

## While You Are On Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (F-1 Students)

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### General Information

Once your application is approved, USCIS will issue you an EAD. Submit a scanned copy of your EAD card to the International Center using [our online form](#) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Your F-1 status continues through the OPT period.

You must stop your employment when the end date on the EAD card is reached, but may remain in the U.S. for the 60-day grace period.

You may begin working once

- you have obtained the EAD card (you may not begin employment if your OPT has been approved but you have not yet received the EAD in the mail)
- and the begin date on the card has been reached.

The EAD is not employer specific, so you may change employers at will. However, employment must be directly related to the field of studies. Any employment outside your field of study is unauthorized and is a substantive violation of your status.

### Social Security Number

If you do not yet have a Social Security Number (SSN), you will be required to have one for tax reporting purposes. You may apply for a SSN after you have received the EAD card and the begin date on the card has been reached.

If you already have a SSN, do not apply for a new one. Social Security Numbers are for life.

[You do not need your SSN to begin working.](#) <sup>[2]</sup> On your first day of employment, you will be asked to complete employment paperwork. If you do not yet have your SSN, you may write “applied for” in the space where the SSN is to be provided. Once you receive the Social Security Card in the mail, provide the

number to your employer.

## **U.S. Department of Homeland Security Address Notification Requirement**

You are required to update your address in [Wolverine Access](#) [3] within 10 days of any change, even while you are on OPT.

## **Travel Outside the U.S. and Reentry**

For important information on travel while you're applying for OPT, refer to the [Travel Advisory](#) [4] "Travel while on post-completion OPT". This section includes important information on documents required to reenter the U.S. while on OPT, plus information about applying for a new visa stamp.

If your F-2 dependents travel outside the U.S. and reenter without you during your OPT period, they should carry their own original documents along with photocopies of all the documents you are required to carry for reentry. The list of required documents is provided in the Travel Advisory.

## **OPT Employment Requirements and Reporting**

You are expected to be employed in your field of study during OPT, and you are required to submit employer information to SEVIS. The maximum period of unemployment is 90 days.

### **Documenting OPT Employment**

It is recommended that you keep documentation of all your employment. In the future, you may be asked to provide proof of your detailed employment history during OPT.

Specifically, you should maintain evidence — for each job — of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, the hours worked per week, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and description of the work.

If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, we highly recommend that you obtain a signed letter from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work you performed. Keep this in your personal records.

### **Types of employment allowed during pre- and post- completion OPT**

All OPT employment, including post-completion OPT, must be in a job that is related to your degree program.

This employment may include the following (does not apply to students on a [STEM extension](#) [5]):

#### **Paid employment**

- Students authorized for post-completion OPT may work part time (at least 20 hours per week) or full time.

#### **Multiple employers**

- Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program. Employment during pre-completion OPT cannot exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.

### **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists)**

- Students who are musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs.

### **Work for hire**

- Work for hire means that an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. It is sometimes called “1099 employment” because people who “work for hire” receive Internal Revenue Service Form 1099-MISC – which shows how much money was earned for a particular year – from the contracting company. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.

### **Self-employed business owner**

- Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.

### **Employment through an agency**

- Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

### **Unpaid employment**

- Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

## **Reporting Employment**

Students are required to report changes in employment to the IC as soon as possible. We recommend that you report changes within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a DHS official may determine you to be out of status.

To report periods of employment along with employer information, start the IC [OPT Employment Record](#) [6] web form by entering your UMID. You will be directed to update your current employer or [create a new employer/unemployed record](#) [6]. If your employment information changes, revisit the web form to provide an update. For instance, you must enter an end date for your current job before adding a new employer/unemployed record. The IC will enter this data into SEVIS for you.

## **Periods of Unemployment**

Students on post-completion OPT are only allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment.

### ***What counts as “unemployment time”***

- Unemployment time is counted each day during the OPT dates indicated on the EAD.
- Students who have OPT extended due to the cap gap provisions continue to accrue unemployment time and are subject to the 90-day limitation on unemployment.
- If you have a job offer that begins more than 90 days after your OPT begins, you will exceed your allowable unemployment time. Receiving a job offer within the 90 days is not sufficient, you must be employed in one of the employment types listed above.
- If you travel outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90 day limit.
- Permanently leaving the U.S. without notifying the International Center result in the accidental accrual of unemployment. For this reason, you must contact the IC if you decide to abandon your OPT.

### ***What does not count toward “unemployment time”***

- If you travel abroad while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of your employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.
- Days of unemployment that occurred before April 8, 2008.

### ***Consequences of exceeding allowable period of unemployment***

- If you exceed the allowable period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, you are considered to have violated your status.

If you cannot find employment that meets the definition of OPT employment, you may have the following options:

- Apply to U-M or another university to continue your education by a change of level or transferring to another institution. See [Starting a New Program](#) below.
- Depart the United States (be sure to notify the IC if you [abandon your OPT](#) and leave)
- Change status to another legal status if possible

## **Ending OPT Early**

### **Abandoning OPT**

If you decide to abandon your OPT before the end date of your EAD and leave the U.S., you must notify the International Center so we can end your SEVIS record. Please submit a [departure form](#) [7] telling us that you have decided to abandon your OPT and the date you plan to depart the United States. We will end your SEVIS record effective the date you indicate you plan to leave the U.S. or the date you notify us, whichever is later. If you do not notify us, you may continue to be billed for health insurance.

### **Starting a New Program — at U-M or at Another Institution**

During the period you are authorized for OPT, you may decide to apply to another academic program,

either at U-M or another University. Once you are admitted to another degree program, it is important to discuss the situation with an advisor at the International Center, as the issuance of a new I-20 will effect/terminate your OPT. Please call the IC to request an appointment (appointments may be in-person or by telephone). If you are admitted to a degree program at another University, the International Center must transfer your I-20 to that institution so they may issue a new I-20 for you.

- *Admission to U-M for a new degree program/change of level.* Once you have been admitted to a new degree program at U-M, the admissions office will issue a new I-20 to you. The issuance of this new I-20 does not end your OPT immediately. Your EAD is terminated as soon as you enter the U.S. with the new I-20 or you check-in for the new program, **whichever is earlier**. Either one of these events will activate your SEVIS record for the new degree and deactivate your OPT SEVIS record. This means you must immediately stop employment regardless of the card's appearance of validity if you reenter with your new I-20 or check-in at the IC.
- *Transfer to another school in the U.S.* in order to begin a new degree program. Authorization for OPT is not transferable. Your authorization for OPT ends on the transfer release date. If you wish to complete OPT, set the release date for a date after the OPT ends. You can set the transfer release date to occur during the 60-day grace period following post-completion OPT (see the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, [Transfer for F-1 Students](#) [8] (refer to section 6.7)). On your transfer release date, you must stop employment regardless of your EAD card's appearance of validity.

In order to maintain your F-1 status, a new I-20 for change of academic level, new degree program, or transfer must be issued before the end of your 60 day grace period.

## **Change of Status During OPT**

If you change your immigration status (e.g. from F-1 to H-1B, F-2, or J-1) during the period of your OPT your OPT ends on the effective date of the USCIS action notice and any unused OPT time is lost (you cannot have both F-1 OPT status and another status at the same time, nor can you return to OPT if your new status is terminated for any reason).

The University of Michigan is required to notify SEVIS of your new status and requests that you notify the Office of the Registrar immediately. To officially record your new status, the Office of the Registrar will need a copy of the approval notice you received from USCIS. You can get this information to the Registrar's Office in one of two ways:

- Visit the Registrar's office at either of the two locations: 2200 SAB, 515 E. Jefferson St. (Central Campus) or 2202 LL North Pierpont Commons, 2101 Bonisteel Boulevard (North Campus). Bring your M-Card and your documents.
- Write a letter which includes your name, your current status, your UMID number and your signature asking for an update on your visa status. Include with the letter a copy of the documentation you received from USCIS.

Mail to:

U-M, Office of the Registrar  
Student Services  
2200 SAB, 515 E. Jefferson St.

Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-2090 USA

Fax to:

Office of the Registrar  
Student Services  
734.763.9053

Email to:

[ro.registration.questions@umich.edu](mailto:ro.registration.questions@umich.edu) [9]

## “Cap Gap” Relief for OPT — H-1B Transitions

Some students may be eligible for an extension of OPT and F-1 status due to the new [Cap Gap Relief](#) [10] rules.

### F-1 OPT STEM Extension

Some students on post-completion OPT may be eligible for an extension of OPT if they received a U.S. degree in a STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Information about the STEM Extension can be found at [F-1 OPT STEM Extension](#) [5].

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**Source URL:** <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/on-opt>

#### Links

[1] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/resources/forms/employment-authorization-document>

[2] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/resources/tax/getting-ssn-card>

[3] <http://wolverineaccess.umich.edu/>

[4] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/travel-advisory>

[5] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/stem-extend>

[6] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/resources/forms/opt-employment-form>

[7] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/resources/forms/f1-departure>

[8] <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/f1-transfers>

[9] <mailto:ro.registration.questions@umich.edu>

[10] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/cap-gap>