

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING WORKSHOP

February 9, 2026

THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Today we will discuss:

- **What is OPT**
- **When to apply**
- **Items needed for OPT application**
- **How to apply**
- **Important considerations**
- **STEM Extension**
- **Questions**

WHAT IS OPT?

Defined as up to 12 months of *“temporary employment directly related to the student’s major area of study.”*

- It is a work authorization benefit to allow for a practical work experience in your field of study.
- You may apply for OPT once for each degree level.

Three types of OPT

Pre-completion OPT: before graduation

- Part-time employment during school year and full-time employment during school breaks.

Post-completion OPT: after graduation

- Must be employed at least 20 hours per week in the area of academic major

24 month STEM Extension OPT: after initial OPT

- Additional time available for students within approved Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programs

[/https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/stemList2024.pdf](https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/stemList2024.pdf)

Who is eligible?

F-1 students maintaining status

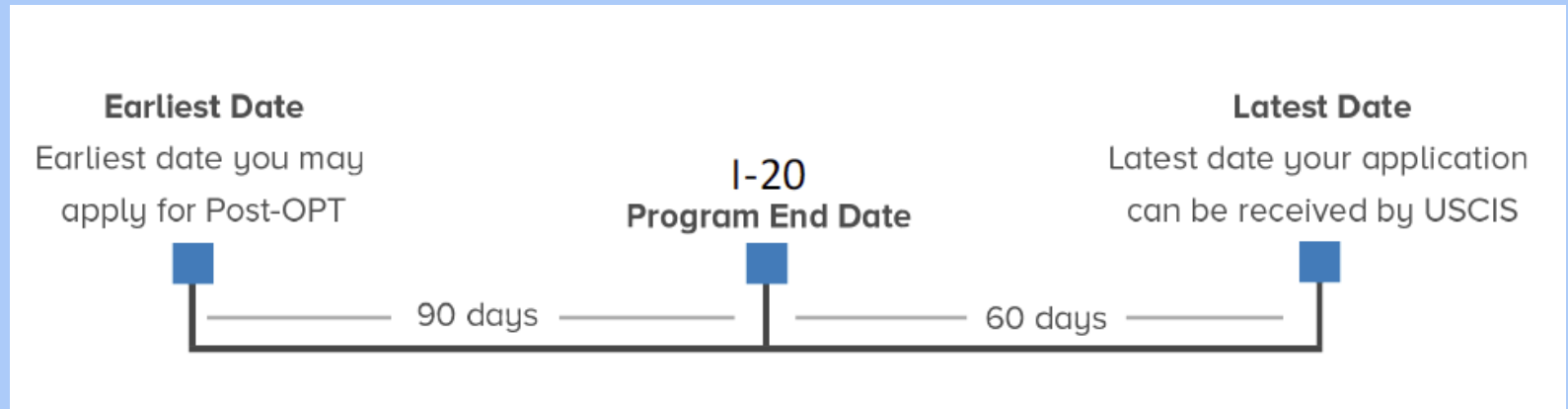
- Enrolled full time for at least one academic year
- Completing a course of study (post-completion)
- Have not used 12 months or more of full time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

What type of work qualifies for OPT?

- Any work in your field of study
- Can be paid or unpaid, as long as student gains direct benefits
- Regular paid employment or multiple short term employers qualify
- Self-employment qualifies
- Anywhere in the United States – but not outside of the US

Language Training students are not eligible for OPT.

When to apply? (Post Completion)



Program End Date: May 14, 2026

Earliest Date: February 13, 2026

Latest Date: July 13, 2026

- You can only work after receiving your work authorization card (EAD) from USCIS
- A job offer isn't required to apply for OPT
- USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of OPT recommendation being made within SEVIS

How do I apply?

1. Use Shya's email link to book an OPT appointment.
2. Apply online (www.uscis.gov/i-765) and upload all supporting documents, including filing fee within 30 days of OPT I-20 being issued.

Applications are processed typically within 90 days. If approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Card (EAD) in the mail at the address you provided on your application.

Items Needed to Apply

1. Completed form I-765 “Application for Employment Authorization” (www.uscis.gov/i-765)
2. Collect the following items:
 - *Digital passport style photo (should be recent)*
 - Updated USCIS Photo Policy (<https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/new-photo-policy-helps-prevent-immigration-fraud-through-enhanced-identity-verification>)
 - *I-20 with OPT request*
 - *Copy of passport biographical page*
 - *Copy of F-1 visa in passport*
 - *Copy of I-94 (available on www.cbp.gov)*
 - *Payment for filing fee. Current fee is \$470.*

Important Considerations

Processing times vary.

Premium Processing is available for an additional fee of \$1,685. This fee is in addition to the base I-765 fee and guarantees a **30-business-day** processing time for certain employment authorization applications.

****The premium processing fee will increase to \$1,780 on 3/1/2026.**

Report all OPT changes to CIE within 10 days:

- New employer
- Loss of employment
- Address changes

No more than 90 days of unemployment are allowed for Post Completion OPT. Records will be auto-terminated in SEVIS.

Travel

While application is pending:

- **Traveling before program completion:**
Must re-enter the US before the end date of your Form I-20 and you must present a valid visa and passport.
- **Traveling after program completion:**
NOT RECOMMENDED! Could result in denial of OPT application and/or inability to re-enter the US.

Travel

After application is approved:

- You may travel abroad once your OPT is approved as long as you already have a job. Re-entry to the US while on OPT requires:
 - *Valid F-1 visa*
 - *Valid Form I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2 and with a travel validation signature within the past 6 months.*
 - *EAD card*
 - *Employment documentation: letter from employer, copies of pay stubs, etc.*

60 Day Grace Period after OPT

You have a 60-day grace period from the end date of your OPT EAD card.

- **Work is not allowed during your grace period, but you can travel within the US and make preparations to go back home.**
- **If you travel abroad during your grace period, you cannot re-enter the US in your F-1 status.**

24 Month STEM Extension

- Employer must be registered in E-Verify system
 - *Contact your employer to find out if your workplace participates in E-Verify*
- Degree must be in a STEM field
 - *See CIP Code on page 1 of your I-20 and compare it to this list:*
<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/stemList2024.pdf>
- Must process the extension request with CIE
 - *STEM request must be submitted to CIE no earlier than 90 days*
 - *Must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration date printed on your EAD card.*
 - *Student must submit the I-983 TRAINING PLAN (<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf>) FOR STEM OPT STUDENTS before we can make the request in SEVIS.*

Employment during STEM Extension

- An additional 30 days of unemployment is given for STEM OPT. You are not permitted to have more than 120 days of unemployment during the entire 36 months of OPT.
- Same reporting requirements apply: change of employer, name, new address, change of status, etc.
- If you plan to change employers after STEM OPT is approved, you must submit an updated I-983 form to CIE and you are still to work for an E-Verify employer. Make sure you confirm before accepting a job offer.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Even though you may have graduated, you are still listed under Juniata's SEVIS account.
- You must keep in contact with the International Office to notify us of any address/employment changes within 10 days.

To apply:

Contact:

sme100@juniata.edu

Questions?