OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)—Frequently Asked Questions

When should I apply?
F-1 students may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before their program end date and up to 60 days after their program end date. We recommend applying 3 months prior to when you want to begin working to allow for processing delays. Graduate students who have completed all coursework and have only research credits remaining may apply at any time.

How long will it take for my application to be processed?
The average OPT application takes around 3 months to process; however, this is not a guarantee of processing time.

How can I track the progress of my application?
Once your application has been mailed, you will receive a receipt within 2-3 weeks. This receipt will indicate your receipt number. Once you have received your receipt, you can use your receipt number to check the status of your application online. Go to http://www.uscis.gov and follow the “Check your Case Status” link.

Will the EAD card be mailed directly to me?
Your EAD card will be delivered to the address that you enter on the I-765 application form. It is a good idea to make a copy of the card for your records. If you use the address for ISFS, the card will be mailed to us and we will notify you when it has arrived.

When can I begin working?
You may not begin working until you have received your EAD. Once you have your EAD, you may work during the dates printed on the card.

What if I will change residence after I apply for OPT and before I receive my EAD card?
If you plan to move before you receive the EAD card, you should contact USCIS immediately to notify them of your new address. You can change your address through the USCIS Case Status website or by calling the USCIS Customer Service number. You may also use the address for ISFS instead of your own address when filling out the I-765 form.

What are the limits on periods of unemployment?
Students on post-completion OPT may accrue up to 90 days of unemployment. 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. Students who receive a 24-month STEM OPT extension are given an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days over their
entire 36 month post-completion OPT period. The unemployment count does not start until the start date that is printed on the EAD card.

**How does travel outside the United States impact the period of unemployment?**
Any travel outside of the United States while unemployed (after the start date printed on the EAD) **will count** as unemployment against the 90/150-day limits. If a student travels while employed either during a period of paid vacation authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

**What details should students report to ensure that their status does not expire due to excessive unemployment time?**
Students are required to report changes in employment to isfs@ohio.edu within 10 days. Please complete the OPT Employment Update form for any change to your employment status.

**What is the effect on a student’s status if the student exceeds the period of unemployment?**
A student who has exceeded the period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT has violated their immigration status, unless they have taken one of the following actions prior to reaching the limit:
- Applied to continue his or her education by a change of level or transferring to another school
- Departed the United States
- Applied to change their immigration status
- Taken action to otherwise maintain legal status

**A student’s SEVIS record may be terminated if the unemployment limit is exceeded.**

**What should I do if I am currently working under “Curricular Practical Training” (CPT) and want to continue working with the same employer?**
It is essential that you apply for your OPT on time. Due to the unpredictable processing times for EAD cards, if you apply for OPT less than 3 months before your CPT ends, it is possible that you may have to interrupt your employment. If you have not received your EAD card at that time, you cannot continue your employment. Once you receive your EAD, show it to your employer and ask to have your personnel file updated to show your work eligibility is based on OPT.

**How does a transfer or change of level impact the period of OPT?**
The student’s authorization for OPT ends on the transfer release date. Authorization for OPT is not transferable. If the student wants to complete OPT, the transfer-out school must set the release date for a date after the OPT ends.