

F-1 Visa
International
Student
Handbook

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Cultural Adjustment

Cultural adjustment

Living in a culture that is different from your own can be both an exciting adventure and a challenging process. Regardless of what country you are from, it is common for all international students to go through a period of cultural adjustment. Understanding this adjustment process and getting support through this transition will help you to have a more fulfilling experience, both academically and personally.

Culture shock

The values, social norms, and traditions in the U.S. may be very different from beliefs about "how things should be" in the country where you grew up. When individuals move to another culture, they naturally carry their own background and life experiences with them, and these shape how they perceive and adjust to their new environment. For example, some of you may find American classroom culture easy to adjust to, while others may struggle significantly in this area. "Culture shock" is a common experience that describes the feelings of confusion, stress and disorientation that occur when entering an unfamiliar culture. Keep in mind that not everyone has the same reactions to cultural adjustment and may experience the symptoms of culture shock in varying degrees, and at different times. Common reactions to culture shock include:

- extreme homesickness
- avoiding social situations
- physical complaints and sleep difficulties
- difficulty with coursework and inability to concentrate
- becoming angry over minor irritations
- significant nervousness or exhaustion

Strategies to help you cope with the adjustment process

- **Culture is relative**

Culture is relative, which explains why individuals from different cultures may perceive American norms differently. For some, the American communication style may seem too direct, while others may find it not direct enough. As an international student, you will be exposed to many new customs, habits and ideas. Try to avoid labeling them as "good" or "bad" according to the culture you are from. Remember that there may be parts of a culture you dislike or disapprove of, but these are part of a broader social system, and therefore make more sense inside that system.

- **Be open-minded and curious**

Adjusting to a new culture does not mean that you have to change your own values, but it is important to respect those of other people. When you find yourself in an unfamiliar situation, try to think of it as a new adventure. Allow yourself to be curious about the way things are perceived and done in this new environment.

- **Use your observation skills**

Since you will encounter unfamiliar rules and norms, observing how others are acting in situations can help you understand what behavior is expected of you. Pay attention to both the verbal and nonverbal communication of others in order to get a more complete picture of what is going on.

- **Ask questions**

Ask for help when you need it. Asking for assistance or an explanation does not have to be considered a sign of weakness. Understanding others and making yourself understood in a new language (or context) requires lots of rephrasing, repeating and clarification. It may be helpful to ask questions like "as I understand it you are saying... Is that correct?"

- **It's ok to experience anxiety**

Learning to function in a new environment is not easy. It is natural to feel anxious or frustrated sometimes. The key is to remind yourself that these feelings are normal and are likely to be situational and temporary.

- **Give yourself (and others) permission to make mistakes**

You will inevitably make mistakes as you explore a new culture. If you can find the humor in these situations and laugh at them, others will likely respond to you with friendliness and support. Keep in mind that others will probably make mistakes, too; when someone makes an inaccurate assumption or a generalized statement about your culture, it may be due to a lack of information. If you're comfortable with doing so, this can be an opportunity to share information with others about yourself and your culture.

- **Take care of your physical health**

Be mindful about keeping a healthy diet and getting enough exercise and rest. Try to find an activity that you enjoy and make it part of your routine. Being physically active can help reduce your stress level.

- **Find a cultural ally**

An American friend (or another international student who has been in the U.S. for several years) can be a great consultant on cultural expectations. When you have questions or need a second opinion on something, this person can help clarify confusions and provide support as you adjust to your new environment.

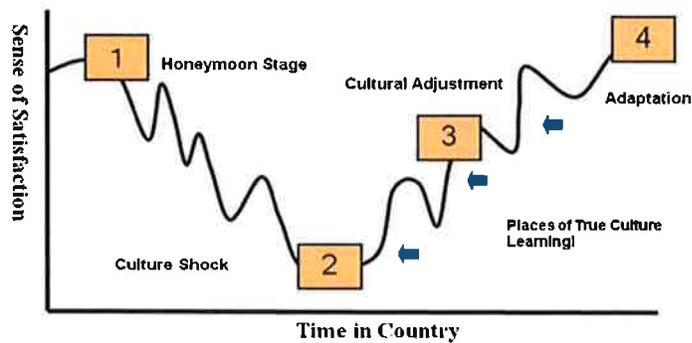
- **Seek out support from other international students**

Many international students find it helpful to discuss their concerns with others who are going through similar transitions. Talking with others about their adjustment to the new culture can provide ideas and insights about your own experience. *

- **Be patient - don't try to understand everything immediately**

The process of adjusting to a new culture requires time. It may also require a different amount of time for different areas of adjustment. Try to encourage yourself to be patient with this experience and not be overly critical of yourself.

Adapting to a new culture is an ongoing process. It may be challenging at times, but most students who experience culture shock agree that going through this transition helped them to learn more about themselves and to develop greater confidence in their ability to navigate new situations. It can also lead to a renewed appreciation of one's own culture. There are many people in the university community who are available to provide you with support. Keep in mind that you do not have to struggle alone.



Adapted from "Maximizing Study Abroad," University of Minnesota

Four Common Stages of Cultural Adjustment*

STAGE 1: "The Honeymoon"—Initial Euphoria/Excitement • Excitement with new sounds, sights, smells. • Superficial involvement in the host culture (like a tourist). • Intrigue with both similarities and differences between the new culture and your home culture. • Lots of interest in learning, very motivated and cooperative. • You feel as if you will be able to handle anything—"I am not going to have any problems adjusting!"

STAGE 2: "Culture Shock"—Irritation/Hostility • The novelty of the new culture has worn off, and you now focus primarily on the differences between the new culture and your home culture. • Small differences feel like major catastrophes. You become overly concerned with and stressed out by problems and feel helpless and frustrated (the elevator in your dorm is constantly broken; you do not have hot water in the morning; you cannot access e-mail from your apartment/dorm, registering for classes feels like an unstructured nightmare, etc.). • Stereotypes and prejudices surface: you feel as if the host nationals are cold, unhelpful, snobbish. • You search out American friends. • You are homesick. You miss your friends and family in the U.S.—and to make matters worse, you hear that the weather in Princeton is glorious.

STAGE 3: Gradual Adjustment, Humor, and Perspective • You are becoming more familiar with the new culture and its "logic" and values. Cultural cues become easier to read. • You feel more comfortable and less isolated, and you even begin to prefer some aspects of the new culture to your home culture. • You feel like "As long as I am here, I should make the most of it." • You experience periodic personal highs and lows, as adjustment gradually takes place. • Your sense of humor returns. You are able to laugh at certain ways of doing things that previously just annoyed you and even to laugh at yourself from time to time. • Since you are past the initial, emotional stages of cultural adjustment, you can now enter a stage of "deeper learning." You begin to see a multitude of approaches to your life abroad and to question some of your assumptions about the world. This can be both exciting and unnerving.

STAGE 4: "Feeling at Home"—Adaptation and Biculturalism • The "new" culture is no longer new; instead, the "foreign" country you live in now feels like another home. • The aspects of the culture that are different from the U.S. no longer affect you in a negative way. You are able to live and work to your full potential. • Just like you do in the U.S., you appreciate certain aspects of the foreign culture and are critical of others.

Social
Security
& Tax
Information

Social Security and Tax Information

<https://apps.carleton.edu/intl/attend/sstax/>

Social Security

Social Security Numbers (SSN) are used primarily for U. S. tax identification purposes. Therefore, **if you will be earning income in the United States**, you must also file tax forms and will therefore need a Social Security Number. F-1 students who are authorized for employment can apply for an SSN. *Please note that if you are an F-1 student and you do not have employment, you do not qualify for an SSN.* The Social Security Card will be issued to you free of charge. If you do acquire a SSN please do not confuse this number with your Carleton College student identification number.

International Students/scholars will be helped with the application for a social security number and should check with the Office of Intercultural and International Life for the latest forms and [instructions](#). You must apply in person at the nearest Social Security Administration office, which is in Mankato or Minneapolis. ***You must wait until you are in the United States for at least 10 days before you apply for a Social Security number.***

You must complete two forms: (1) the Social Security application Form SS-5 found [here](#), and (2) Verification of [Employment Form](#) that must be completed by campus employer and Designated School Official. In addition you need to bring your original passport, Form I-94, I-20 or DS-2019 with you to the nearest SSA office. **DO NOT MAIL THE APPLICATION or YOUR DOCUMENTS TO THE SSA OFFICE.** After you submit your application, request a Receipt Letter from the SSA official and bring a copy to OIIL. In 1-3 weeks you'll receive your Social Security Card or Number, and bring that to the office so we can verify you received your card. After you get your card you'll need to update your information in GLACIER and print up the updated forms to the Business Office; you should also update your U.S. bank account with your SSN.

In general, students/visiting scholars who have been in the United States less than five years in F-1 or J-1 status are exempt from paying federal Social Security tax. Possession of a social security number does NOT constitute eligibility to work (you still need permission to work if you apply for internship, externship, research or any other type of paid or unpaid employment).

U.S. Income Tax

Once you arrive on-campus all students/visiting scholars are required to fill out W-4 forms (and other employment verification forms as needed) for United States income tax purposes.

Students/scholars should use their local Carleton College address and not their home address; otherwise, important and urgent mail may be delayed for long periods of time. Scholarship, fellowship, or assistantship awards that exceed tuition & fees, minus the cost of course-required books, fees, supplies, and equipment -- are taxable income.

Some scholarships, maintenance allowances, prizes, and payments for teaching and research may be considered taxable income by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Students/scholars holding an F-1 or J-1 visa are subject to withholding and payment of federal and state income taxes unless they are exempt by a provision of a tax treaty.

The level of taxable earnings fluctuates and must be checked each year. During the month of January all persons employed by Carleton, including students/scholars, receive W-2 statements showing their total taxable earnings and withholdings. All F-1 and J-1 individuals are required to file the Income Tax Return before April 15 of each year, in consultation with the Assistant Director of OIIL.

Carleton annually purchases Web-based computer software, Glacier Online Tax, designed to help non-resident aliens with student/scholar visas complete their income tax forms. There is also an annual tax help session with a local certified public accountant to answer additional questions.

International Students And Social Security Numbers



Are you temporarily in the United States to attend a college, language, vocational, or nonacademic school with a nonimmigrant **F-1**, **M-1**, or **J-1** student classification? Your school may ask you for your Social Security number. Some colleges and schools use Social Security numbers as student identification numbers. If you don't have a Social Security number, the college or school should be able to give you another identification number.

Social Security numbers generally are assigned to people who are authorized to work in the United States. Social Security numbers are used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. Social Security will not assign a number to you just to enroll in a college or school.

What do I have to do to work in the United States?

If you want to get a job on campus, you should contact your designated school official for international students. This official can tell you if you're eligible to work on campus and can give you information about available jobs. Also, your school may approve certain limited off-campus employment, as permitted under Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations. **If your school has authorized you to work either on or off campus, and you meet Social Security's eligibility requirements described in the next section, you can get a Social Security number.**

How do I apply for a Social Security number?

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work from the DHS can apply for a Social Security number. We suggest you wait 48 hours after reporting to your school before you apply for a Social Security number. Waiting will help ensure we can verify your immigration status with the DHS.

To apply for a Social Security number at your local Social Security office:

- Complete an application for a Social Security card; and
- Show us documents proving your:
 - Work-authorized immigration status;
 - Age; and
 - Identity.

Immigration status

To prove your immigration status, you must show us a current admission stamp in your unexpired foreign passport and *Arrival/Departure Record* (Form I-94), if available. If you're an F-1 or M-1 student, you must also show us your *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status* (Form I-20). If you're a J-1 exchange visitor, you must show us your *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status* (Form DS-2019).

Work eligibility

If you're an F-1 student and eligible to work on campus, you must provide a letter from your designated school official that

- Identifies you;
- Confirms your current school status; and
- Identifies your employer and the type of work you are, or will be, doing.

We also need to see evidence of that employment, such as a recent pay slip or a letter from your employer. Your supervisor must sign and date the employment letter. This letter must describe

- Your job;
- Your employment start date;
- The number of hours you are, or will be, working; and
- Your supervisor's name and telephone number.

If you're an F-1 student authorized to work in curricular practical training (CPT), you must provide us your Form I-20 with the employment page completed and signed by your school's designated official.

If you're an F-1 or M-1 student and have a work permit (Form I-766) from the DHS, you must present it.

If you're a J-1 student, student intern, or international visitor, you must provide a letter from your sponsor. The letter should be on sponsor letterhead with an original signature that authorizes your employment.

We cannot process your application if

- Your on-campus or CPT work begins more than 30 days from your application date; or
- The employment start date on your work permit from the DHS (Form I-766) is a future date.

Age

You must present your foreign birth certificate if you have it or can get it within 10 business days. If you can't present your foreign birth certificate, we can consider other documents, such as your passport or a document issued by the DHS, as evidence of your age.

Identity

We can only accept certain documents as proof of identity. An acceptable document must be current (not expired) and show your name, identifying information, and preferably, a recent photograph. Social Security will ask to see your current U.S. immigration documents, such as a current admission stamp in your unexpired foreign passport and *Arrival/Departure Record* (Form I-94), if available.

All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents. We also cannot accept a receipt showing you applied for the document. We may use one document for two purposes. For example, we may use your admission stamp in the unexpired foreign passport as proof of both work eligibility and identity.

Do I need a Social Security number before I start working?

We don't require you to have a Social Security number before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to report wages using a Social Security number. While you wait for your Social Security number, your employer can use a letter from us stating that you applied for a number. Your employer may use your immigration documents as proof of your authorization to work in the United States. Employers can find more information on the Internet at www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm.

Contacting Social Security

Visit www.socialsecurity.gov anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, www.socialsecurity.gov, is available to you anytime and anywhere!

Requesting

a

Leave of

Absence

LEAVE OF ABSENCE OR WITHDRAWAL

Your F-1/J-1 status is based on your full-time enrollment. If you are not going to be enrolled in courses full-time, you will need to take some kind of immigration action and must notify our office as soon as possible. If you are taking a leave of absence or withdrawing from your studies, working with the Dean of Students Office and OIIL is required and separate from anything you must do or file with your academic department.

If you fail to notify the Dean of Students Office and OIIL about your leave, your record will be terminated for "**Failure to Enroll**" and this could have serious consequences if you want to visit, study or work in the U.S. in the future.

There is no true "leave of absence" for immigration purposes. Your F-1/J-1 record is based off of your full-time registration. If there is a change in your registration or you are not going to be enrolled, some immigration action or process will need to occur.

Even if your leave has been approved by the Dean of Students Office, you must still work with OIIL to take care of your immigration record.

Before Taking a Leave of Absence or Withdrawing

Important Considerations:

- 1) F-1 Students: **If you take a leave of absence for more than 5 months**, you will not be eligible for CPT or OPT until you have completed three quarters of full-time enrollment after your return from your leave.
- 2) If your record is terminated, you cannot remain in the U.S. during your leave. See below for more information.
- 3) If your leave is for a documentable **medical reason**, you can be authorized for a reduced course load based on medical conditions, and your SEVIS record will remain active. Please read more about a medical reduced course load before submitting your Leave of Absence Notification Form.

Necessary Actions:

- 1) Receive approval from the Dean of Students Office for a Leave of Absence. After receiving approval, **your SEVIS record will be terminated** for "Authorized Early Withdrawal", which will not adversely affect your immigration record. The exact date of the termination will be based on the date indicated by the DOS Office.
- 2) Depart the country within 15 days of the termination date (for "Authorized Early Withdrawal" only). You cannot be in the U.S. with a terminated record. If you are terminated for another reason, such as a suspension or unauthorized employment, you do not have a grace period to leave and you must depart immediately.

Returning from a Leave of Absence

F-1 students returning from a leave of *fewer than five months*:

If the gap in your enrollment has been fewer than five months, OIIL can usually request that your F-1 status is 'reactivated', which allows you to maintain your OPT/CPT eligibility and use the same I-20 and visa (if not expired). Note that OIIL can only *request* that your record is reactivated. USCIS approves the actual reactivation and often requires additional documentation from the school and the student to make the change. If your leave is for fewer than five months, make sure to:

- 1) Contact our office by email at least **one month** before you plan to return to Carleton. This will give us time to request that your record is reactivated with USCIS. After the request is made, a staff member will confirm once your record has been turned back to 'active'. Processing times vary and can take from 1-4 weeks, so it is important to contact us well in advance.
- 2) Be sure you have a valid travel signature on page 2 of your I-20. If not, request an updated signature from a DSO (Brisa Zubia or Liz Cody).
- 3) Re-enter the U.S. with all required travel documents, including a valid F-1 visa after your record is set back to 'active'. Note that reactivation times vary. Our office cannot guarantee when your record will be turned back to 'active'. Because you will not be able to enter the U.S. unless your record is 'active', you may want to wait until your request is approved before purchasing airfare.

F-1 students returning from a leave of *more than five months* and ALL J-1 students:

- 1) Contact OIIL 3 months before you plan to return to Carleton. This will allow time for the creation and receipt of your new SEVIS record/I-20.
- 2) Coordinate with the Dean of Students Office to receive approval to return to campus. Once approved, provide the DSO with a completed Certification of Finances, a copy of your current passport, and a copy of your Financial Aid Award Letter, if received. You may send your documents by scanned email attachment to bzubia@carleton.edu. We do not require physical copies of the financial statements.
- 3) Receive your new Form I-20 or DS-2019 from OIIL. OIIL will send your document via FedEx Priority Mail.
- 4) Pay the SEVIS fee.
- 5) F-1 students: Obtain a new F-1 visa, even if your old F-1 visa is still valid.
J-1 students: Obtain a new J-1 visa, *ONLY if your old visa is no longer valid.*

6) Travel to the U.S. no more than 30 days before the start date listed on your new I-20.

Please speak to a staff member in OIIL at least two weeks before the proposed LOA begin date.

LOA for Medical Reasons:

1. LOA for medical reasons is treated as a Reduced Course Load in SEVIS.
 2. If you will be on LOA for medical reasons for more than 12 months, consult the Dean of Students Office.
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LOA for Non-Medical Reasons:

The process for students to return from LOA will depend on how long you are on LOA and outside the United States:

LOA for ONLY One Term & Outside of the U.S. for LESS THAN 5 Months:

1. OIIL terminates your SEVIS record;
 2. Depart the U.S. within 15 days after the termination of your SEVIS record;
 3. Inform the International Student Adviser (email at bzubia@carleton.edu) of your plans to return at least 60 days before your intended date of reentry to the U.S.
 4. OIIL sends a request to SEVP to return your F-1 record to Active status.
 5. Once approved, OIIL will issue you a new I-20 and you will be able to re-enter the U.S.
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LOA for ONLY One Term but Outside of the U.S. for MORE THAN 5 Months:

1. OIIL terminates your SEVIS record.
2. Depart the U.S. within 15 days after the termination of your SEVIS record;
3. Request a new I-20 before returning to the U.S. Prepare to submit a completed Certification of Finances, a copy of your current passport, and a copy of your Financial Aid Award Letter, if received. *Your current I-20 is no longer valid.* Contact bzubia@carleton.edu for more information.
4. Pay the I-901 SEVIS fee for the new I-20's SEVIS ID.
5. Apply for a new F-1 visa, if applicable. It is recommended you contact your nearest U.S. embassy/consulate about whether you will need a new visa.

6. You will not be eligible for off-campus employment benefits until you are in your new F-1 status for at least one academic year.
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LOA for MORE THAN One Term & Outside of the U.S. for MORE THAN 5 Months:

1. OIIL terminates your SEVIS record.
2. Depart the U.S. within 15 days after the termination of your SEVIS record;
3. Request a new I-20 before returning to the U.S. Prepare to submit a completed Certification of Finances, a copy of your current passport, and a copy of your Financial Aid Award Letter, if received. *Your current I-20 is no longer valid.* Contact bzubia@carleton.edu for information.
4. Pay the I-901 SEVIS fee for the new I-20's SEVIS ID.
5. Apply for a new F-1 visa, if applicable. It is recommended you contact your nearest U.S. embassy/consulate about whether you will need a new visa.
6. You will not be eligible for off-campus employment benefits until you are in your new F-1 status for at least one academic year.

Curricular
Practical
Training
(CPT)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for F-1 Visa Holders

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) enables F-1 student to gain off-campus employment authorization in the U.S. for intern, extern, research assistant, etc., as long as curricular credit requirements are met. Student who has received 12 months or more of full-time CPT is ineligible for post-completion (after graduation) Optional Practical Training (OPT). A request for CPT authorization must be made to a Designated School Official (DSO), not a government agency. There is no application fee. A student may begin employment only after receiving a new I-20 with CPT approved.

CPT employment, paid or unpaid, must relate to your program of study or major and you must take a required independent or other approved course to satisfy the curricular credit requirement. CPT is not authorized for concentrations. Failure to register and complete the required course will jeopardize your student status. CPT is not required for employment at Carleton during the holiday breaks. Exchange students and those who will not return to Carleton the following term are not eligible for CPT.

A student must register for an independent reading (290 or 390), study (291 or 391), research (292 or 392), or other course approved by the department that requires an internship/externship, research project, or other curricular experience. Student must register for a minimum of 1 credit for a course related to Winter or Spring Break CPT, and a minimum of 3 credits for Summer Break or while school is in session. Math majors may register for Math 297 and biology majors may register for Bio 395, either course is repeatable as long as the content changes.

Employment completed during the summer, winter, or spring break, requires course registration in the following fall, winter, or spring term. CPT authorization is required for a participant in an approved Carleton off-campus program in the U.S. where an internship or other work experience is also required; the course runs concurrently with the off-campus program. CPT may be authorized during Carleton's academic terms but student must register for the required course each term and employment authorization is for only one term at a time.

To qualify for CPT authorization a student must meet the following conditions:

- o Maintain valid immigration status before applying for CPT.
- o Enroll full-time in a degree program for a full academic year (10 consecutive months).
- o Have a job offer that your academic department verifies is practical work experience in your major.
- o Some majors may limit the number of internships and thus CPT course; check with your department.

<p>Part-time CPT is less than 20 hours per week. Part-time CPT does not affect Optional Practical Training (OPT).</p>	<p>Full-time CPT is for more than 20 hours of work per week. Students with 12 months or more of full-time CPT are not eligible for OPT.</p>
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CPT Application Process:

1. Obtain employment and attach signed offer letter to CPT Endorsement Form. Letter should include: job title, paid or unpaid, expected work hours (see above), employment start and end date, employer's address, supervisor's name with telephone and email contact.
2. Have your professor complete his/her part of the CPT Endorsement Form to verify the department's approval of your CPT and the required course taken for credit.
3. Set-up an appointment to meet with a Designated School Official (DSO) and bring the CPT Endorsement Form, passport and current I-20 with you.
4. Allow 5 business days for your new I-20 to be processed that authorizes CPT employment.
5. Present the new I-20, passport, and I-94 (print out electronic copy <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html>) to your employer so they can verify your employment eligibility on the I-9 form as needed.
6. Register for your independent reading, study, research, or other approved course by the required drop/add deadline <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/registrar/student/registrationforms/>.

Repeat previous steps if you extend employment period or change employers. To prevent a break in employment eligibility, apply at least two weeks before your current CPT authorization expires. Working before or beyond the authorized dates of employment would be a violation of your student status. Also, keep your address updated by contacting Brisa Zubia, bzubia@carleton.edu or 1-507-222-7488.

Optional
Practical
Training
(OPT)

OPT Application Information and Instructions

NOTE: *Please contact Brisa with questions about any employment – paid or unpaid. Before you submit your application, please make an appointment with Brisa to discuss changes in application and immigration regulations.*

International students who have been enrolled at Carleton on a full-time basis for a full academic year (or 9 months) prior to completion of your studies or graduation may be eligible for Optional Practical Training. OPT is an extension of F-1 student status and provides temporary employment related your academic major(s). Although OPT can be utilized during your studies (referred to as pre-completion OPT), most students elect to use this employment authorization after they graduate or post-completion OPT. If doing pre-completion OPT, you must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment (unless done during school breaks).

OPT allows you to work in a position related to your major(s) for up to 12 months, but has to be completed within 14 months of program completion. You must work at least 20 hours a week part-time but no more than 40 hours a week full-time. If you previously used *full-time* CPT (Curricular Practical Training) for more than one year, you are ineligible for OPT. You may be eligible 12 months of OPT for each subsequent higher level degree completed, and you may attend school part-time during OPT.

To qualify for OPT you must maintain lawful F-1 status (full course of study, good academic standing, etc.) for an entire academic year before you apply. Unlike CPT, you do not need a job offer in order to apply. If your employer has agreed to sponsor your H-1B visa, you still need to apply for OPT as H-1B visas are not valid until Oct 1.

You should file for post-completion OPT no more than 90 days before your program end-date or graduation date and no later than 60 days after. If you will graduate early in the Fall or Winter Term, your program end-date is the last day of exams, otherwise it is the date of graduation for Spring Term. You must also submit the new, signed I-20 with your OPT application within 30 days of its issuance. Unless you are enrolled to begin graduate school in the subsequent term (or within 5 months, whichever is earlier) you must return home before the 60-day grace period ends.

It may take 3-4 months (or more) to process an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), the OPT employment card. You cannot start work until your EAD is issued. **You are strongly advised to apply for your OPT before you graduate and to remain in the U.S. while your application is pending.**

If you depart the U.S. after submitting your application but before OPT is granted or leave while you are unemployed and on OPT, you may face difficulties when you re-enter as Port of Entry Officers at airports and border crossings could refuse you entry. You should bring copies of documents that demonstrate you are actively seeking employment, your EAD application receipt notice (Form I-797) and/or written job offer. If you travel while on OPT, you should also bring a letter confirming your employment. When you travel you should have a valid passport (for at least 6 months), current visa (you can apply for a new visa during OPT but it may be difficult to prove ties to your home country), and a signed I-20 (within the last 6 months). While under F-1 status and OPT, never enter the U.S. under any other visa, including tourist, as it will invalidate your OPT application or/and EAD card.

During OPT, you should not be unemployed for more than 90 days or you will be out of status and must leave the U.S. immediately (there is no grace period). You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern related to your studies with a minimum of 20 hours a week to meet the employment requirement. You may be employed with more than one employer or volunteer organization at a time but total employment should not exceed 40 hours and all employment must relate to your studies. You may have a series of part or full-time positions (or “gigs” as an artist/performer). You may be self-employed but you should provide proof of your business registration, your active involvement in it, and how it is related to your studies. *At all times you should maintain documentation of your employment, e.g., position held/job title, proof of the duration of that position, contact information for your supervisor or manager and a description of the work.*

To maintain your F-1 status and work authorization during OPT, you must report within 10 days to Carleton the following changes:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address in U.S. and home country
- Employer name and/or address
- Any periods of unemployment
- Change in nonimmigrant status, e.g., change from F-1 to H1-B, attendance at another (graduate) school, etc.
- Departure from U.S.

You can only extend OPT under the following situations:

- 1) “H-1B Cap Gap Extension” if your employer has applied for H-1B visa and requests a change of status as part of the application, your employment is extended until Oct 1 when that visa starts. You should send Carleton a copy of your H-1B receipt or approval notice by fax or email to verify you qualify for the “Cap Gap Extension”. If your H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or revoked, employment and F-1 status ends. You have 60 days to prepare for departure, change degree level, transfer, change status, etc.
- 2) If you are a student who has received a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM), that appears on the STEM designated Degree Program List published on the SEVP website, <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>, you may be eligible for a one (1) time 17-month extension of your OPT. You must submit a copy of your transcript reflecting your major field of study. **Carleton majors that currently qualify for STEM Extension are biology, chemistry, computer science, environmental studies, geology, mathematics, physics.** In addition, the employer with whom you are seeking the 17-month OPT extension must be registered in E-Verify. Accordingly, you must list the employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in Item 17 of the Form I-765. Please refer to the Form I-765 instructions for Foreign Students, and Carleton’s Extensions of OPT for further information.

STEM Extension Requirements:

- 1) You must submit STEM extension application within 90-120 days of the first 12-month OPT period end date;
- 2) You should not travel while your STEM extension is being adjudicated or decided upon;
- 3) You cannot be unemployed more than 120 days (including the 90 days from the first 12-month period) during the 29-month period;
- 4) You must submit updated personal address and employment information every 6 months;
- 5) Employment during the 17 month STEM extension **MUST BE PAID** and all employers must be E-Verify participant;
- 6) Employment continues until a decision is made on your STEM extension application or for 180 days, whichever comes first;
- 7) Employer needs to report within 48 hours to Carleton or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) if your employment has been terminated or you departed before the end of the STEM extension period.

OPT Suggested Timeline

(For example only, your actual dates may be different than illustrated.)

90 days Before	Apply for OPT – You can apply no more than 90 days before program end date.
<p>Program End or Graduation Date March 15 or June 11, 2016 for most of you.</p>	
60 days After	<p>You have a 60-day grace period during which time you should do one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to depart the U.S. within 60 days – NO WORK or STUDY • Apply for OPT if you have not • If accepted to graduate program, have your SEVIS record transferred – releasing SEVIS record to a new school cancels OPT/EAD on the release date. • Change status to another nonimmigrant status if eligible
12 months	<p>Maximum length of your OPT & during OPT keep these numbers in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 days – maximum unemployment length (120 days maximum with STEM extension) • 10 days – MUST REPORT to the office within 10 days any of these changes: legal name, any address change, employer name, employer address and/or unemployment • 90 days before end of 12-month OPT – apply for STEM extension if you are eligible.
<p>60-day grace period (see above)</p>	
17 months	<p><i>If you qualify, apply for 17-month STEM extension 120 days before the initial 12-month OPT expires.</i></p>
<p>60 days After STEM Extension OPT Everything above except cannot apply for another OPT.</p>	

F-1 Student Non-STEM OPT Application Checklist

Please complete as much of this checklist before your appointment with Brisa and bring any questions with you.

Step	Action	Completed		
1.	Complete Carleton OPT Application Sheet – Decide on your OPT start and end dates (within 60 days of program end date or graduation).			
2.	Secure the recommendation letter from your academic adviser(s) and bring with.			
3.	<p>Complete Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, and photocopy. Available from www.uscis.gov under FORMS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will not forward mail, you are encouraged to list the office as your mailing address in Question 3: • c/o Brisa Zubia, OIIL, One N College St, Northfield, MN 55057. • Office will make a copy of OPT your employment documents and send it to you. You may list another U.S. address but that should be valid for 4+ months and you need to send the office a copy of your employment card once it is issued. • In Question 16, enter the correct Eligibility Code: • (c) (3) (A) – Pre-completion OPT; • (c) (3) (B) – Post-completion OPT; • (c) (3) (C) – 17-month STEM extension. 			
4.	<p>Gather all documents and supporting material to submit with your Form I-765. Make three (3) copies of everything except photos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$380 fee (check or Money Order payable to U.S. Dept of Homeland Security) – confirm current cost on I-765 application • 2 recent identical photographs (see instructions on the Form I-765 under Required Documentation) – You can do this at Walgreens for an estimated \$12. Write your name and I-94 number on back in pencil or lightly with a pen. • Form I-94 – photocopy both sides • Valid passport (should have more than 6 months validity remaining) – photocopy of photo page, renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc. • Visa (if applicable) – photocopy of visa page • Photocopies of all I-20s you have been issued (pages 1 & 3) • Photocopies of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (if applicable) 			
5.	Schedule an appointment with Brisa to review your application and obtain your new I-20 (new I-20 must be submitted within 30 days of its issuance).			
6.	<p>File Form I-765, new I-20 supporting documents listed in Step 4 & 5 with the appropriate USCIS Service Center. Do not file electronically.</p> <p>When filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, you may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying that your application has been accepted. You must complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145), and attach it to the first page of your application. See www.uscis.gov and Forms section.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034 </td> </tr> </table>	<u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036	<u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034	
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7.	A Receipt Notice Form I-797 (send office a copy) should be received 2-3 weeks after submission of your I-765. Use the 13-character receipt number, which starts with 3 letters such as LIN, to check your application status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do . If after 90 days you do not hear anything from USCIS, contact Carleton International Student Adviser.			