

# OPT FAQ SHEET

## When should I apply?

- A student may submit their OPT application as early as 90 days before their program end date to USCIS and no later than 60 days after their program end date.
- If a student leaves the United States after their program end date before applying, they are not eligible to apply for OPT upon their return.

## What dates should I choose?

It is recommended that you choose an OPT start date 90-120 days from the application date. Please keep in mind that USCIS can take 90 days or longer to process your application. There is no guarantee you will receive approval by your requested OPT start date.

## When can I start working?

You may only start working upon two conditions:

1. You have received your EAD (OPT) card.
2. Your OPT start date has arrived.

## Can I work or volunteer while I wait for my OPT application to be processed?

Working or volunteering at a company is not allowed between the end of your program and your OPT start date. We recommend taking this time to job search or relax before your OPT begins.

## It has been 90-120 days since I submitted my OPT application to USCIS, what can I do?

If the normal processing time has been exceeded and you would like to check the status of your application, you may call the USCIS Customer Service phone number at 1-800-375-5283. Be sure to have your receipt number available when calling.

## Is there something UCI Division of Continuing Education can do to expedite my application?

UCI Division of Continuing Education has no influence as to whether your application is approved nor the speed at which a decision is rendered.

## My friend received their OPT approval but I'm still waiting, is there something wrong?

Please be mindful that each application is processed individually. So even though you and your friend may have applied at the same time, your applications will be processed separately and considered on their own merits. There is no reason for concern if you have not received approval before the normal processing time of 90 days.

## What counts as employment?

Your line of work must relate to the program you completed in your last quarter. USCIS counts employment as paid or volunteering 20 hours a week or more. Any work not related to your most recently completed program is a violation of your F-1 status.

## What happens if I do not find a job?

You are allowed 90 days of unemployment starting from your chosen OPT start date. Be sure to keep a tally of all your unemployment days as you will be required depart the United States immediately once you reach the 90<sup>th</sup> day. The 90 days of unemployment do not have to be consecutive to count.

## Can I travel during OPT?

Yes, travel is allowed during OPT. Since you are still considered a UCI Division of Continuing Education F-1 student, you must receive a signature on your I-20 before you travel.

## Can I purchase health insurance while on OPT?

If your employer does not offer health insurance under the company plan, you may purchase UCI Division of Continuing Education health insurance. The cost of our insurance is \$50.00 per week of coverage. If you would like to purchase health insurance please contact an international student advisor.

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## **What if I decide to end my OPT earlier than my end date and return home?**

If you decide that you would not like to continue with OPT and return to your home country you may do so. If you choose to return home permanently you **must** inform an International Student Advisor by emailing [ImmigrationOfficials@ce.uci.edu](mailto:ImmigrationOfficials@ce.uci.edu) that you intend to end your OPT so that we may update your government record accordingly.

## **Can I apply for a STEM Extension for my OPT?**

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) extensions are only available to international students who have graduated from a 4-year institution in the United States with a STEM related degree. UCI Division of Continuing Education students are not eligible for a STEM extension and can only participate in OPT for a maximum 12 month period.