

OPT Application Information and Instructions

NOTE: Please contact Liz Cody (ecody@carleton.edu), with questions about any off-campus employment – paid or unpaid. Before you submit your application to USCIS, please make an appointment with Liz to discuss changes in your application and immigration regulations.

International students who have been enrolled at Carleton on a full-time basis for a full academic year (or 9 months) prior to completion of your studies or graduation may be eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is an extension of F-1 student status and provides temporary employment related your academic major(s). Although OPT can be utilized during your studies (referred to as pre-completion OPT), most students elect to use this employment authorization after they graduate or post-completion OPT. If doing pre-completion OPT, you must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment (unless done during school breaks).

OPT allows you to work in a position related to your major(s) for up to 12 months, but has to be completed within 14 months of program completion. You must work at least 20 hours a week part-time but no more than 40 hours a week full-time. If you previously used *full-time* CPT (Curricular Practical Training) for more than one year, you are ineligible for OPT. You may be eligible 12 months of OPT for each subsequent higher level degree completed, and you may attend school part-time during OPT.

To qualify for OPT you must maintain lawful F-1 status (full course of study, good academic standing, etc.) for an entire academic year before you apply. Unlike CPT, you do not need a job offer in order to apply. If your employer has agreed to sponsor your H-1B visa, you still need to apply for OPT as H-1B visas are not valid until Oct 1.

You should file for post-completion OPT no more than 90 days before your program end-date or graduation date and no later than 60 days after. If you will graduate early in the Fall or Winter Term, your program end date is the last day of exams, otherwise it is the date of graduation for Spring Term. You must also submit the new, signed I-20 with your OPT application within 30 days of its issuance. Unless you are enrolled to begin graduate school in the subsequent term (or within 5 months, whichever is earlier) you must return home before the 60-day grace period ends.

It may take 3-4 months (or more) to process an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), the OPT employment card. You cannot start work until your EAD is issued. **You are strongly advised to apply for your OPT before you graduate and to remain in the U.S. while your application is pending.**

If you depart the U.S. after submitting your application but before OPT is granted or leave while you are unemployed and on OPT, you may face difficulties when you re-enter as Port of Entry Officers at airports and border crossings could refuse your entry. You should bring copies of documents that demonstrate you are actively seeking employment, your EAD application receipt notice (Form I-797) and/or written job offer. If you travel while on OPT, you should also bring a letter confirming your employment. When you travel you should have a valid passport (valid for at least 6 months into the future), current visa (you can apply for a new visa during OPT but it may be difficult to prove ties to your home country), and an I-20 with a valid travel signature (signed within the last 6 months). While under F-1 status and OPT, never enter the U.S. under any other visa, including tourist, as it will invalidate your OPT application or/and EAD card.

During OPT, you should not be unemployed for more than 90 days or you will be out of status and must leave the U.S. immediately (there is no grace period). You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern related to your studies with a minimum of 20 hours a week to meet the employment requirement. You may be employed with more than one employer or volunteer organization at a time but total employment should not exceed 40 hours and all employment must relate to your studies. You may have a series of part or full-time positions (or “gigs” as an artist/performer). You may be self-employed but you should provide proof of your business registration, your active involvement in it, and how it is related to your studies. *At all times you should maintain documentation of your employment, e.g., position held/job title, proof of the duration of that position, contact information for your supervisor or manager and a description of the work.*

To maintain your F-1 status and work authorization during OPT, you must report within 10 days to Carleton the following changes:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address in U.S. and home country
- Employer name and/or address (for all employers)
- Any periods of unemployment
- Change in nonimmigrant status, e.g., change from F-1 to H1-B, attendance at another (graduate) school, etc.
- Departure from U.S.

OPT Suggested Timeline

<i>(For example only, your actual dates may be different than illustrated.)</i>	
90 days Before	Apply for OPT – You can apply no more than 90 days before program end date.
Program End or Graduation Date	
60 days After	<p>You have a 60-day grace period during which time you should do one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to depart the U.S. within 60 days – NO WORK or STUDY • Apply for OPT if you have not • If accepted to graduate program, have your SEVIS record transferred – releasing SEVIS record to a new school cancels OPT/EAD on the release date. • Change status to another nonimmigrant status if eligible
12 months	<p>Maximum length of your OPT & during OPT keep these numbers in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 days – maximum unemployment length (120 days maximum with STEM extension) • 10 days – MUST REPORT to the office within 10 days any of these changes: legal name, any address change, employer name, employer address and/or unemployment • 90 days before end of 12-month OPT – apply for STEM extension if you are eligible.
60-day grace period (see above)	
<i>3 Months before POST OPT expires</i>	<i>If you qualify, apply for 24-month STEM extension 90 days before the initial 12-month OPT expires.</i>
<p>60 days After STEM Extension OPT Everything above except cannot apply for another OPT.</p>	

F-1 Student Non-STEM OPT Application Checklist

Please complete as much of this checklist before your appointment with Liz and bring any questions with you.

Step	Action	Completed		
1.	Complete Carleton OPT Application Sheet – Decide on your OPT start and end dates (within 60 days of program end date or graduation).			
2.	<p>Complete Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, and photocopy. Available from www.uscis.gov under FORMS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will not forward mail, you are encouraged to list the office as your mailing address in Question 3: • c/o Liz Cody, OIIL, One N College St, Northfield, MN 55057. • Office will make a copy of your OPT employment documents and send it to you. You may list another U.S. address but that should be valid for 4+ months and you need to send the office a copy of your employment card once it is issued. • In Question 16, enter the correct Eligibility Code: • (c) (3) (A) – Pre-completion OPT; • (c) (3) (B) – Post-completion OPT; • (c) (3) (C) – 24-month STEM extension. 			
3.	<p>Gather all documents and supporting material to submit with your Form I-765. Make three (3) copies of everything except photos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$410 fee (check or Money Order payable to U.S. Dept of Homeland Security) – confirm current cost on I-765 application. The fee is expected to increase to \$550 at some point. • 2 recent identical photographs (see instructions on the Form I-765 under Required Documentation) – You can do this at Walgreens for an estimated \$12. Write your name, SEVIS ID, Date of Birth, and I-94 number on back in pencil or lightly with a pen. • Most Recent I-94 record • Valid passport (should have more than 6 months validity remaining) – photocopy of photo page, renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc. • Visa (if applicable) – photocopy of visa page • Photocopies of all I-20s you have been issued (pages 1 & 2, instruction pages not needed) • Photocopies of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (if applicable) 			
4.	Schedule an appointment with Liz to review your application and obtain your new I-20 (new I-20 must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of its issuance).			
5.	<p>File Form I-765, new I-20 supporting documents listed in Step 4 & 5 with the appropriate USCIS Service Center. Do not file electronically.</p> <p>When filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, you may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying that your application has been accepted. You must complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145), and attach it to the first page of your application. See www.uscis.gov and Forms section. If you will apply from a state other than MN, please ask Liz for mailing address.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680 </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517 </td> </tr> </table>	<u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680	<u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517	
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6.	<p>A Receipt Notice Form I-797 (send office a copy) should be received 2-3 weeks after submission of your OPT application. Use the 13-character receipt number, which starts with 3 letters such as LIN, to check your application status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do. If after 90 days you do not hear anything from USCIS, contact Liz.</p>			

You can only extend OPT under the following situations:

- 1) “H-1B Cap Gap Extension” if your employer has applied for H-1B visa and requests a change of status as part of the application, your employment is extended until Oct 1 when that visa starts. You should send Carleton a copy of your H-1B receipt or approval notice by fax or email to verify you qualify for the “Cap Gap Extension”. If your H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or revoked, employment and F-1 status ends. You have 60 days to prepare for departure, change degree level, transfer, change status, etc.
- 2) If you are a student who has received a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM), that appears on the STEM designated Degree Program List published on the SEVP website, <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>, you may be eligible for a one (1) time 24-month extension of your OPT. You must submit a copy of your transcript reflecting your major field of study. **Carleton majors that currently qualify for STEM Extension:**

Major Code	Major Description	CIP Code	CIP Description
BIOL	Biology	26.0101	Biology/ Biological Sciences, General
CHEM	Chemistry	40.0501	Chemistry, General
COGSC	Cognitive Science	30.2501	Cognitive Science
CS	Computer Science	11.0701	Computer Science
ECON	Economics	45.0603	Econometrics and Quantitative Economics
ENST	Environmental Studies	3.0103	Environmental Studies
GEOL	Geology	40.0601	Geology/Earth Science, General
MATH	Mathematics	27.0101	Mathematics, General
PHYS	Physics and Astronomy	40.0801	Physics, General
PSYC	Psychology	42.2799	Research and Experimental Psychology, Other
STAT	Statistics	27.0501	Statistics, General

In addition, the employer with whom you are seeking the 24-month OPT extension must be registered in E-Verify. Accordingly, you must list the employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in Item 17 of the Form I-765. Please refer to the Form I-765 instructions for Foreign Students, and Carleton’s Extensions of OPT for further information.

STEM Extension Requirements:

- 1) You must submit STEM extension application within 90 days of the first 12-month OPT period end date, but before OPT expires;
- 2) You should not travel while your STEM extension is being adjudicated or decided upon;

- 3) You cannot be unemployed more than 120 days (including the 90 days from the first 12-month period) during the 24-month period;
- 4) You must submit updated personal address and employment information every 6 months;
- 5) Employment during the 24 month STEM extension MUST BE PAID and all employers must be E-Verify participant;
- 6) Post-Completion OPT employment continues until a decision is made on your STEM extension application or for 180 days, whichever comes first;
- 7) Employer needs to report within 48 hours to Carleton or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) if your employment has been terminated or you departed before the end of the STEM extension period.