

## **Maintaining Your F-1 Status During Post-Completion OPT**

While you are in the US for the duration of the authorized post-completion Optional Practical Training (the dates on your EAD card), you will continue to be an F-1 student and so you must continue to maintain your F-1 status. The Office of International Programs and Extended Studies at Ithaca College will continue to be responsible for your immigration records before the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Be sure to keep in touch with OIPES and to follow the guidelines outlined below.

---

### **Reporting requirements:**

- Make sure that you report **any changes of name or address** within 10 days of the time the name/address change takes place. You can make that report yourself via the SEVP Student Portal or send that information to the OIP (by mail, e-mail, or fax) and we can assist you.
- Please provide us with a clear copy of your **EAD card** as soon as you receive it.

### **Job requirements and unemployment during OPT**

- You are required to **pursue practical training experience in your major field of studies** while on OPT. Students on post-completion OPT may have up to 90 days of unemployment. Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- You can begin work only after your OPT is approved and you receive your EAD and you can be employed only during the EAD validity period.
- All OPT employment must be in a **job directly related to your degree program** (your major(s), not minor(s)). This employment may be paid or unpaid – students on OPT may work as volunteers or unpaid interns where this does not violate labor laws. OPT work may be part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full time.
- Once you begin work, you must report in SEVIS the following information:
  - Employer name and address
  - Your job title
  - Your starting date
  - Are you working full time (more than 20 hours/week) or part time
  - A brief explanation of how the employment is directly related to your course of study. Here are some sample explanations of a direct relationship:

Bachelor's degree in Business: "I work full time as a Loan officer at the Happy Homes mortgage company where I meet with clients and evaluate, authorize and recommend approval of loan applications. On a daily basis, I use the knowledge I gained in my credit analysis, sales, and marketing classes."

Master's degree in Music: "I am working at the Regional Hospital playing the harp in patient rooms. I also conduct hands-on harp beginner workshops for long-term patients. On average, I work at the hospital 35 hours per week. My duties directly utilize the skills and knowledge I acquired from my coursework and degree in Music Therapy."

You can report your OPT employment information directly to SEVIS by using the **SEVP Student Portal**. Let us know if you need assistance getting access to the Portal. If you cannot access the Portal, please send that information to OIPES via e-mail and we can help you update your SEVIS record.

### **Travel Outside the US while on OPT:**

- If you decide to **travel outside the US** while on OPT, you must carry the following documents in order to return to the US to resume employment:
  - the valid EAD card,
  - your I-20 endorsed for travel within the last six months,
  - a valid F-1 visa
  - a letter of employment confirmation.

See below for more information.

International travel between the date of application for the EAD and the date actual employment begins is extremely risky, even if you have a valid F-1 visa. If you have graduated already, you will not be able to re-enter the US without the documents listed above. Never enter the US in any status other than F-1 if you plan to work on your OPT.

- **If your F-1 visa has expired**, keep in mind that the rate of rejections of visa renewal applications for students on OPT tends to be considerably higher than the applications of students pursuing their studies. If you will be applying for a renewal of your visa, please contact OIPES well in advance of your departure from the US.
- Keep in mind that OPT authorization is **automatically terminated** when the student transfers to another school or begins full-time studies at another educational level. OPT ends **completed within 14 months** from the date of your completion of studies.
- While on OPT, you will no longer be covered by IC's **insurance** plan, so make sure you have insurance coverage for the duration of your stay in the US.

## **Overseas Travel While on OPT**

If you decide to travel outside the US while on OPT, you must have the following **travel documents** in order to return to the US:

- valid unexpired passport (the expiry date must be more than 6 months away)
- current unexpired F-1 visa stamp
- I-20 signed for travel **within the last 6 months**
- Valid EAD (OPT card)
- job offer letter or letter confirming current employment

Regarding the letter of employment:

In order to re-enter the US, you will need to have a job offer letter or a letter confirming your current employment. The letter should reflect the fact that this is a temporary employment (for less than 12 months, within the dates of authorization on your EAD card). An offer of permanent/long-term employment may be considered by the immigration official at the border to be inconsistent with your non-immigrant F-1 student status and you may be refused entry into the US.

This is not due to a change in the law, but a move on the part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to enforce more strictly the regulation in 8CFR214.2(f)(13): "An F-1 student who has an unexpired EAD issued for post-completion practical training and who is otherwise admissible may return to the United States to resume employment after a period of temporary absence."

Please contact OIPES if you have any questions regarding travel while on OPT.