

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is work authorization available to international students who have been in valid F-1 status for at least two consecutive semesters and who plan to seek employment in the U.S. in their field of study. OPT is recommended by Advisors at Coppin International Office, but final approval is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

Application Deadline

The earliest you can apply for OPT is 90 days before your "completion date." The latest date the USCIS will accept your application is 60 days after your completion date. In addition, OPT applications must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of receiving an OPT I-20 from the Coppin International Office.

What is Your Completion Date?

For OPT purposes, this is the day you complete your final degree requirements:

Undergraduate Students-

Your completion date is considered to be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

Graduate Students

Your completion date is the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing your thesis or dissertation in the Graduate Division. If you do not have a research component to your degree program, your completion date would be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

Points to Remember

- One year of OPT is available after completing each higher level degree program.
- A job offer is not required to apply for OPT. However, once you find a **qualifying job**, you must notify Coppin International Office.
- **Unemployment** is allowed for no more than 90 days.
- The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.
No special permission is required to change employers or terminate your employment. However, you must notify Coppin International Office of your unemployment and/or new employer's information at <http://www.coppin.edu/ISS/>.
- During the period of OPT, a student continues in F-1 status, since OPT is considered to be part of the program of study.
- It can take the USCIS three to five months to issue the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) that allows you to begin working on OPT. There is no way to expedite an application.
- Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you have the EAD in your possession and your chosen start date has arrived.

- Once the OPT application is submitted to the USCIS, it is very difficult to change or cancel the application.
- OPT can only be extended beyond 12 months (for up to 17 additional months), if you meet the following three conditions:
 - Your OPT is based on a US Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral in a **STEM** major (Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics at the time of application for the extension.
 - Your employer subscribes to **E-Verify**.
 - You are currently authorized for OPT and working in a job related to your field of study
- OPT is available both before and after completing the degree program.

Application Instructions

Visit the Office of International Student Services for instructions.

17-Month Extensions of OPT

Students who have received a U.S. Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields are eligible for a one-time, 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months).

STEM EXTENSIONS

Students who have received a U.S. Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in certain **STEM majors** (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), are eligible for a one-time, 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months). To be eligible for the 17-month extension, the following conditions must be met:

- The student must have completed certain science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) degrees. If you have a double major, you will qualify if one of the degrees is a STEM major.
- The student must be authorized for OPT at the time of the extension application and working in a job or have a job offer related to his or her field of study.
- The extension must be based on the same degree as the post-completion OPT.
- At the time of application for the OPT extension, the student's employer (or prospective employer) must be registered with and participating in the USCIS' E-Verify employment verification program.
- The student must not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment in the initial 12-month period of OPT.

What is E-Verify?

E-Verify is an Internet based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. An employer's participation in E-Verify is voluntary and is currently free to employers. If your company wants to participate in E-Verify, visit the **DHS web site**.

When to Apply for the STEM Extension

The USCIS must receive your application before the expiration date of your EAD, but no earlier than 120 days before the expiration date. The USCIS recommends that students apply within 90 and 120 days of the expiration date of the current OPT. Timely applications will automatically extend the 12-month OPT work authorization up to 180 days until you receive the 17-month OPT Extension EAD.

Application Instructions

Visit the Office of International Student Services for instructions.