



MAINTAINING YOUR STUDENT STATUS

A student holding an F-1 visa is defined by U.S. immigration law as:

An alien having a residence in a foreign country which he has no intention of abandoning, who is a bona fide (legitimate) student qualified to pursue a full course of study and who seeks to enter the U.S. temporarily and solely for the purpose of pursuing such a course of study.

It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to maintain your legal right to remain in the U.S. This means:

- Have a valid passport and appropriate visa at all times
- Report any changes of address (including email and phone number) to Enrollment services within ten (10) days of moving. We will inform the SEVIS system of the change of address as is required by Federal Regulations.
- Attend only the school indicated on your I-20.
- Pursue a full course of study.
- Maintain full-time registration each semester until graduation or transfer to a new school.
- Make normal progress toward an education objective. For ESL students, this means a completion certificate, for BA and MBA students, this means completion of all degree requirements.

If appropriate:

- File a timely extension
- File a timely transfer
- File a timely change of status

Adhere to all INS regulations relating to employment – Limit employment to twenty (20) hours per week, when school is in session.

No off-campus employment without PRIOR authorization

Follow Federal regulatory procedure:

- Moving from one educational level to another (e.g. ESL to BA or BA to MBA)
- Transferring from one school to another

Filing a timely application for program extension.

Depart from the USA in a timely manner after completion of studies. (60 days)



OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) FOR F-1 STUDENTS

When can you apply for Optional Practical Training?

Immigration regulations require that students be enrolled full time every semester. The only exceptions are (1) If a student is already on OPT before the beginning of the semester or (2) if a student has been pre-approved for reduced enrollment in his/her final semester (less than 9 hours)

Students who have been in F-1 status for at least 9 months (two academic semesters) are eligible for optional practical training (OPT), which is a temporary employment authorization in their major field of study for purposes of gaining practical experience. Students may receive twelve (12) months of practical training for each higher academic level (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate)

Students may apply for authorization for OPT directly related to their major area of study in the following cases:

- Pre-completion OPT during summer vacation. Students must intend to register for the next semester. It is advisable to have a job offer at the time of application in this case. The job can be full or part time. Apply 90 days before you wish to begin work.
- Pre-completion OPT which school is in session. Must maintain full time enrollment. Practical training must not exceed twenty (20) hours a week. Should have a job offer before applying, and cannot hold any on-campus positions simultaneously. Apply 120 days before you wish to begin work
- Pre-completion OPT after completion of all course requirements except thesis or dissertation, or final project requirements for non-theses students, OPT is authorized to be worked before the student's program end. Should have a job offer before applying. Apply 120 days before you wish to begin work.
 - If degree requirements will not be completed before the program end date on the I-20, must request an extension of program.
 - If less than 12 month allotment of OPT is used, must apply for remaining OPT time. Requires new OPT application and fee.
 - Students cannot enroll full time during this employment period; the maximum enrollment allowed is six (6) hours.
 - If students are not enrolled at all during this OPT period, a Leave of Absence from, should be filed with the Enrollment office for academic purposes.
- Post-completion OPT after program end date

- Apply no more than 90 days before the completion of the program, but no later than 60 days after program completion.
- OPT must begin within 60 days of program completion, even if you apply during the 60 day grace period.
- Students carrying 3 or more course work hours may NOT begin OPT before the end for the semester.
- Students on assistantship and any other students enrolled for full time hours, including research hours, cannot begin OPT before the end of the semester or the end of their assistantship contract, whichever date is later.

Extensions of OPT may be filed for the following:

- Cap gap extension if you have been approved for H1b during post-completion OPT but you will have a gap between when your OPT ends and when the H1b status begins.
- 17 month STEM extension if you graduated with a degree in science, technology engineering, or math, and meet USCIS requirements while on post-completion OPT. ONE extension is permitted, whether at the bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level. Once used, there is no other STEM extension available.

Upon completion of all required forms, the Coordinator will review the application. A new SEVIS I-20 will be issued indicating the recommendation by the Coordinator for OPT.



Checklist for OPT application:

1. I-765 (completed in blue ink and signed by the student)
2. SEVIS I-20 form bearing an OPT recommendation by the DSO. You must also bring in all previous issued I-20 forms and have them copied at the time you submit your application for review.
3. Passport and I-94 card (these will be copied and immediately returned to you at the time you submit your application)
4. Payment of either a certified funds or money order made payable to "Department of Homeland Security". Fee: \$340
5. Two (2) color (passport size) photos



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS and ANSWERS **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

What are immigration requirements for enrollment if I am near the end of my degree program?

- International graduate students are required to maintain full time hours with few exceptions. One exception is if you are in your final semester, and need less than full time hours to complete your Plan of Study and you are NOT on assistantship. If this is your situation, you must complete a Request for Reduced Enrollment Form, have an advisor sign it stating that you will finish degree requirements by the end of the semester, and submit it to us BEFORE the beginning of your final semester. If approved, you will be allowed to enroll for either Defending Student Status (DSS), or 3 credit hours, or the number of hours required to complete your Plan of Study (if more than 3 hours).

“Date admitted to the U.S.”, Is this the last time?

- This is the last time when you were inspected and admitted to the U.S. A stamp in your passport and on your I-94 card shows the last date and place of entry.

Can I change jobs during OPT?

- Yes, you can, as long as the job is related to your area of study. You must provide employment information to IGSS as soon as you are offered and accepted employment, and report any changes in employment within 10 days, using the Change of Address for SEVIS form.

What if I don't have a job when I apply for OPT, or lose my job while in OPT?

- Students on post-completion OPT may have up to a total of 90 days of unemployment during the 12 month OPT period. If you use the 90 days before your OPT period ends, your OPT will be terminated by USCIS.
- Students with an approved cap-gap extension are all subject to the 90 day period of unemployment.

- Students who receive a 17-month STEM extension are given an additional 30 days of unemployment for a total of 120 days over the entire post-completion OPT period.

What if I move after I submit the OPT application to USCIS?

- You will have to notify USCIS in writing of your change of address. Unfortunately documents from USCIS are not forwarded to a new address by the postal service but are returned to USCIS. If you know you will move within a few days or weeks after you submit your application, give a P.O. Box address or someone's address whom you trust where you will be able to receive correspondence and your OPT authorization from USCIS. Also remember that you are now obligated to report address changes and employment information to us, and in turn we update your information in SEVIS.

Can I split up my time on OPT?

- Maybe. If you want to do summer OPT or apply for OPT before the final project or thesis, then this is considered pre-completion OPT. You can use part of your 12-month maximum eligibility for pre-completion OPT, and then apply for any remaining time as post-completion OPT when you complete your degree requirements. Please come by the Admissions Office to discuss your plans with one of our Enrollment Coordinators.

What if I don't use all my OPT because I go back to school?

- Your OPT will be cancelled if you transfer to a new school (as of the transfer release date) or begin a new degree program at Colorado Heights University. (program start date on new I-20 form)

Can I go home just before I complete my degree?

- You should not travel outside the U.S. right before your graduation unless you already have an approved OPT and a job offer in your hand. If you leave the U.S. after you have applied for OPT but before receiving the authorization or before even applying for OPT, you may not be able to return to the U.S., and thus lose your practical training.

What if I want to travel during OPT. Do I need to get a travel signature from CHU?

- Yes, you do. You will have to bring your I-20 in to us for a travel endorsement.

Do I need to report my address changes to CHU and USCIS while I'm on OPT?

- Yes, you need to report to us if and when your address changes while you are on OPT.



TIPS FOR COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION (I-765)

General Instructions: You must complete all items (1-16 and #17, only if applying for 17 month extension for degree holders in a STEM field). Read, sign and date the certification section.

ITEM IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Applying for: Check “permission to accept employment” for your initial application, or “renewal”, if you are extending a previously approved OPT program.

1. **Name:** Enter your name as it appears on your I-20 form and passport.
2. **Other names used:** Include all the names here that appear in your passport but not on your I-20. List any names that you have used on official documents in the United States.
3. **Address:** Print clearly and be sure to include your complete address. USCIS will send all communication to this address, including your work authorization card. This address also determines where you must file the application.
- 4-8 Self-explanatory (for date of birth use month/day/year format)
- 9 **Social Security Number:** The number appearing on your social security card.
- 10 **Alien Registration Number (I-91 number):** Use the eleven digit identification number on your I-94 card (in the upper left corner of the card).
- 11 **Previous employment authorization from USCIS:** Check “yes” *ONLY* if you submitted an application directly to USCIS (for example: for optional practical training or internship with an international organization). Do not include on-campus employment or curricular practical training (co-op) or work authorization that was granted based on a different visa status.

- 12-15 **Last entry and current status:** Obtain this information from your current I-94.
- 16 **Employment eligibility section:** This is reference to the regulations permitting your employment.
- Write **(c) (3) (A)** for pre-completion OPT
 - Write **(c) (3) (B)** for post-completion OPT
 - Write **(c) (3) ©** for **17 month extension for STEM degrees**
- 17 If applying for the 17 month extension for degree-holders in a STEM field: This does not apply to CHU.

SIGN the form within the lines provided, NOT outside the lines.

COMPLETION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM, GRADUATION DATE

Your program completion date is the basis for determining the date you are eligible for full-time employment.