What is Optional Practical Training?

- OPT is a special academic training period authorization granted by the Department of Homeland Security. Most students on an F01 visa choose to use OPT to participate in employment (which must be) related to their degree, following completion of their academic program. F-1 Students are eligible for one year of OPT per educational level (bachelor’s, master’s, PhD).

Who is eligible for OPT?

- An F-1 student who has been in F-1 status for at least one full academic year (two sequential semesters).
- Eligible F-1 students may engage in Optional Practical Training:
  - After completion of a program of study
  - Before completion of studies if engaged in thesis or dissertation research. (most applicable to graduate level studies)
  - During the summer or during winter break or January term (when not enrolled in class)
  - **During the regular academic year (on a part-time basis, deducted from the 12-month maximum at a proportional rate.)

**NOTE:** In this situation, Curricular Practical Training may be a better option for you. Ask your DSO for more information.

You are not eligible to apply for OPT if you leave the U.S. after graduation and before applying for OPT.

When can I apply?

- You can apply as early as 90 days before graduation, and as late as 60 days following the last day of your final term (NOT day of commencement ceremonies). This means that the application must be received by USCIS before the 60 day period ends. It is best to apply before completion, as it can take an average of 90 days to process the application. **Plan ahead!**

Do I need a job offer in order to apply?

- No

Can I go in person to a USCIS office to apply for OPT?

- No. OPT applications must be submitted by mail, with the help of your DSO. The DSO must recommend OPT in the SEVIS system for permission to do OPT; the USCIS must approve it. At Luther, the DSO will help compile your application for mailing to the USCIS.
Can I file the OPT application electronically?
◆ No—you must follow the instructions in this packet. While USCIS does have the option for I-765 electronic filing, supporting documents must still be mailed, thus your DSO does not recommend filing electronically.

Can I request fewer than 12 months of OPT?
◆ No. OPT applications will automatically be approved for 12 months (or, will end 14 months from the last date of your final term, whichever comes first)

When can I start to work under OPT?
◆ When you have the EAD (Employment Authorization Document—in other words, your OPT card) in hand, and not before the start date noted on the card. This is why you need to plan ahead and apply early.

Can I change employers under OPT?
◆ Yes, you may change employers, as long as the employment is related to your field of study. You must, however, keep your DSO updated on your address, the name and address of your employer, the employer ID number (EIN), and your phone number and email.

How long can I stay in the United States after my OPT expires?
◆ Sixty days, unless you have obtained a new I-20 to enter a new degree program, have applied to extend your OPT (under the STEM extension), or applied to change to another immigration status.

Can I return to school after completing OPT?
◆ Yes. You need to obtain a new I-20 for the next program of studies. Your current DSO will complete the SEVIS procedure for transfer to the new school so that the DSO at your new school can issue the I-20. You will need to provide your Luther DSO with a copy of your acceptance to your new school.

If I complete a year of OPT and return to school for another degree, can I have another year of OPT?
◆ Yes, as long as you are moving to a higher level of study.
Is OPT a different visa?
- No. A person with OPT authorization is an F-1 student holding an EAD for OPT. The OPT acts as an extension of your I-20.

What’s the difference between OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT)? If I used CPT, can I still use OPT?
- As the name implies, CPT is meant to be an integral part of your college curriculum, hence you cannot participate in CPT after completing your degree program. At Luther, you must use CPT for credit in your major department. This requires securing a job/internship with full job description before you apply for CPT. You must have permission for credit from your academic department. You are still eligible for OPT as long as your CPT employment does not extend to 12 months of full time employment. For more questions about CPT, see your DSO.

How do I apply for OPT?
1. Read these Important Questions (above)
2. Follow the “Instructions for Filing Forms I-765 with the USCIS” on the Diversity Center website and complete form I-765, as well as the LDC Student Request for 12 Month OPT form. Be sure to have discussed your OPT start date with your employer, if you have one.
3. When the forms are completed, make an appointment with your DSO by calling 563-387-1014.

USE the following OPT Application Checklist to make sure you have all the required documents when you meet with your DSO.
# OPT Application Checklist

**OPT application**

Submit your completed application and other documents to your DSO for review and assistance. DSO will issue a new I-20 showing request for OPT.

Read overview at: [https://reason.luther.edu/diversity/internationalinfo/currentstudents/opt/](https://reason.luther.edu/diversity/internationalinfo/currentstudents/opt/)

---

## Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ☐   | ☐  | Completed and signed form I-765  
Can be found, along with sample of how to complete the form at: [https://reason.luther.edu/diversity/internationalinfo/currentstudents/opt/](https://reason.luther.edu/diversity/internationalinfo/currentstudents/opt/)  
|

---

## Submit supporting documents in this order, with I-765 on top:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ☐   | ☐  | Check or money order  
Made out to U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, for $380  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | 2 Passport sized photos  
Write name and I-94 number on the back of each photo. For photo guidelines see: [Photos](#)  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Copy of signed I-20, endorsed by DSO for OPT application  
Meet with your DSO to enter the OPT application into your SEVIS record, print I-20, and give you the original. Don’t forget to sign it! Note, your OPT application must be receipted by USCIS within 30 days of the entry in SEVIS.  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Copy of all previously issued I-20s  
Front and back, showing any endorsements for CPT, etc.  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Copy of Passport  
Check expiry date  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Copy of US F-1 Visa  
Check expiry date  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Copy of most recent I-94  
Note: CBP will no longer be issuing the paper I-94. If you don’t have one, you can upload one from: [Electronic I-94](#)  
|
| ☐   | ☐  | Letter of support from DSO  
|