OPT

Optional Practical Training

Make the most of your work experience!

What is OPT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment approval allowing an *F-1 student* to gain experience in their major area of study

OPT can be requested for *1 full year* at *each educational level*

| F1 status + one year of full-time enrollment	
Pre-completion: part-time while attending class full-time **(less than 20 hours per week)**	Post-completion: full-time after completing Associate Degree **(20 hours or more per week)**

How does OPT work?

F-1 student considers work experience related to their academic program:

- What courses have you completed?

- What work experiences relate to your major?
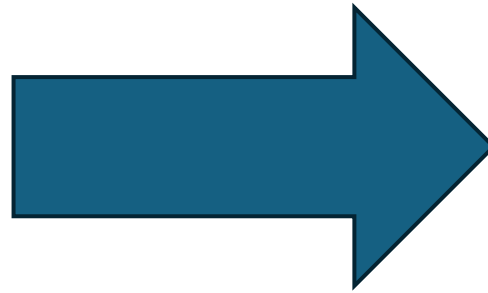
Palomar College Career Center
- Career Center

➢ Career Counselors: matching career interests with academic programs
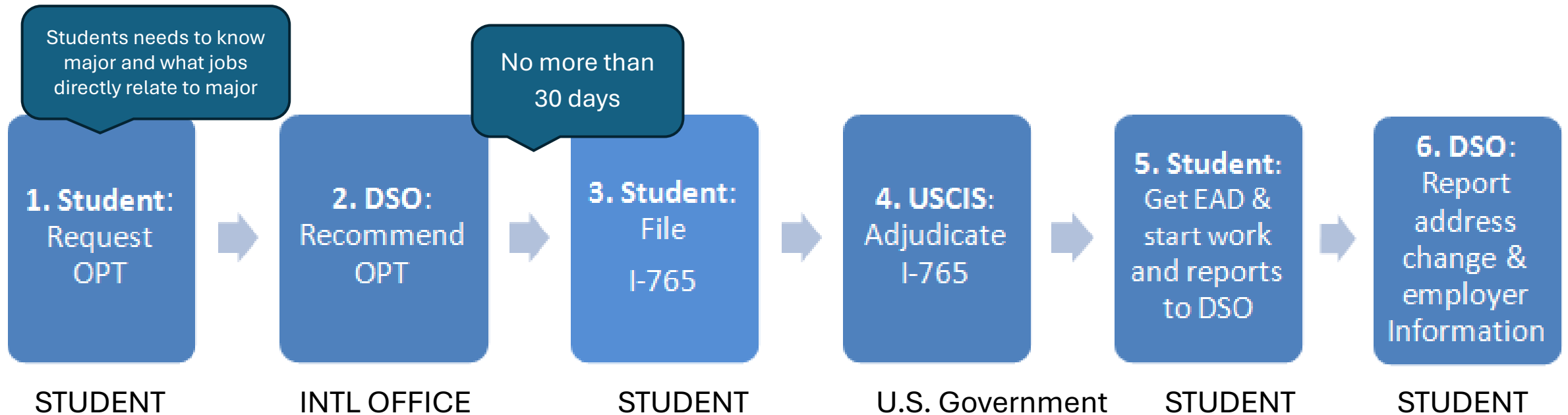➢ Resume help
➢ How to search for jobs

Talk to professors in your major

➢ What jobs are related to your program?
➢ Can they recommend an employer?

F-1 student decides when to apply for OPT

Overview of OPT Process who is responsible

Students needs to know major and what jobs directly relate to major

No more than 30 days

1. Student: Request OPT

2. DSO: Recommend OPT

3. Student: File I-765

4. USCIS: Adjudicate I-765

5. Student: Get EAD & start work and reports to DSO

6. DSO: Report address change & employer Information

STUDENT

INTL OFFICE

STUDENT

U.S. Government
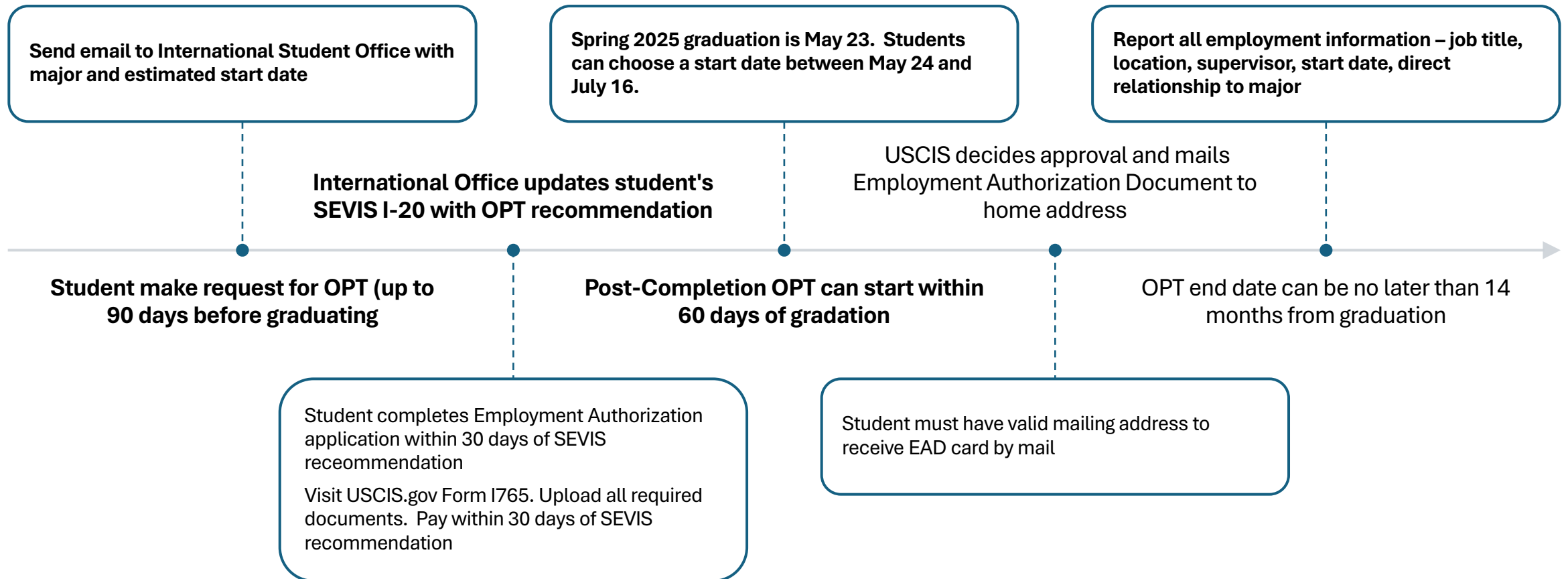
STUDENT

STUDENT

What is acceptable employment?

- **Paid employment**. A student may work part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full time.
- **Unpaid employment**. A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for a student on post-completion OPT. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student's employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

- **Multiple employers**. A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program and, for pre-completion OPT, cannot exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.

- **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists).** A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.

- **Work for hire**. This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.

- **Self-employed business owner**. A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that they have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.

- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm**. A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

ALL EMPLOYMENT DIRECTLY RELATED TO MAJOR

Post-Completion OPT Key Dates

1 Year after Full-Time Studies Begin	90 Days before Program End Date	Program End Date	60 days after Program End Date	14 Months after Program End date
• First date that F-1 OPT can be requested • **Exception:** OPT can be requested earlier, if student will complete one academic year before OPT employment begins.	• Earliest date that Form I-765 may arrive at USCIS for post-completion OPT	• Pre-Completion OPT must end no later than this date	• Last date to request post-completion OPT in SEVIS • Filing deadline for USCIS to receive Form I-765 • Latest possible requested start date for post-completion OPT	• Last possible end date for post-completion OPT

Post-Completion OPT Spring 2025

Send email to International Student Office with major and estimated start date

Spring 2025 graduation is May 23. Students can choose a start date between May 24 and July 16.

Report all employment information – job title, location, supervisor, start date, direct relationship to major

International Office updates student's SEVIS I-20 with OPT recommendation

USCIS decides approval and mails Employment Authorization Document to home address

Student make request for OPT (up to 90 days before graduating

Post-Completion OPT can start within 60 days of gradation

OPT end date can be no later than 14 months from graduation

Student completes Employment Authorization application within 30 days of SEVIS receommendation

Visit USCIS.gov Form I765. Upload all required documents. Pay within 30 days of SEVIS recommendation

Student must have valid mailing address to receive EAD card by mail

IMPORTANT!

[Training Opportunities in the United States | Study in the States](#)

- **Students remain in F-1 visa status while approved for Optional Practical Training**
- International students do not need a job to request OPT, however F-1 students must find a position paid or unpaid to remain in legal F-1 status.
- No more than 89 days of unemployment allowed for F-1 status.
- All F-1 visa requirements remain in effect
  - Report change in address, phone, email within 10 days
  - Report all employment, changes in employment, interruptions in employment within 10 days
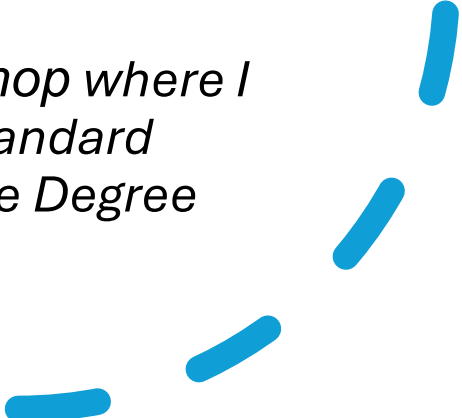
Demonstrating direct relationship between employment and academic program

Student's responsibility to report job responsibilities and relationship to academic major. Talk to employer for help.

Sample:

I work full time as a Loan Officer at a mortgage company, Happy Homes, 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 that I took as part of my major program of study.

I work full-time as a bookkeeper at a pastry shop where I enter accounts received and payable using standard accounting practices I learned in my Associate Degree Accounting courses.

Travel during OPT

See important travel information for F-1 students, including during OPT

https://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel

Can I travel while my OPT application is still pending

Yes, but traveling during this time should be undertaken with caution. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away, however, so you would want to make sure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to your DSO and on the application and would be able to send in requested documents. Also, if USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States. Like a request for further information, USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address.

Can I travel during OPT

If USCIS has approved your OPT you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States, in addition to your Form I-20, valid passport and visa, and a letter of employment if you have one. If you exceed the limits on unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status.
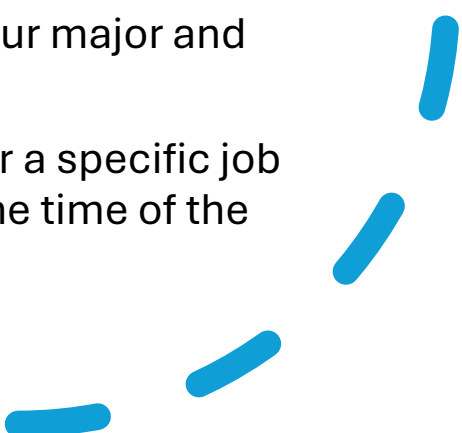
What other options do I have for work experience?

[Training Opportunities in the United States | Study in the States](#)

On Campus Jobs
- Office, department or service provided at Palomar College
- Less than 20 hours per week during semester

Curricular Practical Training
- Must have been a full-time student for one academic year and in F-1 status
- Your educational plan must include a [cooperative education course CE 100](#)
- Must enroll for a cooperative education course in your major and remain enrolled for duration of semester.
- Permission is provided by the International Office for a specific job title, a specific company, location and only during the time of the assigned course.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the International Student Office

- Room SU-103 San Marcos Campus

- Call 760-744-1150 press 9, then dial extension 2167

- Send email to internationalstudents@palomar.edu