OPT Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why should I apply for OPT?
A. OPT, when approved, grants the student one year (12 months) of work authorization valid for employment anywhere in the United States. This employment should be directly related to your field of study.

Q. Who decides what date my OPT starts?
A. You do, at the time of your appointment with ISS. You may choose your OPT start date to be anytime from the day after the completion date of your I-20, to the last day of your grace period. Please know that USCIS approves OPT applications in the order they were received. If you file your application late, you will likely lose OPT time. So, if your application is not approved until after your grace period has ended, your authorization will begin the date the card was approved (not backdated.)

Q. Can I change my OPT requested dates?
A. No. It may take months in order to initiate this kind of request with USCIS and there is no guarantee of when it would be completed. You risk losing significant valuable time, while waiting on USCIS to process a change to your OPT dates.

Q. Can I continue working on campus while I wait for OPT?
A. You may not work on campus after your completion date (graduation date). If you wish to take a job on campus after graduation, you must have OPT in order to work.

Q. When can I begin working?
A. When you have your OPT approved (Employment Authorization Document, or EAD, in hand).

Q. What happens after I file my application?
A. ISS mails your application to USCIS for processing. First, in a few days, you should receive an e-mail or text notification that your application was received. Next, in a few weeks, ISS will receive a Form I-797 which proves the application has been successfully filed. Later, when the OPT application is approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to ISS. A copy will be made and then the card will be mailed to you. Always be sure to update your current address using the OPT Update Form: http://tinyurl.com/OPTnotice

Q. Can my application be denied?
A. Yes. It is possible, although very unlikely. If your application is denied, you will receive a notice describing the reason why it was denied.

Q. How long do I have to wait for the application to be approved and the card to arrive?
A. If your application has been pending for more than 90 days, contact International Student Services. You can also apply for a temporary EAD at the local USCIS district office:
   DHS Philadelphia District Office
   1600 Callowhill Street
   Philadelphia, PA 19130
Q. Can I travel while waiting for my OPT approval?
A. It is not recommended to travel outside of the U.S. while the application is pending, since there is a possibility that your re-entry could be denied. But, if you choose to travel: you must have your new I-20 (showing the OPT request), plus a valid passport and valid F1 visa. OPT is part of your F1 status. You should also carry as much supporting evidence as possible (including a letter from your future employer, an interview offer, etc).

Q. Can I travel while on OPT?
A. Yes, you can travel, but you need a valid passport, valid F1 visa and your newest I-20, plus the EAD card. If your visa is expired, you will need to apply for a new F1 before returning to the US. Since OPT is for employment experience, it is highly recommended that you travel while employed, or with an offer of employment.

Q. What are the requirements of OPT?
A. You must:
   - Update ISS anytime you move (give us your new address!) http://tinyurl.com/OPTnotice
   - Update ISS anytime you gain employment or change jobs http://tinyurl.com/OPTnotice
   - Actually use OPT to work. Federal Regulation states that you should not be unemployed on OPT for more than 90 days. Accrual of more than 90 days unemployment may be cause for USCIS to deny you immigration benefits at a later date.

Q. What if I can’t find a job?
A. Avoid the 90-day unemployment limit by volunteering. You may volunteer for at least 20 hours per week (related to your field of study) and this will count as employment. Use the OPT Update Form to report this work! The SEVIS system will automatically terminate your SEVIS record after 90 days recorded as unemployed. Please report to me using the OPT Update Form!

Q. Since I’m on OPT, does my Bucknell health insurance continue?
A. No, although you are still on an F1 student visa, your health insurance coverage will officially end on July 31st of the year you graduate.

Q. What if I want to go to graduate school, or go back to school?
A. If you decide to enroll in a new degree program, you will need a new I-20 from that university. Issuance of that new I-20 cancels your OPT. If you earn a degree at the same or lower level, you will not earn more OPT, but you may apply for any remainder left of the 12 months. Use the “Transfer Out” Form located on the ISS website in order to request transfer of your SEVIS record to the new university.

Q. My OPT is almost over. What do I do now?
A. OPT is a temporary work authorization. If your OPT is expiring and you do not have H1B sponsorship from an employer, you must stop working on the last day of your EAD and choose one of the following:
   1. Leave the U.S. within 60 days. (This is a grace period. You may stay, but you may not work).
   2. Secure admission to a new degree program and request your SEVIS record be transferred to the new university. Use the “Transfer Out Form” on the ISS website. (Continued…)
3. Secure another visa status. (If you are married, or a close family member has petitioned for your dependent visa status or permanent residency).

**Q. I earned a degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering or Math) field. Do I get more OPT?**

**A.** Depending on your degree, you may be eligible for a STEM-OPT extension. [Eligible degrees are listed here](http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2014/stem-list.pdf)

If your degree appears in that list, you may be eligible to apply for an additional 24-month extension of OPT. Once filed, you are eligible to continue working for up to 180 days while the 24 month OPT STEM Extension is pending.

In order to apply:

- You must apply between 15-90 days before the expiration of your current (12 mo.) OPT
- You must be employed for a company or organization that is registered with E-Verify [http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify](http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify)
- Your degree must be earned: you must be able to show a copy of your final transcript and diploma
- You must have never used the 24 month STEM extension previously
- You must complete Form I-983, “Training for STEM OPT Students”, and submit to ISS

**Q. What are the 24 month STEM extension requirements?**

**A.** While on this extension, you are required to submit any changes within ten days. Use the OPT Update form:

- Moved
- Lost your job
- Change in job
- PLUS you MUST submit the [OPT Update Form](#) once every six months, as confirmation of your continued employment and continued residence at that address. *This is an urgent and serious requirement of the STEM OPT extension!*

**Q. What if my employer sponsors me for H1B? Do I have to leave the US to change status?**

**A.** No. If you are working on OPT, your employer can sponsor you to switch your status from F1 to H1B. You do not have to travel outside of the US. However, if you choose to do so (after obtaining your H1-B status), you will need to apply for the H1-B visa before returning to the US.

**Q. What is the H1-B Cap-Gap Extension?**

**A.** If your OPT is expiring during the summer (i.e. July 15th), but your H1-B is approved to start on October 1st, your OPT will be automatically extended so you can remain in the US and continue working, until the H1-B takes effect on October 1st. *However, you must contact ISS at iss@bucknell.edu or (570) 577-3794 to request an updated I-20 that shows the cap-gap extension.*

**Q. What if I change to another status?**

**A.** Any change of immigration status (to H-1B, permanent residency, dependent visa status, etc.) cancels OPT since it is a benefit of your F1 visa status. Please notify ISS if your immigration status changes.