OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

OPT FACT SHEET

DEFINITION

- Optional Practical Training (OPT) is off-campus work authorization in a student’s field of study for 12 months after completion of the academic program.
- Students in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) may also be eligible for an additional 17-month extension for OPT.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Student must have been enrolled at Mercer University for at least one full academic year (9 months or 4 consecutive sessions) before applying for OPT.
- Student must be in valid F-1 status at the time of the application.
- Student must have no HOLDS on their academic or financial record.
- Student must NOT have been previously approved for OPT for the same or higher level.

HOW TO APPLY FOR OPT

- Complete the Mercer University OPT Application with your academic department.
- Meet with your International Student Advisor to review the following documents:
  - Completed Mercer University OPT Application
  - Original completed USCIS Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
  - Two U.S. passport-style photos with your I-94 number and full name printed lightly in pencil on the back
  - Personal check or U.S. money order for $410 payable to the Department of Homeland Security
  - Photocopy of Passport Biography Page (Can be made in OIP)
  - Photocopy of F-1 Visa (Can be made in OIP)
  - Photocopy of I-94 card (front and back) or print your electronic I-94 at: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html)
  - Photocopy of all I-20s since entry into the U.S. as an F-1 student. This includes all I-20s issued from other schools.
  - Photocopy of previous EAD/OPT cards (If applicable)
  - Photocopy of Change of Status I-797A Notice of Action (Approval Notice) if you changed status to F-1 (If applicable)
  - Job offer letter (Optional)
- International Student Advisor will issue a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation.
- Obtain a photocopy of all documents to be sent as part of your OPT application.
- Mail all application materials with the newly signed I-20 with OPT recommendation to USCIS.

WHEN TO APPLY & PROCESSING TIMES

Earliest: 90 days before completion of studies. Latest: 60 days after completion of studies. We recommend applying 90 days before completion to ensure timely processing. You DO NOT have to have a job to apply. USCIS processing of your application can take up to 90 days from receipt. USCIS will mail your application receipt in 2-3 weeks. If your EAD card does not arrive within 90 days, contact the Office of International Programs immediately.