What is OPT?

Work experience in the U.S.* for a U.S. employer related to an F-1 student's major to provide practical training during or upon completion of a degree program

*OPT is required for working physically in the U.S. for a U.S. employer. Work can be hybrid or remote within the U.S. as long as there is a supervisory relationship with the U.S. employer. OPT cannot be used to work remotely in the U.S. for a non-U.S. employer. If you will be physically working outside the U.S., OPT is not required, even for U.S. employers.

What kind of work can I do with OPT?

Possible

- Paid, unpaid or volunteer positions

- Multiple employers

- Work for hire as contractor or consultant

- Self-employed business owner

- Agency or consulting firm

Not possible

- Work unrelated to your major

- Work for a non-U.S. employer

- On-campus employment through Student Employment unless enrolled in a higher level degree program at UR for the next available term

- Work for UR after graduation UNLESS the job is a faculty, staff or other professional position recruited through Human Resource Services

How long is OPT?

- **12 month maximum at each higher educational level for non-STEM majors**

    - **Cannot combine 12 month OPT periods**

    - **Can only apply once at each degree level. If you apply to use less than 12 months of OPT, you cannot apply again to use the remaining time.**

- **24-month extension for qualifying STEM majors**

When can I use OPT?

Pre-completion

- Must be used BEFORE graduation

- Job offer is REQUIRED

- Part-time during semester (20 hour per week maximum including on-campus employment); Full-time during official school breaks

- Time will be deducted from 12 month maximum (part-time is calculated at full-time equivalent, e.g. 6 months part-time=3 months full-time)

Post-completion

- Must be used AFTER graduation

- Job offer is NOT REQUIRED

- At least 20 hours per week or an average of 20 hours per week in 1-month for variable schedules

What is required for OPT?

- **Valid F-1 status** and good UR standing at time of application*

- **Physical presence in the U.S.***

- Full-time enrollment in any status that does not prohibit full-time study for at least 1 academic year by employment start date

- Not having been approved for 12 months of OPT at same degree level

- Not having used 12 months or more of full-time CPT

*The regulations state that to be eligible to apply for OPT, you must have valid F-1 status, which is only possible if you are physically in the U.S. It is only possible to apply from within the U.S.

What is not required for OPT?

- A job offer for post-completion (except for 24-month STEM extension)

- Approval by Center for Global Engagment (CGE) (USCIS approves OPT)

- Working in a particular U.S. location (work can be done anywhere in the U.S. for a U.S. employer)

What is the earliest date I can apply for OPT?

Pre-completion

- 90 days before completing 1st full academic year

- If you have completed 1st full academic year, 90 days before employment start date

Post-completion

- 90 days before graduation

- **Applications filed 91 or more days before graduation will be rejected** and you will have to re-apply with a new application form and fee

- Must apply separately for pre- and post- completion

What is the latest date I can request an OPT recommendation from CGE?

- **December 1** fall semester preferred deadline

- **May 1** spring semester preferred deadline

- Application must be **filed with USCIS within 30 days of OPT recommendation from CGE** and no later than the end of the 60 day grace period after your graduation

How do I choose my OPT start and end dates?
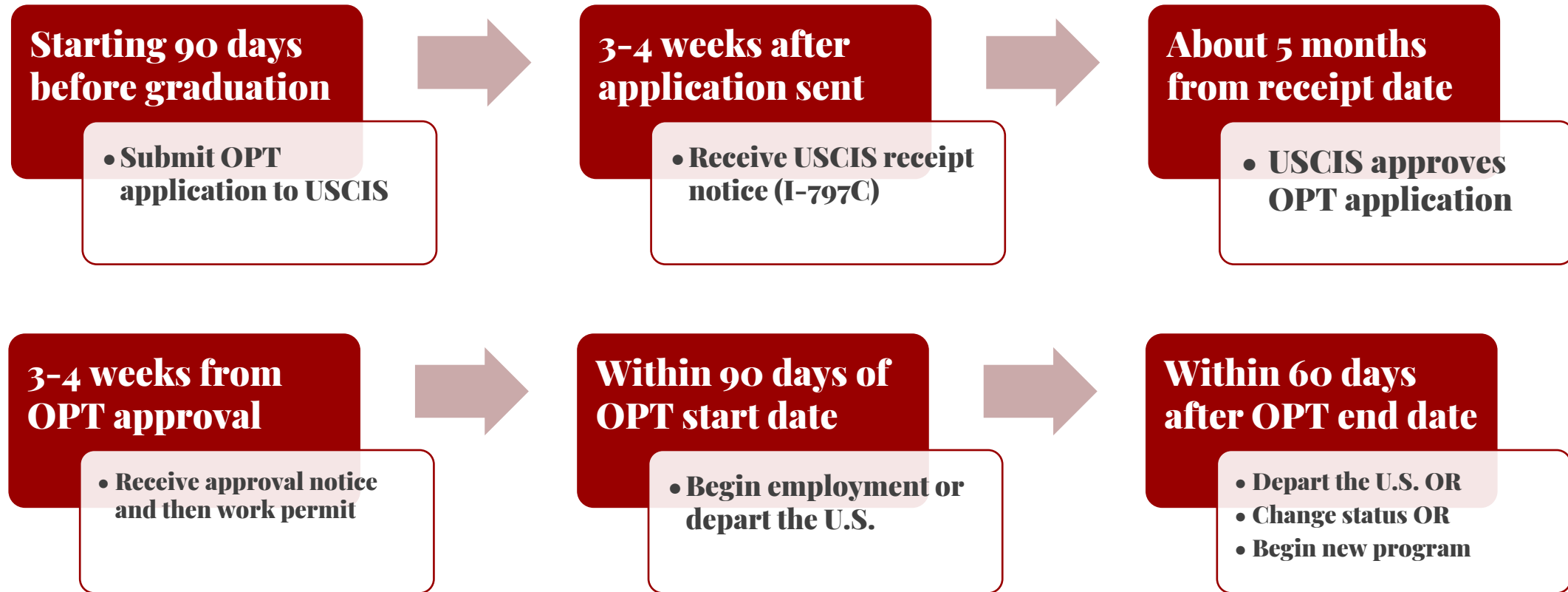
Pre-completion

- Known or estimated dates of employment

Post-completion

- Start date anytime from 1 to 60 days after graduation

- End date no more than 12 months from start date if you have not used pre-completion OPT

What is the timing of the OPT application and approval process?

Starting 90 days before graduation
- Submit OPT application to USCIS

3-4 weeks after application sent
- Receive USCIS receipt notice (I-797C)

About 5 months from receipt date
- USCIS approves OPT application

3-4 weeks from OPT approval
- Receive approval notice and then work permit

Within 90 days of OPT start date
- Begin employment or depart the U.S.

Within 60 days after OPT end date
- Depart the U.S. OR
- Change status OR
- Begin new program

When does my OPT start?

- Must be in physical possession of EAD (Employment Authorization Document)

- Cannot work until EAD start date

- Employment must begin and end during authorized period

When does my OPT end?

- On EAD end date UNLESS you have a pending H-1B petition, a 24-month STEM extension, or you have exceeded the 90 day unemployment limit

- If you transfer to another institution

- If you start a new degree program

- If you cancel your OPT (please consult CGE 1st) - **NO REFUND of USCIS fee!**

- If you do not graduate and your application is pending it must be withdrawn; if your application has already been approved, you can work part-time while completing your program and full-time upon program completion

- **60 day grace period after EAD end date** to change your visa, begin a new program, or depart the U.S.

24-month STEM extension

- Apply up to 90 days before OPT end date – application MUST be submitted within 60 days of STEM OPT recommendation date

- 180 day automatic work authorization extension while application is pending

- Two 24-month extensions can be used after each higher degree level; Cannot be combined; Can be based on previous STEM degree obtained within 10 years of application date

- Work at least 20 hours per week in paid position for each E-Verify employer; No volunteering or self-employment allowed

What the requirements of OPT?

- **Cannot exceed 90 calendar days of unemployment** (150 days for 24-month STEM extension); employment travel and periods of authorized leave do not count as unemployment

- Cannot work during gap between end of semester (pre-completion) or graduation (post-completion) and EAD start date

- 10-day reporting requirements through **SEVP Portal** for 12-month post-completion OPT

- Additional reporting requirements for 24-month STEM extension including self evaluations

What happens if I exceed the unemployment limit?

- Department of Homeland Security calculates unemployment time in SEVIS and will auto-terminate records exceeding unemployment limit

- Date of record termination equals loss of F-1 status immediately – **NO GRACE PERIOD!!**

- Violation of F-1 status by not departing the U.S. or applying to change or continue your status once unemployment limit is reached

- Status violations can result in future issues when applying for a U.S. visa, re-entering the U.S. or applying to change your status

- Report all periods of employment and volunteering

- Keep documentation of your work history (e.g. paystubs, employment contracts, experience letters for volunteer positions)

If I am in the U.S., what is my status during post-completion OPT?

- You are **still in F-1 status** while your application is pending and after it has been approved

- If you filed by the end of the 60 day grace period after graduation, **you can remain in the U.S.** while your application is pending but you cannot work

- **Part-time study is permitted** during pending and approved periods of OPT but you cannot begin a degree program

If I am in the U.S., can I travel abroad?

Pending application before graduation

- **Possible with or without a job if you re-enter the U.S. a few weeks before graduation**

- **I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for citizens of Canada & Bermuda)**

Pending application after graduation

- Possible with or without a job (but **risky**). Travel is **NOT** recommended near the time your EAD is supposed to be approved.

- I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, I-797C receipt, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for citizens of Canada & Bermuda)

- Job offer letter for confirmed employment or proof of job search for unconfirmed employment (e.g. interview invitation)

If I am in the U.S., can I travel abroad?

Approved application with EAD but no job

- Travel is **NOT** recommended

- I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, EAD, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for citizens of Canada & Bermuda)

- Proof of job search (e.g. interview invitation, job application submissions)

- Unemployed time abroad cannot be regained

Approved application with EAD and job

- Cannot enter the U.S. until EAD start date

- I-20 signed for travel every 6 months, passport, F-1 visa stamp (except for citizens of Canada & Bermuda), EAD, and contract letter (EAD alone is not valid for re-entry)

- Not permitted during pending H-1B applications

What happens if I leave the U.S. after graduation without applying for OPT?

- **Ineligible to apply for post-completion OPT**

- **May not be allowed to enter U.S.**

How do I apply for OPT?

- https://global.richmond.edu/international-students/stay/employment/index.html for all OPT application forms

- Attend a mandatory OPT workshop (times and dates will be sent via email)