

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

OPT is **practical** work experience in your **field** of study, typically after completion of a degree. Initial OPT can last up to 12 months. Students are allowed to have one 12-month OPT period per degree level. Students on OPT are still considered to be F-1 students at Marian University even if working elsewhere in the United States. The Employment Authorization Document (EAD) received for OPT is an extension of your F-1 status for the purposes of practical training.

Who is eligible?

- F-1 students who are legally maintaining their status; **and**
- Who have been enrolled full-time for at least 2 consecutive semesters; **and**
- Who will be completing a course of study this term; **and**
- Whose OPT employment will be directly related to their course of study.

What should you do before applying for OPT?

Before applying for OPT, you should confirm with your academic advisor that you will be completing your degree. When you submit your OPT application to the U.S. government, you are informing them you are done with your classes in that term. Make sure this is true before submitting your OPT application. For the OPT application, you will need a completed OPT Authorization Request Form, which requires your academic advisor's signature. Please plan ahead.

When should you apply for OPT?

Students can apply for OPT up to **90 days before**, and 60 days after, the program completion date. **Program completion is the last day of the term during which you are registered for all the necessary credits for your program.** It is currently taking **3-4 months** for USCIS to process applications and **you must have your EAD card in-hand** in order to start work. Apply early and plan accordingly!

Your OPT may end no later than 14 months after your program completion date.

What should you know when applying for OPT?

- The OPT packet contains **detailed instructions** for preparing your OPT application; please follow these instructions to avoid delay of your application. The packet includes:
 - The OPT **application procedure**
 - List of **required documents** to bring to your GEO advising appointment
 - A **final checklist** to review prior to mailing your application
 - Information for **tracking** your application status
 - Detailed **photo** specifications
- Once your application for OPT has been approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to the address on the I-765 form. **The post office WILL NOT FORWARD mail from USCIS, if you change your address after you apply.** USCIS will also not deliver your EAD to a PO Box. **Make sure the address you put on the I-765 is where you will be living (and accepting mail) in the coming 3-4 months.** Alternatively, consider using GEO's mailing address.
- It is impossible to **cancel** your practical training once you have received your EAD; the time granted on your EAD card will be counted regardless of your actual employment. You will not receive a refund of the fee paid and you are unable to apply for OPT again based on that degree.

Important OPT Information

While on OPT, you are still an F-1 student. OPT is a benefit of F-1 immigration status.

During OPT, you MUST keep GEO informed:

- Submit a copy of your **EAD card** upon receipt
- Report all **address changes, employment information, and unemployment periods** to GEO within **10 days of any change**. Submit all changes to GEO via email.
- Submit a copy of all **Change of Status** application receipts and approval notices, upon receipt (if applicable)

REMEMBER:

- **You can't work** until you have your EAD card **in-hand** and the start **date** is valid.
- Your **OPT will automatically terminate** if you transfer to another school or begin to study at another educational level.
- You **may not accrue** more than **90 days of unemployment** during the initial 12-month OPT period.
- You have a **60-day grace period** after your OPT ends; however you cannot work during this time.

Travel during OPT:

Traveling during OPT can be risky; we suggest you talk with GEO prior to purchasing an airline ticket. If you travel, you will need:

- **I-20** which includes **current employment information** and a **DSO travel signature dated within the past 6 months**
- **Passport**, valid at least 6 months into the future
- **Visa stamp that will be valid upon re-entering** the United States. If your visa is expired, please speak to GE.
- Valid **EAD**
- **Proof of employment**. Carry copies of recent paystubs **AND** a letter from your employer indicating you will have a job upon your return.

Dependent Travel – Since OPT is not noted on dependent I-20s, an F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student's I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card, and proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

*If you are **unemployed** or your **OPT application is pending**, talk with GEO before purchasing your flight.*

Other information you may need to know:

- **Taxes** – Generally, if you have been in the United States less than 5 years, you should be exempt from Social Security Tax & Medicare Tax, also known as FICA (See Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, earnings are subject to applicable federal, state & local taxes unless your country has a tax treaty with the USA exempting you from payment. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year, for the previous calendar year.
- **Health Insurance** – It is extremely important that you have health insurance while living in the United States. If your employer doesn't provide health insurance, you should obtain another plan. You are eligible to have the Marian University international student insurance plan through LewerMark. Charges can be placed on your student account.

OPT Application Procedure – 12 Months

- Step 1. Obtain and **read** through this **entire OPT packet**.
- Step 2. **Meet with** GEO to discuss your OPT plans, such as when to file, required documents, and employment options.
- Step 3. **Assemble the documents** required for your application.
- Step 4. Make an **appointment** with GEO to finalize your application.
- Step 5. **Mail** application, get receipt notice, and track status.
- Step 6. **EAD – Submit photocopy** to GEO.
- Step 7. **Report Employment and Changes to GEO**, such as your address, address where employment is taking place, and periods of unemployment.

OPT Application Required Documents

When you meet with GEO, please bring the following documents:

- Completed **OPT Request Form**
- 2 passport photos** – Gently print your name and SEVIS number on the back
- Passport and F-1 visa**
- I-94**. Bring a printout from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94> or your I-94 card (land border crossing from Canada only).
- Check, money order, or U.S.-issued debit/credit card**. Payable **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (do not abbreviate to DHS) and include your **SEVIS N#** in the memo field.
If applicable:
 - Photocopy of any **previous EAD cards** and I-20 with previous OPT authorization(s)

You can file the traditional route or online. If you plan to file online, please notify GEO in advance as there are a few things you'll need to complete prior to your OPT appointment.

During the OPT advising session, you will receive a new I-20, assemble your OPT application materials, and receive an envelope for mailing. It is possible to mail your application packet via the Campus Mailroom. Please use a traceable method.

Tracking your Application Status

Once your application has been accepted by USCIS, you should receive a **text message** and/or **email** indicating receipt and containing your **receipt number**. Within 2 – 6 weeks of sending your application you will receive a **Notice of Action(I-797)**; this is proof that you have an application pending with USCIS. This document will also contain your **receipt number**. Use your receipt number to track the status of your **case status** at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>

Color Photograph Specifications

You **must** submit **two identical color photographs** of yourself taken **within 30 days** of the filing your OPT application.

The **passport-style** photos must be:

- **2" x 2"**
- **full face**, frontal view
- have a **white to off-white background**
- printed on **thin paper** with a *glossy finish*
- be **un-mounted** and **un-retouched**
- Your **head must be bare** unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order of which you are a member

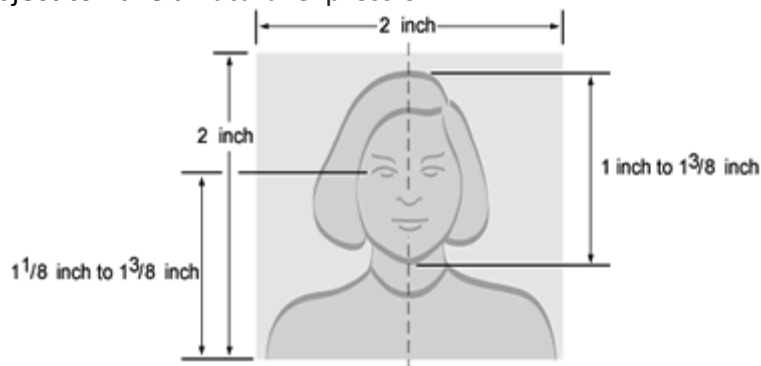
Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and SEVIS Number on the back of the photo.

When filing online, use the photo cropping tool to ensure your photo meets specifications.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html>

7 Steps to Successful Photos

- ☑ Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
 - ☑ Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).
 - ☑ Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below); ensure that there is some space above the top of your head.
 - ☑ Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
 - ☑ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
 - ☑ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- Encourage subject to have a natural expression



Sample Check

Please confirm current fee before sending.

Your Name _____
Your Street Address _____
City, State, Zip code _____

Date _____ The date you write the check

Pay to the order of U.S. Department of Homeland Security \$ 410.00
Four hundred and ten 00 100 Dollars

Your Bank's name and address _____

SEVIS ID#: _____ Your signature _____

Your Bank Routing Number _____ Your Checking Account Number * Your Check Number _____

Getting a Social Security Number (SSN)

You should apply for an SSN, if you do not have one already. To do so, complete the Social Security section of the I-765. This is the preferred method. However, another option is for you to apply at the local office. You will need:

- Your EAD
- Your latest I-20 with the OPT authorization
- Your immigration documents- passport, visa, I-94 card/printout, and SEVIS Fee Receipt (I-901)
- Completed SS-5 (Social Security Number application found at <http://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>)

Once you have obtained your SSN card and have shown the card to your employer, please keep the card in a safe place. Do not take a picture of your card or carry it on a daily basis; the SSN can be easily used for identity theft. GEO does not need a copy of your Social Security card.



Optional Practical Training Authorization Request

Section to be completed by student:

Last Name:	First Name:	Have you been approved for CPT or OPT before at Marian? Yes or No Dates:
Marian Email and Non-Marian Email:	Phone:	Have you been approved for OPT before at another U.S. school? Yes or No
Company Name (if known):		
Company Address:		
City:	State:	Zip Code:
Job Title:		Number of Hours Per Week:
Requested OPT Start Date: (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expected Date of Program Completion: (mm/dd/yyyy)	Major(s):
I will update GEO should my job duties or employment information change. I understand I will lose my F-1 visa status if I fail to abide by the OPT regulations, including a maximum days of unemployment, and my SEVIS record will be terminated.		
Student Signature:		Date:

Section to be completed by Academic Advisor:

1. Has the student already **completed all program requirements** for degree completion? **Yes or No**
If the student is still in classes, please choose No.
2. **Expected completion date** of degree requirements: _____
3. Is the student in good academic standing and eligible to complete the degree? **Yes or No**
4. Has this student applied for graduation? **Yes or No**

 Academic Advisor Name Academic Advisor's Signature Date

The purpose of this form is to confirm that this Marian University international student is poised to complete his/her/ their academic program in order to apply for an employment benefit from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

You may either return this form to the student or scan and email it to Rhonda J. Hinkle, Executive Director, GEO, at rhinkle@marian.edu.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Student Handbook



Excerpts from:

Alien Liability for Social Security and Medicare Taxes

The full text can be found at: <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Alien-Liability-for-Social-Security-and-Medicare-Taxes-of-Foreign-Teachers,-Foreign-Researchers,-and-Other-Foreign-Professionals>

In general aliens performing services in the United States as employees are liable for U.S. social security and Medicare taxes. However, certain classes of alien employees are exempt from U.S. social security and Medicare taxes as follows.

Nonresident aliens, in general, are also liable for Social Security/Medicare Taxes on wages paid to them for services performed by them in the United States, with **certain exceptions based on their nonimmigrant status**. The following classes of nonimmigrant's and nonresident aliens are exempt from U.S. Social Security and Medicare taxes:

F-visas, J-visas, M-visas, Q-visas. Nonresident Alien students, scholars, professors, teachers, trainees, researchers, physicians, au pairs, summer camp workers, and other aliens temporarily present in the United States in **F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2** nonimmigrant status are exempt on wages paid to them for services performed within the United States as long as such services are allowed by USCIS for these nonimmigrant statuses, and such services are performed to carry out the purposes for which such visas were issued to them.

Exempt Employment includes:

- **On-campus student employment** up to 20 hours a week (40 hrs during summer vacations)
- **Off-campus student employment allowed by USCIS.**
- **Practical Training student employment on or off campus.**
- Employment as professor, teacher or researcher.
- Employment as a physician, au pair, or summer camp worker

Limitations on exemption:

- The exemption does not apply to spouses and children in F-2, J-2, M-2, or Q-3 nonimmigrant status.
- The exemption does not apply to employment not allowed by USCIS or to employment not closely connected to the purpose for which the visa was issued.
- The exemption does not apply to F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2 nonimmigrant's who change to an immigration status which is not exempt or to a special protected status.
- The exemption does not apply to F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2 nonimmigrant's who become resident aliens.

The IRS has published regulations which stipulate that aliens who arrive in the United States on F, J, M, or Q visas will be assumed to be "NONRESIDENT ALIENS" but only to the extent that the assumption is consistent with the residency rules of section 7701(b) of the Code. Since the social security/Medicare tax exemption for foreign students, scholars, teachers, researchers, and trainees under the Code requires that the payee be a "NONRESIDENT ALIEN", then the social security/Medicare tax exemption ceases to exist at the point the payee becomes a "RESIDENT ALIEN" under the residency rules of section 7701(b) of the Code.

Thus, to summarize, both the Internal Revenue Code and the Social Security Act allow an exemption from social security/Medicare taxes to alien students, scholars, teachers, researchers, trainees, physicians, au pairs, summer camp workers, and other nonimmigrants who have entered the United States on F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1, or Q-2 visas and who are still classified as NONRESIDENT ALIENS under the residency rules of the Internal Revenue Code. As discussed above, **this means that foreign students in F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1 or Q-2 nonimmigrant status who have been in the United States less than 5 calendar years are still NONRESIDENT ALIENS and are still exempt from social security/medicare taxes.** This exemption also applies to any period in which the foreign student is in "practical training" allowed by USCIS, as long as the foreign student is still a NONRESIDENT ALIEN under the Code. **Foreign students in F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1 or Q-2 nonimmigrant status who have been in the United States more than 5 calendar years are RESIDENT ALIENS and are liable for social security/Medicare taxes** (unless they are exempt from FICA under the "student FICA exemption").

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Student Handbook

Optional Practical Training is intended to provide hands-on, practical work experience that is complimentary to your academic program. An F-1 student may be eligible for 12 months OPT, provided this practical training is **directly related to your field of study**, is **commensurate** with your educational level, and is **recommended** by your academic advisor.

Requested OPT start date: _____ **and end date:** _____

Program End Date	Fall 2023 12/15/2023	Spring 2024 05/03/2024
Application		
First Date to submit OPT application	09/18/2023	02/05/2024
Last Date for USCIS to receive application	02/13/2024	07/02/2024

Employment		
Earliest Employment Start Date	12/16/2023	05/04/2024
Latest Employment Start Date	02/13/2024	07/02/2024

In making this request I understand and agree to abide by all requirements, including:

- I will **mail my OPT application within 14 days** of my OPT I-20 issue date. The U.S. government must receive my OPT application within 30 days of my OPT appointment.
- If I apply late**, my OPT period may be less than 12 months. All OPT must be completed within 14 months of program completion. I may have a maximum of 90 days unemployment.
- I will inform GEO if I decide not to continue OPT.
- I will **report all changes** in my U.S. or overseas **address** to GEO within 10 days of such change.
- I will provide GEO with a **copy** of my Employment Authorization Document (**EAD**).
- I understand that I **cannot begin working until I have my EAD card in-hand**.
- I will **report** the name and address of my **employer** to GEO within 10 days of starting work.
- I understand that I **should have health insurance** coverage for the duration of my F-1 status, including OPT.

Last Name

First Name

Student Signature

Date