Optional Practical Training

Part 2: Initial 12 Months of OPT
Initial 12 Months of OPT

In this section, you will learn:

- The distinction between pre- & post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- How the IC determines your “completion date”
- Timeline for submitting your OPT application to the U.S. Immigration Service (USCIS)
- How to choose the date you wish to begin your OPT
Completion Date = the last day of the last month you are enrolled in credits required for your degree program.

- Winter = April 30
- Spring = June 30
- Spring/Summer = August 31
- Fall = December 31

- Professional schools (i.e. Law School) may have completion dates in May.
- PhD students have the option of using their defense date instead of the end of the term in which they defend. (defense must be before end of term)
Pre-Completion OPT
Employment begins and ends BEFORE the completion of your degree program

Three Types:

1. **During Annual Vacation** *(spring/summer)*
   - you must intend to register full-time for the following term
   - may be part- or full-time

2. **While School is in Session** *(fall & winter)*
   - *full-time* registration is **required** during that term
   - may be part-time **only**

3. **After Completion of All Course Requirements** *(excluding thesis/dissertation)*
   - If authorized for *part-time*, you must be registered *full-time*.
   - If authorized for *full-time*, full-time registration is *not* required
When can I apply?

- USCIS takes up to 90 days to process an OPT application - *Plan Accordingly!*

- One academic year **NOT** completed:
  - USCIS will not accept the application more than **90 days** before completing one full academic year.

- One academic year completed:
  - USCIS will not accept the application more than **90 days** before requested employment start date.

**Pre-Completion OPT**

Employment begins and ends **BEFORE** the completion of your degree program
Post-Completion OPT

Employment begins and ends AFTER the completion of your degree program

- Three types:
  - Initial 12 months
  - 17 month STEM extension
  - Cap-Gap extension

- Initial 12 months:
  - Job offer not required
  - Requested start date must be during 60 day grace period
  - No more than 90 days of unemployment allowed
  - Can apply:
    - No more than 90 days before your completion date
    - No more than 60 days after your completion date
### Post-Completion OPT Timeline

**Initial 12 Months**

- **Application Period:**
  - Apply up to 90 days before completion date
  - OPT application period
    - 90 days
    - 60 days
    - **OPT BEGINS**
      - Any day during 60 day grace period

- **Authorization Period:**
  - 12 months
  - 90 days
  - **Apply for STEM extension (if eligible)**
  - **OPT ENDS**

- **Extension, Transfer, Change of Status, or Leave U.S.:**
  - NO WORK unless authorized for extension or change of status
  - 60 days

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Division of Student Affairs

University of Michigan
Completion Date

OPT Application Period

Feb 1

March 1

Latest date USCIS can receive your application to allow full 90 days for processing

Latest date USCIS can receive your application to allow full 90 days for processing

OPT Begins

Completion Date

NO WORK (on or off campus)

Earliest date you can apply for OPT

April 30

June 1

June 29

End of 60 day grace period

Division of Student Affairs

University of Michigan
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

Feb 1
Earliest date you can apply for OPT

Latest date USCIS can receive your application to allow full 90 days for processing

Completion Date

April 30 / May 1

OPT Begins

June 29
End of 60 day grace period
Choosing a Start Date

- If your job starts **during 60 day grace period**, request job start date or earlier.
- If your job starts **after 60 day grace period**, request latest date possible *(59th day of grace period)*.
- If your job starts **before your completion date**, make an appointment with an IC advisor.
- **YOU** must choose a start date if you don’t already have a job offer.

**REMINDER:** If there is a gap between your completion date & OPT start date, you have **no** work authorization during the gap!
If you request an earlier date:
  - **PRO** - Your employer will be impressed that you can start your new job so quickly
  - **CON** - If you don’t find a job quickly, you may risk being unemployed for 90 days and would need to leave the U.S.

If you request a later date:
  - **PRO** - You have less of a chance to be unemployed for 90 days and be required to leave the U.S.
  - **CON** - A job offer could be rescinded if your employment start date is uncertain or too far in the future.
If you choose to send your application during your grace period to postpone your OPT start date as late as possible:

- **PRO** - Lots of time to find a job, 90 days of unemployment not as much of a worry
- **CON** - OPT start date will be uncertain
- **CON** - A job offer may be rescinded
- **CON** - Dates CANNOT be changed after OPT approved
- **CON** - You will not receive all 12 months of OPT
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

- Apply up to 90 days before completion date
- OPT application period
- USCIS Processing OPT Application
- OPT Authorization Period
- 9 months
- OPT ENDS June 29
- NO WORK unless authorized for extension or change of status
- 60 days
- extension, transfer, change of status, or leave U.S.

- Completion date April 30
- Application Received by USCIS June 29
- OPT Start Date October 1

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OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

Apply up to 90 days before completion date

NO Work Authorization
5 Months

OPT Authorization Period
9 months

OPT ENDS June 29

OPT Start Date October 1

Completion date April 30

extension, transfer, change of status, or leave U.S.

NO WORK unless authorized for extension or change of status

USCIS Processing OPT Application
Application Received by USCIS June 29

NO Work Authorization

60 days
At this point, you should know:

- Pre- or Post-completion OPT?
- How to figure out your completion date
- When you should request an OPT I-20
- When you should send your OPT application to USCIS
- How to determine your requested OPT start date