



# Optional Practical Training (OPT)

University of Connecticut Health Center  
Human Resources – International Office

# OPT - The Basics

- OPT is a benefit for F-1 students to work off-campus in a field directly related to their major area of study.
- An offer of employment is not required **at the time you apply** for OPT.
  - However, once OPT is approved, you have a maximum of 90 days of unemployment allowed over the 12 months.
  - If you change employment, gaps in employment count!
  - If starting your job later than EAD start date, that counts!
- OPT employment must be **directly related** to your field of study.
- You must be physically present in the U.S. and in active F-1 status at the time of application.

# OPT - The Basics

- You are allowed a total of 12 months of full-time OPT per degree level.
- While on OPT, your F-1 visa is still *sponsored by UCHC*, even if you are working elsewhere
- You have **90 days of unemployment** allowed under regular post-completion OPT.

# First Steps

- Determine your **official Program Completion Date (PCD)**
  - **PhD Students**
    - Discuss your defense dates with your advisor and your committee.
    - Pass private defense, then determine public defense date and thesis submission date  
**Thesis submission date = PCD**
    - Confirm date with **Academic Advisor** and **Assoc. Dean of Grad School**
    - Academic Advisor completes the **OPT Recommendation Letter**
  - **Dental (MDS) students**
    - Confirm completion of both **MDS and clinical certificate** with your Academic Advisor.
    - The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs – SODM will complete the OPT Recommendation Letter
    - Typically MDS students complete June 30.
    - You must have a thesis defense date and submit your thesis to the Graduate School for the MDS portion.
- **\*Program Completion Date must be 100% confirmed before proceeding\***

# Next Steps

- Determine your OPT start date
  - Can be anytime within the **60-day** period following your PCD. This is your choice
- Gather your documents: passport, visa, I-94, previous I-20's
- **Submit an OPT I-20 Request Form**
- UCHC International Advisor will be in touch after you submit this form.
- Students can apply for OPT **up to 90 days before PCD**
- **Absolute latest** date for USCIS to receive OPT application is **60 days after PCD**

# Filing with USCIS

- There are two options for filing your I-765
  - Electronic Filing (e-filing)
  - Paper filing
- Many now choose to file online, but it is your decision
- We offer “**E-Filing Tips**” with helpful information
- Either way, you will work with your International Advisor to process the OPT request

# Premium Processing

- Optional, not required
- Reduces processing time to 30 calendar days
- \$1,500 premium processing fee + \$410 filing fee
  - *(Filing fee for online filing is \$470 as of 4/1/2024).*
- Can be filed online or by mail

# After Filing

- Let the IO know when your OPT is approved. Please send us a copy of your EAD card.
- As soon as you have a signed offer letter of employment, send a copy to the IO. Your DSO can add your employer information to SEVIS.
  - *“Direct relationship between employment and a student’s major area of study”* – DHS Policy Guidance, 2019
- You have a maximum of **90 days** you can be unemployed on OPT. (150 total days with STEM extension).
- Remember to keep the UCHC IO updated if you change jobs or address – must report within 10 days!



# SEVP Portal

- Allows student to report info to SEVP themselves while on OPT
- When OPT authorization approved, SEVP sends account creation email to student
- Students can update: addresses, telephone numbers, employer information and monitor their employment authorization
- Students still must send contract/offer letter and copy of EAD card to International Office
- You should update UCHC with your personal email to add to SEVIS
- More information at [Study in the States](#)

# Employment... and beyond!

- Employment at UConn Health
  - Postdoc – minimum 1 year appointment
  - Faculty – minimum 1 year appointment
  - Make sure the hiring dept reaches out to the IO to get all the HR hiring paperwork done **in advance** of your EAD start date.
- Dental/Medical Residency
  - You may want to delay your OPT start date to coincide with your residency start date.
- TRAVEL on OPT
  - I-20 must be signed
  - EAD Card
  - Offer letter or employment verification letter

# Employment... and beyond!

- 24-month STEM Extension
  - ONLY for qualifying majors: Biomedical Sciences qualifies for STEM, Dentistry does not
- H-1B Filing
  - If employer is in the private sector, they are subject to the H-1B “cap.” Make sure they file your H-1B by April 1 deadline for October 1 start.
- “CAP GAP” Extension
  - If you are selected in H-1B lottery, you must “bridge the gap” from end of OPT until your October 1 start. This is the “cap gap extension,” it is typically automatic in SEVIS.
  - Contact the IO for questions on the cap gap extension if you are in this situation
  - Not recommended to travel during this time

# Please contact the HR- International Office with any questions!

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*This information is provided as general guidance; however, this does not constitute legal advice. We will make every attempt to help you file your OPT accurately and successfully, but ultimately anything you file with USCIS is your responsibility.*