

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

What you need to know about F-1 Optional Practical Training Employment Authorization for International Students.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is off-campus employment authorization that allows F-1 students to get work experience in their major field of study. The amount of work permitted is a maximum of 12 months of full-time employment for the time during which you are an F-1 student. You may use it during or after your studies in whatever portions you choose. You may work for any employer, anywhere in the United States.

Think of it as an OPT bank account! In that account are 12 months of full-time optional practical training. Let's say you'd like to work full-time for three months one summer before you graduate with your bachelor's degree. That is a three-month withdrawal of full-time employment, leaving you nine months left to spend after you have graduated from your specific degree program.

How can it be used?

- Summer vacation and semester break
- While school is in session: *part-time employment only*
- After completion of all course requirements for a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, excluding the thesis or equivalent
- After completion of ALL requirements for the course of study

How can you qualify for it?

- You must have been enrolled full-time for one full academic year.
- You must be able to describe how the type of work you are seeking directly relates to your major. You do not have to have a job offer to apply for OPT. If you are applying for OPT before completion of studies, however, it is wise that you be as sure as possible of a job so that you don't waste any of your OPT "account".
- You may not use all of the 12 months of full-time Optional Practical Training *before* the end date of your I-20.

How do you apply?

Make an appointment to speak with the PDSO or DSO. We will determine whether you qualify for OPT. If you do, then you will receive further instructions. An appointment will be made once you have obtained all the initial documents

Please bring all of your original immigration documents: (passport, I-94, visa, all previous I-20's and two colored passport type photos as described on attached sheet. If you previously had OPT, bring your old EAD card with you.

How long does it take?

After you return your application and it has been processed, it will be sent to USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). It may take up to 90 days for your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to be returned to us from USCIS. It could take less or longer depending on the workload on USCIS. Unfortunately, there is no way to make the process go faster.

What if you want to travel before starting after-completion of studies OPT?

Once you have begun the process by sending in your application, you should *not* travel outside of the United States without the EAD card, SEVIS I-20, and a letter from the employer. To re-enter the United States you *may need to show proof of an employer*. Otherwise, you may be denied entry.

Do I need to have a job while I am on optional practical training?

Yes. The regulations require that you do have employment while on your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 24 month extension. While on POST-graduation OPT, you **MUST** update your employment.

Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?

The employment does **NOT** have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed (including performance majors with regular “gigs”), interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employed” for the purposes of OPT employment. If you are “self-employed,” keep careful records of all the work you do—it must to be at least 20 hours per week.

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?

You may **NOT** begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

Do I have to do anything with the Wesleyan’s Immigration Services while I am on OPT?

Yes! Immigration regulations **REQUIRE** that while you are on POST-graduation OPT, you **MUST** report your employment and address information to the Wesleyan OISA by sending an email, within 10 days of any employment or residential address changes.

When you are ready for an appointment to process the application, bring the following:

- Two photos 2”x 2” (All photos must meet the specifications for colored, full-frontal/passport photos-(taken no more than 30 days prior to your application).
- \$410 fee (check or money order) payable to:
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- All past original I-20’s
- Passport
- Visa
- I-94 (to obtain your most recent I-94 - Google “I-94 retrieval” complete form submit and print.)
- EAD card (if previous OPT)

We will send the application to USCIS via certified mail, return receipt requested. Estimate that it will take approximately **60-90 days to process the application.**

YOU CANNOT START WORKING UNTIL USCIS AUTHORIZES YOUR EMPLOYMENT AND YOU HAVE YOUR EAD CARD IN YOUR POSSESSION!

**Optional Practical Training Request Form
(Undergraduate Only)**

Name: _____
Last name First name Middle name

Class Year: _____ **Social Security Number:** _____

Email: _____ **WesId:** _____

Major(s): _____

Marital Status: Married ___ Single ___ Divorced: ___

Expected date of completion of studies: _____

Write a brief description of the type of employment or internship. Please note that this description will be used for the recommendation for your Optional Practical Training. (1000 words or less- use additional back of sheet if necessary)

What kind of OPT are you applying for?

1. Before completion of studies:

Full-time - (only available during vacation, summer break or if you have completed all of your coursework except for comprehensives, thesis, or dissertation)

Starting on: _____ **and ending on:** _____

Part-time - (Less than 20 hours a week.)

Starting on: _____ **and ending on:** _____

2. After completion of studies:

Starting on: _____ Your start date could be as early the day after the actual date of completion of studies you put above, or any other date within the 60-day period.

Ending on: _____ You may use all of the 12-month benefit you have remaining. Your ending date *cannot be later than 14 months* after the actual date of completion of studies.