

MISSOURI VALLEY UNIVERSITY

INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Optional Practical Training

Student Guide

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1. Understanding OPT

What is OPT?

OPT is a temporary work authorization for eligible F-1 students after they complete their degree.

- OPT allows you to work in the United States in a job related to your major or degree program.
- You can receive up to 12 months of OPT after completing your degree.
- You must apply for OPT through USCIS and receive approval before you can begin working.
- If your application is approved, USCIS will send you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), also called a work permit.
- Your EAD shows the dates you are allowed to work.
- OPT does not give you a new visa or immigration status. You remain in F-1 status while participating in OPT.

Can I Apply?

You may be eligible for OPT if you:

- Are currently maintaining valid F-1 status.
- Have completed at least one full academic year of full-time study.
- Are completing your degree program.
- Have not used 12 months or more of full-time CPT at your current degree level.
- Have not already used 12 months of OPT at the same degree level.

When Can You Apply?

You can apply for OPT **up to 90 days before** your program end date and **no later than 30 days after** your program end date. USCIS will not accept applications submitted outside of this time period.

Term / Semester	Program End Date	Earliest Date	Lastest Date
FALL 2026	December 11, 2026	September 14, 2026	January 08, 2027
SPRING 2027	May 7, 2027	February 8, 2027	June 05, 2027
SUMMER GRADUATES	Varies	90 days before Program End Date	30 days after Program End Date

**See the next page to see details

Important Details:

- **Program End Date:** The last day of classes for your final semester.
- **Earliest Date You Can Apply:** The first day USCIS will accept your OPT application (90 days before your program ends).
- **Latest Date You Can Apply:** The last day USCIS will accept your OPT application (30 days after your program ends).

- **Summer graduates:** Please contact the International Office to confirm your OPT application window. The same rule applies — you may apply 90 days before your program end date and up to 30 days after.
- Check your most recent Form I-20 to confirm your program end date.
- Applying **too early** or too late will result in your OPT application being denied by USCIS.

How Much Does OPT Cost?

- The current OPT application fee is **$470** (subject to change by USCIS).
- The OPT application fee is paid online through USCIS, not Missouri Valley University.
- Students are responsible for paying the USCIS filing fee during the application process.

How Long Does OPT Approval Take?

After USCIS receives your OPT application, the approval process usually takes **3 to 5 months.**

Important: Apply as early as possible during your OPT application window. Waiting too long may delay your ability to start working after graduation.

What is the OPT Start Date?

Your OPT start date **is the first day your work authorization begins.**

- You must choose a date within the **30-day grace period** after your program end date on your Form I-20.
- Example: If your program ends on May 7, your OPT start date can be between May 8 and June 6.

CONSIDER

- Choose a date that gives you enough time for USCIS processing and job searching.
- If you have a job offer, choose a start date that matches your employer's expected start date.
- Your OPT start date cannot be changed after USCIS approval.

Important: Contact the International Office if you need help choosing your OPT start date.

USCIS Biometrics Appointment

After you submit your OPT application online, you will be required to complete a biometrics appointment with USCIS. This appointment allows USCIS to collect your fingerprints, photo, and identity information to process your application.

- USCIS will send you an appointment notice within 30 days after submitting your application.
- The notice will include the date, time, and location of your appointment.
- You must attend the appointment at the USCIS location listed on your notice (usually Kansas City or St. Louis).
- Bring the documents listed on your notice.

Important: Attending your biometrics appointment is mandatory. Missing your appointment may delay or affect your OPT application.

Important Change: F-1 Admission and Extension of Stay

Starting September 15, 2026, F-1 students entering the U.S. may receive a specific "Admit Until Date" on their I-94 instead of "Duration of Status (D/S)."

D/S vs. Admit Until Date

Your I-94 tells you how long you can stay in the United States.

- D/S (Duration of Status): Your stay is generally tied to your F-1 status, so there is no date.
- Admit Until Date: Your I-94 will show an Admit Until Date, which includes your program end date and the 30-day grace period. This date represents the last day you are authorized to remain in the United States. You must depart the United States or take appropriate action to maintain your status by this date.

Example:

- I-94 says D/S → Your stay is based on maintaining your F-1 status.
- I-94 says June 10, 2027 → Your authorized stay ends on June 10, 2027, unless you receive an approved extension.

Important: Always check your I-94 after entering the U.S.

Before You Apply for OPT

Before applying for OPT, check your current I-94 and make sure your authorized stay covers the time you will need to complete your OPT.

1. Check your I-94: Visit the CBP I-94 website and check your "Admit Until Date."
2. Check your dates: Compare your I-94 date with your program end date and the period you expect to be on OPT. If you have an expiration date that would interfere with your year of OPT, you may need to request an Extension of Stay (EOS) through USCIS.

What Is an Extension of Stay?

An Extension of Stay (EOS) is a request to USCIS for additional time to remain in the United States in your current F-1 status.

Do not wait until your I-94 expires. Contact the International Office as soon as possible if your I-94 does not cover the time you need.

Learn More

For more information, visit the DHS Study in the States – Fixed Period of Admission and Extension of Stay.

Premium Processing Option

USCIS offers an optional **premium processing service** for students who want faster processing.

- Additional cost: approximately **$1,780** (subject to change by USCIS).
- USCIS provides a response within **30 business days** after receiving the premium processing request.
- Premium processing does **not guarantee OPT approval**.

Important: Premium processing is optional. Students can apply using regular processing.

2.How to Apply for OPT

01 Read the OPT Student Guide

Before you begin your OPT application, carefully read this OPT Student Guide. It explains the OPT application process, important deadlines, your responsibilities, and the rules you must follow to maintain your F-1 status while on OPT.

- Read this entire guide before applying to OPT.
- As an F-1 student, you are responsible for understanding and following all OPT requirements and deadlines.
- The International Office is here to guide and support you, but you are responsible for maintaining your F-1 status while on OPT.
- In Step 3, you will sign an OPT Acknowledgment Form confirming that you have read and understood this guide.

02 Complete the OPT Graduation Audit Form

This step verifies that you are on track to graduate during your final semester, which is required before you can submit your OPT request. To confirm your eligibility, you must complete the OPT Graduation Audit Form. The form consists of two sections:

- **Section 1:** Complete and sign this section yourself.
- **Section 2**: Take the form to the **Registrar's Office**. A representative will review your graduation status, complete and sign this section, and return the signed form to our office. This confirms that you are on track to graduate.

You are responsible for coordinating with the Registrar's Office to complete and obtain the signature for Section 2.

03 Request Your New I-20 With the OPT Recommendation

After submitting the completed OPT Graduation Audit Form, you can request an updated Form I-20 that includes the OPT recommendation.

To start this process, complete the OPT I-20 Request Form provided by the International Office. This form collects:

- Your personal and academic information
- The type of OPT you are applying for.
- Your requested OPT work start and end dates
- Your expected graduation date
    -

IMPORTANT

The form also includes an acknowledgment section where you confirm that you have read the OPT Guide and understand your responsibilities during OPT. You must complete and sign this form before the International Office can issue your new I-20.

Once the form is complete, scan it as a PDF and email it to David Alvarenga at dea0306@moval.edu

04 Prepare and Review Your Documents

Before you apply for OPT, gather the documents you will need for your application.

If This Is Your First OPT Application
You will need:

- Passport(s) and F-1 visa(s)
- One passport-style photo (ensure they meet photo requirements)
- All I-20s with CPT authorizations (if applicable)
- Most recent I-94 (Use your passport to get your most recent I-94)

If You Have Applied for OPT Before:
Also bring copies of:

- All previous EAD (Employment Authorization Document) cards (front and back).
- Any Form I-20s with previous OPT or STEM OPT recommendations.
- Any USCIS I-797 Approval Notices for OPT or STEM OPT.

Important: The International Office will email you when your new OPT I-20 is ready. After you receive that email, schedule an appointment with the International Office. During your appointment, we will:

- Review your OPT documents.
- Have you sign your new OPT I-20.
- Scan the documents needed for your OPT application.

05 Submit Your OPT Application

After your meeting, the International Office will email you **step-by-step instructions** on how to submit your OPT application online through your **USCIS account**.

Once you submit your application, email the International Office to let us know. This helps us keep track of your application and send you important updates and reminders throughout your OPT period.

IMPORTANT

- **You must submit your OPT application to USCIS within 30 days of the date your OPT I-20 was issued.**
- **If you submit your application after 30 days, USCIS may deny your OPT application.**

3.OPT Pending Period

After you submit your OPT application to USCIS, your application will be reviewed. This time is called the OPT pending period. USCIS processing times can vary and may take several months.

During this time, your OPT has not yet been approved, and you cannot begin working until you receive your EAD card and your OPT start date has arrived.

What You Can Do?

- Remain in the U.S. as long as you maintain your F-1 status.
- Travel within the U.S.
- Track your application status online using your USCIS receipt number at USCIS Case Status.
- Prepare for employment by updating your resume, searching for jobs related to your major, and practicing interviews.

What You Cannot Do

Do not begin work until:

- USCIS approves your OPT.
- You receive your EAD card.
- Your OPT start date has arrived.

Do not continue on-campus employment after your program end date unless your employment is separately authorized.

USCIS Premium Processing Option

USCIS offers an optional premium processing service for OPT applications.

- Students may pay an additional USCIS fee (approximately $1,780) for faster processing.
- USCIS will respond within 30 business days after receiving the premium processing request.
- Premium processing does not guarantee approval.

IMPORTANT

Premium processing is optional. Students can choose regular processing instead.

Understanding Your USCIS Receipt Notice

After submitting your OPT application, USCIS will send you a **receipt notice (Form I-797)** confirming that your application was received.
Your receipt notice includes important information:

- **Receipt Number:** A number you can use to check your OPT application status online.
- **Received Date:** The date USCIS officially received your application.
- **Case Type:** Confirms the type of application submitted.

Important: If your application is pending for more than 90 days from the receipt date, you may submit a case inquiry here: USCIS e-Request.

Checking Your OPT Application Status

You can check your OPT application status online using your USCIS receipt number.

While Your Application is Pending:

- Check your case status regularly.
- Save any USCIS updates or notices you receive.
- Contact the International Office if you receive a request for additional information from USCIS.

Once your OPT is approved:

USCIS will mail your:

- Approval Notice (Form I-797).
- EAD card (Employment Authorization Document).

Travel Considerations:

- International travel while your OPT is pending is not recommended due to re-entry risks.
- Without your EAD card and a job offer, you may be denied re-entry to the U.S.
- The safest option is to remain in the U.S. until you have both your EAD card and a job offer.

Your Responsabilities While OPT is Pending

While your OPT application is being reviewed by USCIS, you must continue to follow F-1 rules and stay connected with the International Office.

1.Update Your Adress

If you move while your OPT application is pending:

- Notify the International Office immediately.
- Make sure your address information is updated so you can receive important USCIS notices and your EAD card.

2.Respond to USCIS Requests

If USCIS sends you a Request for Evidence (RFE):

- Contact the International Office immediately.
- Do not ignore USCIS requests, as missing deadlines may delay or affect your application.

3.Travel During the Pending Period

- International travel while your OPT application is pending is not recommended because it may create risks when returning to the U.S.
- Before traveling internationally, contact the International Office to discuss your situation and required documents.

Your Responsabilities While OPT is Pending

While your OPT application is being reviewed by USCIS, you must continue to follow F-1 rules and stay connected with the International Office.

4.Maintain Your F-1 Status

While your OPT is pending:

- Continue following all F-1 regulations.
- Do not work without authorization.
- Complete any remaining academic requirements if your program has not ended.

5.Contact the International Office

- The International Office is here to support you throughout the OPT process.
- Contact us if you have questions about:
  - Your OPT application.
  - USCIS notices.
  - Travel plans.
  - Maintaining your F-1 status.

6.Remember:

- You are responsible for following OPT rules and deadlines, but the International Office is available to guide you through the process.

4.OPT Approval Period

Once your OPT is approved by USCIS, you must take a few important steps to stay in compliance and maintain your F-1 status. This includes receiving your EAD card, setting up your SEVP Portal account, and updating your employment and contact information.

Step 1: Wait for your EAD Card

- You will receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by mail.
- Your EAD will list the work start and end dates of your authorized employment.
- You cannot begin working until you have both received your EAD card and reached the work start date listed on the card.
- All employment must be directly related to your major and take place within the dates shown on your EAD.

Step 2: Create and Use the SEVP Portal

Once your OPT is approved by USCIS, you will receive an email from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) with a personal link to create your SEVP Portal Account.

- This email comes from: do-not reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov
- Check your Spam, Junk, or Trash folders if you do not see the message.
- The email includes a personal link to create your portal account — this link expires in 14 days, so be sure to open it and create your account.
- If the link expires before you activate it, contact the International Office right away so we can help reset it.

You are required to use the SEVP Portal to:

- Report your job and employer information.
- Update your employment information within 10 days of starting or changing a job.
- Report any periods of unemployment.
- Do not delete previous employer records when updating your profile.

IMPORTANT

Trouble creatingyour SEVP Portal account? Complete the OPT Employment Information Form and email it as a PDF to both dea0306@moval.edu and farfany@moval.edu.

The International Office will use this form to update your employer information in SEVIS and issue your updated I-20.

Step 3: Keep Your SEVP Portal Information Up to Date

Once your OPT is approved, you must use the SEVP Portal to keep your information current. **Federal regulations require that you report any changes within 10 days.**

You are responsible for updating:

- Your U.S. residential address
- Your U.S. phone number
- Your personal email address
- Your employer's name and address
- Your job title
- The start and end dates of each job
- A brief explanation of how your job relates to your major
- Any periods of unemployment
- The date you leave the U.S. (if before your OPT end date)
- Any change in visa status (such as H-1B approval)

IMPORTANT

Keeping your SEVP Portal up to date is a legal requirement during your entire OPT period. Failing to report changes in your employment, address, or contact information within 10 days can result in termination of your F-1 status and loss of OPT benefits. Even if nothing changes, you are still responsible for checking that your information remains accurate in the SEVP Portal at all times.

REMINDERS

1.Unemployment Limit

- You are allowed a maximum of 90 days of unemployment during your 12-month OPT period.
- The SEVIS system tracks unemployment based on your portal updates.
- Exceeding 90 days will result in termination of your F-1 status and may lead to unlawful presence, which can impact future visa or immigration benefits.
- Unpaid work may count as employment if it is directly related to your field and meets labor law standards (e.g., internships or volunteer roles at nonprofit organizations).

2. Grace Period After OPT Ends

After OPT ends, you have a 30-day grace period. You may:

- Prepare to leave the U.S.
- Transfer to another school.
- Apply to change your immigration status.(If eligible)

You cannot work during the 30-day grace period.

3.Tax Requirements for OPT Students

Most OPT students are considered nonresident aliens for tax purposes and are exempt from Social Security and Medicare (FICA) taxes, and you are required to file Form 1040-NR for your U.S. income taxes.

For more detailed information, please click here.

Be sure to check with the Human Resources department at your employer to confirm that your taxes are being handled correctly.

5.OPT Employment Types

During your OPT period, you may work in various ways as long as the employment is directly related to your major field of study. Below are the types of jobs and work arrangements allowed under OPT, with examples of typical entry-level positions students often pursue:

01 MULTIPLE JOBS

You can work for several employers simultaneously, as long as each job relates to your field.
Example: A marketing graduate working part-time as a social media assistant and also as a content writer.

02 FREELANCE OR CONTRACT WORK

Independent contracting is allowed. Keep written contracts with details about the work and dates.
Example: An IT student freelancing as a junior web developer or providing tech support to small businesses.

03 SELF-EMPLOYMENT

You can start your own small business connected to your field. Ensure it is active and licensed if required.
Example: A graphic design student creating logos and promotional materials for local clients.

04 UNPAID INTERNSHIP OR VOLUNTEERING

Allowed if related to your major and compliant with labor laws. Keep records of your duties and hours.
Example: A public health student volunteering at a community clinic or assisting with health education programs.

KEEP RECORDS OF YOUR EMPLOYMENT

While on OPT, it is essential to keep detailed records of all your employment. These documents may be needed for future immigration benefits, visa applications, or when re-entering the U.S.
Examples of documents you should keep include:

- Offer letters
- Employment contracts
- Pay stubs or timesheets
- Letters confirming unpaid work or volunteer hours
- Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card (keep it even after it expires)

IMPORTANT

These examples are for illustration only and do not include every possible job related to your field. It is essential that your employment is directly connected to your major. If you're unsure whether a job qualifies, please contact the International Office for guidance.

6.OPT Travel Rules

Traveling internationally while on OPT requires careful planning to avoid problems when re-entering the United States. Your EAD card (Employment Authorization Document) is not valid for travel alone; you cannot use it by itself to return to the U.S. You must carry all the required documents to prove your F-1 status and OPT authorization.

Before traveling, it is important to know whether your OPT application is pending or approved, as this affects your ability to return. See the guidelines below for each situation:

Travel Rules After OPT Approval

If your OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, you may travel outside and return to the U.S. if you carry all of the following:

- **Valid Passport:** Must be valid at least six months beyond your return date.
- **Valid F-1 Visa:** Must have a valid F-1 visa stamp; renew if expired before travel.
- **OPT I-20:** Signed for travel by your International Advisor within the last 6 months.
- **EAD Card:** Proof of your OPT employment authorization.
- **Job Offer Letter (Strongly Recommended):** Shows your intent to work in your field during OPT.

Travel While OPT Is Pending

If your OPT application is still pending with USCIS, we strongly recommend not traveling internationally. Without your approved EAD, re-entry to the U.S. is risky and may be denied. Immigration officers may question your status since your OPT isn't confirmed yet.

Emergency Travel: In case you must travel due to an emergency, please contact the International Office first. You will need to carry:

- Valid Passport
- Valid F-1 Visa
- I-20 Signed for Travel within the last 6 months
- USCIS Receipt Notice (Form I-797): Proof that your OPT application is pending

Note: Even with these documents, re-entry is not guaranteed. Always check with the International Office before traveling.

Important Travel Reminders

- Do not re-enter the U.S. using a different visa status (such as a B-2 tourist visa) while on OPT. Doing so will cancel your F-1 status and automatically end your OPT authorization.
- Always carry your complete I-20, including both pages, when traveling. Page 1 confirms your program details, and Page 2 includes your OPT Information.
- Consult the International Office before making any international travel plans to ensure you have the proper documentation and avoid issues at the border.

7.STEM OPT Extension

If you completed a degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math) field and are currently on Post-Completion OPT, you may be eligible for a 24-month STEM OPT Extension, allowing you up to 36 months of total work authorization.

Who Qualifies?

- Your degree must be on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- You must be working for an E-Verify employer in a job related to your STEM major.
- You must apply before your current OPT ends.

Important Reminders

- The STEM OPT extension application must be submitted on time to avoid any gap in work eligibility.
- You can continue working for up to 180 days after your current OPT ends while your STEM extension is pending, as long as your application is submitted before the expiration date.

Need Help or Ready to Apply?

Contact Yesenia Farfan, Director of International Admissions, at farfany@moval.edu
She will guide you through the steps and provide you with the most up-to-date requirements and instructions for the STEM OPT Extension process.

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8.OPT KEY POINTS

Before applying for and while participating in OPT, remember:

OPT DURATION

OPT is temporary work authorization for F-1 students. You may work for up to 12 months after completing your degree.

JOB RELEVANCE

Your job must be related to your degree.

NO JOB OFFER REQUIRED

You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT.

WHEN YOU CAN START

You cannot work until your OPT is approved, you receive your EAD card, and the start date on your EAD has arrived.

UNEMPLOYMENT LIMIT

You may not have more than 90 days of unemployment during your 12-month OPT period.

REPORT CHANGES PROMPTLY

Report changes within 10 days, including employment, address, legal name, or immigration status changes.

KEEP RECORDS UPDATED

Keep your information updated in the SEVP Portal and with the International Office.

TRAVEL ON OPT

Travel carefully while on OPT. Carry your valid passport, F-1 visa, signed I-20, EAD card, and proof of employment when traveling internationally.

TRAVEL SIGNATURE

Your I-20 travel signature must generally be less than 6 months old when traveling while on OPT.

MANTAIN F-1 STATUS

OPT does not change your F-1 status or give you a new visa.

PLAN BEFORE CHANGES

If you plan to change your immigration status, start another program, or continue working after OPT, contact the International Office before taking action.

REMEMBER!

OPT = F-1 STATUS + TEMPORARY WORK AUTHORIZATION + CONTINUED F-1 REQUIREMENTS

If you are unsure about your OPT, employment, travel, or immigration status, contact the International Office before making a decision.

Contact Us



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