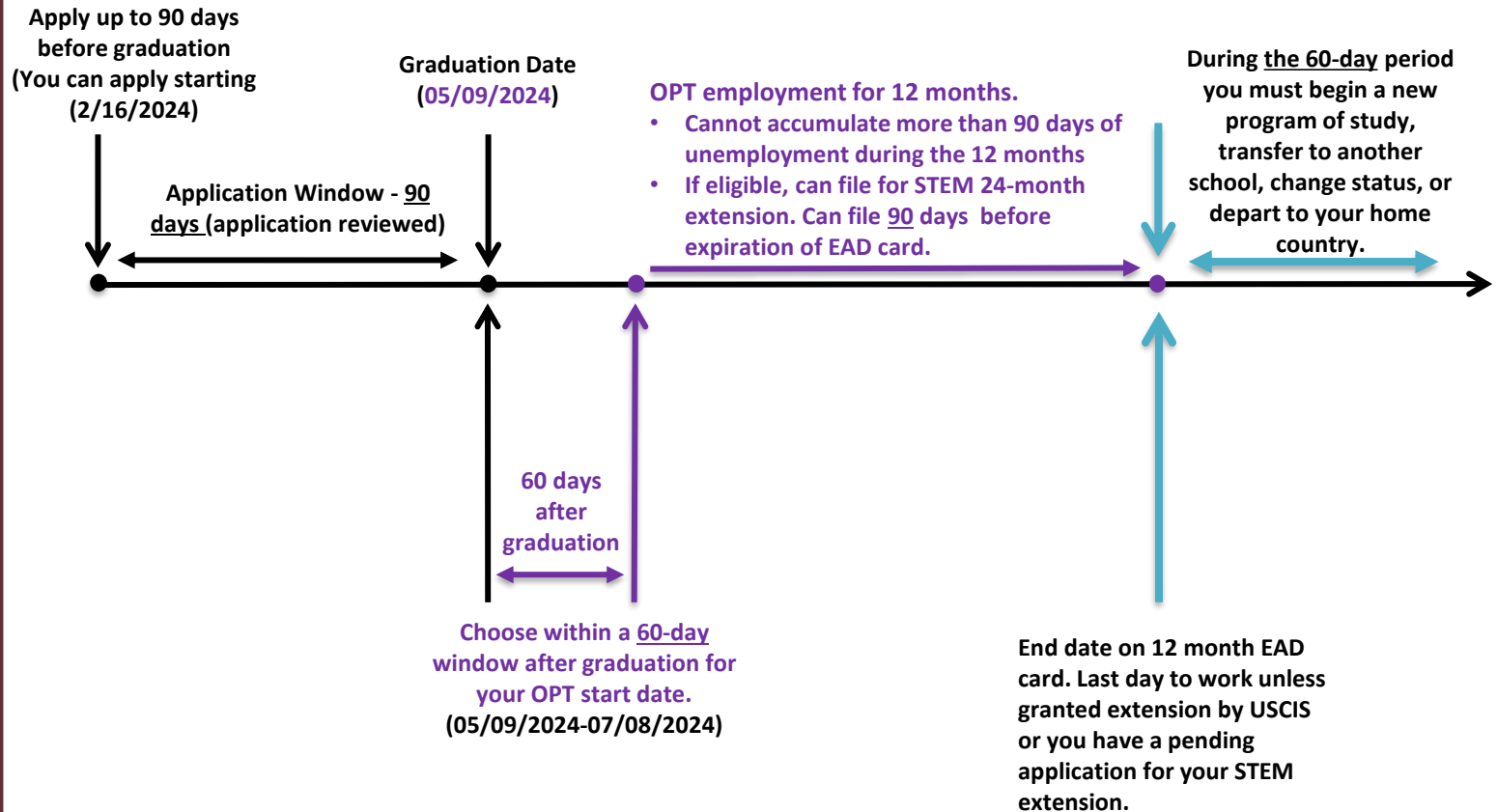
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OPT Timeline





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How to apply

Two options

1. Submit Online (Recommended)

- Need to create an online account with USCIS
- Upload documents

OR

2. Mail the application to USCIS

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Application Documents

Online Submission Option

- **Application Checklist**
- **Forms**
 - Complete the OPT Request Form with IE
 - I-765 Form (<https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>)
- **Supporting documents**
 - Digital (2x2) **colored photos** taken within the last 30 days
 - Application fee is **\$410**
 - Can pay by Credit card or debit card payment
 - Copy of **new I-20** (You will get this after your IE advisor recommends OPT)
 - Copy of your **passport**
 - Copy of your **F-1 visa**
 - Copy of your **I-94 record** <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>
 - Copy of **previous** Employment Authorization Document (**EAD**), if you had one



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Applying Online

1. [Create online account with USCIS](#)
2. Login into [My USCIS account](#)
3. Select I-765 application for Employment Authorization
4. Code for Post completion OPT is (C)(3)(B)



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Application Process

1. Submit the [Graduation Application](#) with the Registrar's office
2. Schedule an appointment with IE
3. Bring supporting documents, passport, visa, I-94 or save on computer
 - We can assist you to review your online application
 - Issue your OPT recommendation I-20
 - Take your digital photos (if needed)

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OPT Students Responsibilities

- Start working only when receive approval and EAD card
- Maintain employment rules
 - Job must be related to your major field of study and educational level
 - Keep track of unemployment time. A total of 90 days of unemployment are allowed in 12 month OPT period
 - Can work in volunteer positions to count as employment as long as 20 hours a week and doesn't violate labor laws
- Maintain reporting requirements
 - Send a copy of the EAD card to DSO at TAMIU and
 - Report any changes in address and employer information
 - Through the SEVP Portal or TAMIU's IE Office



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Reporting Requirements

The following information must be reported within 10 days:

- Employer's name (company name)
- Employers address (your office location)
- Employers EIN # (nine digits long and the format is XX-XXXXXXX)
- Job title
- Employer start date (the day you begin working)
- Full-time/part-time
- Supervisor's name
- Supervisors phone number
- Supervisors email address
- Explanation of how your employment is related to your field of study
- Any legal change in your name
- Report your residential address
- Any periods of unemployment

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SEVP Portal

- Once approved for OPT students will receive a link to create an account with the SEVP Portal
- Through the Portal you can see information in SEVIS and can update your address and employment information
- We would like all TAMIU students to set up a SEVP Portal account
- More information can be found on the SEVP website
 - <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-help-hub/student-records/fm-student-employment/sevis-and-the-sevp-portal>

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Travel outside the U.S. while on OPT

- Travel is not advised when application for OPT is pending
- You are allowed to travel after OPT is approved
 - You will need to following
 - A valid travel signature on your I-20 by a DSO
 - A valid F-1 visa to re-enter
 - If visa is expired, you will need to renew your visa at a U.S. Embassy outside the U.S.
 - OPT/Employment Authorization Card (EAD)
 - A letter or proof of employment from the employer

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Unemployment time and grace periods

- Unemployment period is total of 3 months during a 12 month period of standard OPT
- 60 day grace periods
 - 1st after your completion of your degree and
 - 2nd after the end of your OPT
 - At the end of your OPT you must
 - Depart U.S., apply for another degree program in F-1 or change your status to another status (e.g. H-1 B (working visa) B-2 (tourist visa) or dependent visa)
 - If you plan on going back to school
 - » You must be admitted within the 60-day grace period and receive a new I-20.
 - » Your program must start within 5 months of the end of your OPT.

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After OPT

Once you complete your OPT you must choose from the following options:

- Begin a new program of study at TAMIU
- Begin another program at another SEVIS approved School
 - Complete Transfer Request Form
- [Depart](#) U.S.
- Change status
- Students with a STEM major may apply for extension, 3 months before OPT expires

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Cap-Gap Extension and I-20

- This is for students who apply for H-1B with an employer on April 1st with a start date of Oct 1st and their OPT expires before their grace period
- Government allows students to continue working on their OPT until Sept 30th.
- This is an automatic extension if approved by USCIS and we will issue you an I-20 if this applies to you

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STEM OPT Extension

- Students in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Field are allowed to extend their OPT to an additional 24 months of OPT
- To qualify:
 - Must be approved for post completion OPT
 - Have a job offer with an E-Verify employer
- To apply:
 - Can apply 90 days before current OPT expires.
 - Must apply before OPT expires.
 - Students need to submit I-983 and request form to DSO
- Additional Documents needed
 - Students need to submit a copy of their degree/transcript for proof of the STEM Major
 - New I-20 with DSO recommendation for STEM Extension

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How do I select a start date?

- **May graduates** you can select a start date up to 60 days of their I-20 Program End Date **(Appox. 7/8/2024)**
- On average it takes 90 days to process the applications
 - Better to use an “early” start date if you:
 - Have an employment offer
 - Are confident you will get an offer soon after completion
 - Would like to be available for employment right after program completion
 - Are in a STEM major field of study and plan to apply for H-1B after the 24 STEM OPT Extension
 - Better to use a “later” start date if you:
 - Do not have any employment offers at the time of OPT application
 - Need more time to find jobs
 - You think you may not pass or complete the program
- Plans after graduation and OPT
 - Are you considering getting another degree in U.S.?
 - Are you planning on applying for an H-1B after OPT ends
- *Remember: Choose a realistic start date while keeping in mind current USCIS processing times. There is no “right” or “wrong” start date; simply choose one during your grace period. The date you choose depends on your personal and employment situation.*

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What if I apply and do not complete my program?

- You will need to contact IE immediately to notify us so we can advise you. We may need to extend your I-20
- You have option of canceling your OPT request if you did not submit
- If approved and still need to re-take a class, you may be allowed to work part-time on OPT until you are done with your course requirement.

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Questions?

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