ACADEMY of ART UNIVERSITY

FOUNDED IN SAN FRANCISCO 1929
BY ARTISTS FOR ARTISTS
AAU Post-Completion OPT Guide
We strongly encourage you to read the OPT Tutorial from START to FINISH as you are responsible to follow policies and procedures related to OPT, employment and your F1 status!
Overview

1) Understanding PC-OPT
2) Collecting your Documents
3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet
4) Mailing & Deadlines for PC-OPT Packet
5) Waiting for your Approval & EAD
6) Frequently Asked Questions
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What is PC-OPT?

• Stands for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training
• Short-term work authorization for 12 months after program completion
• Purpose is to gain job experience in your major field of study
• Employment may occur anywhere in the US
• It is a benefit of the F1 status, it is *not a separate visa type*
When is PC-OPT Available?

- PC-OPT is available once per higher degree level
  - Example 1: student completes coursework for B.F.A., is eligible
  - Example 2: student had PC-OPT following B.F.A. degree, has completed coursework for M.F.A. degree, is eligible for a second time
  - Example 3: student completed B.F.A. degree and used PC-OPT, then completed coursework for A.A. degree after B.F.A. degree, student is not eligible because the second degree is lower than the first degree
What is the Eligibility for PC-OPT?

• You must complete your academic program
• You must maintain F1 status for at least one academic year
• M.F.A. students must complete all required degree units but are not required to have completed their thesis
• A job offer is *not* required to apply for PC-OPT
• Students in the personal enrichment program (PEUG) do *not* qualify for PC-OPT
When should I apply for PC-OPT?

- Your **window of time to apply** is 90 days before to 60 days after the program completion date.
- The program completion date is the last day of class in your final semester.

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PC-OPT Application Window

- **3 months** from the program completion date
- **2 months** from the program completion date
- **90 days before**
- **60 days after**
When should I apply for PC-OPT?

- USCIS averages 90 days to process your PC-OPT Application Packet so it is best to apply as early as possible within your Application Window to avoid employment delays.
When should I apply for PC-OPT?

- Important: USCIS must receive your PC-OPT Application Packet and accept it for processing before the end of the PC-OPT Application window or you will be denied.
1) Understanding PC-OPT

How long is my PC-OPT?

- PC-OPT is for 12 months of work authorization
- However, your PC-OPT grants you 14 months of legal F1 visa status
  - 12 months work authorization
  - 2 months grace period after last day of PC-OPT

Legal F1 visa status total: 14 months
How do I maintain my PC-OPT?

- Secure employment directly related to your major
- Work a minimum of **20 hours** per week
- **Immediately report all employment and personal changes and updates to AAU**
  - [http://www.academyart.edu/aau-forms/international-admissions/opt-reporting-form](http://www.academyart.edu/aau-forms/international-admissions/opt-reporting-form)
- Keep total unemployment time under **90 calendar days**
How do I know what jobs I’m eligible for?

- Employment must be directly related to your degree program.
- If you are able to clearly explain how your major is related to your job responsibilities, you can accept the job. If you cannot, then chances are the position does not fit your major.
- Examples:
  - Degree in Interior Architecture & Design: Cannot work at Starbucks as a Barista, but can work at Starbucks designing the interior of stores.
  - Degree in Animation with focus in 3D Modeling: Can accept any form of employment directly related to Animation and Visual Effects, such as composting, texturing, etc.
What kind of jobs can I accept?

• USCIS is not concerned with your salary, so your job can be paid or unpaid

• All the following types of employment are valid:
  – Regular full-time/part-time positions
  – Internship
  – Freelance/Independent contracting
  – Project work (doesn’t include school projects or assisting a friend with a thesis project)
  – Volunteering with non-profit, church or charity organization
  – Self-employment with a valid business license
  – Employment through agency or consulting firm
What are the hours per week requirements?

• You must work at least 20 hours per week
• If you have a variable work schedule, you should average to 20 hours per week each month
• This requirement includes freelance/independent contracting and project work
• Examples:
  – 1 part time job of 20 hours per week
  – 2 part time jobs averaging 20 hours per week, both jobs must be related to your major
Unemployment during PC-OPT?

• Yes, USCIS allows you to be unemployed for up to 90 cumulative calendar days (that includes weekends) anytime throughout the 12 months of your PC-OPT.

• It is your responsibility to track your unemployment time and you should use any form of tracking system you are comfortable with.
What if I exceed 90 days unemployment during PC-OPT?

- You will be considered out of status. Therefore, you must do either of the following before the end of the 90 days:
  - Depart the US and inform the International Office
  - Apply for a change of status with USCIS
  - Maintain your F1 status by continuing your education in the US
    - At AAU and obtain a change of level I-20
    - At another school and obtain a transfer I-20
How do I report employment during PC-OPT?

- **You are required to report** all changes in employment within 10 days of their occurrence to the AAU International Office.
- You can update any changes in employment **online** by completing the **OPT Reporting Form**: http://www.academyart.edu/aau-forms/international-admissions/opt-reporting-form
- The International Office will receive an email with your new employer information and report any updates to SEVIS.
1) Understanding PC-OPT

- The International Services Office will continue to be your contact to report your OPT employment and contact information updates.
- You may also update your employer information through the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Portal, a tool that allows F aliens participating in post-completion practical training to report accurate and timely information directly to SEVP.
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2) Collecting your Documents

What documents will I need?

1. OPT I-20 (from AAU, mail photocopy only)
2. I-765 (from USCIS, mail original)
3. G-1145 (from USCIS, mail original)
4. 2 Passport Photos
5. Photocopy of 1-94
6. Photocopy of visa page
7. Photocopy of passport page
8. Photocopy of all previous I-20’s
9. Photocopy of any previous EADs
10. Personal Check, Cashiers Check or Money Order
Where do I get my PC-OPT I-20?

- Fill out the Online OPT I-20 Request Form at: [http://www.academyart.edu/aau-forms/international-admissions/opt-i-20-request-form](http://www.academyart.edu/aau-forms/international-admissions/opt-i-20-request-form)

- The AAU International Office will then generate and issue your official I-20 within three (3) business days.

- You will get a scanned version of OPT I-20 by email, a hard copy by mail. Your application can be reviewed by email.
How do I fill out the online OPT I-20 Request Form?

- Enter expected completion date, which is the last day from the semester you complete all your course requirements.
- The requested OPT start date must be within 60 days of your expected program completion date at AAU.
How do I pick my Start Date for the OPT I-20?

- The earliest you can start your PC-OPT is one day after your program completion (one day after the last day of the semester).
- The latest you can start your PC-OPT is 60 days after your program completion.
What do I look for when I receive my OPT I-20?

• Your requested employment start and end date must be indicated on the second page of your I-20. Make sure the OPT start date on your I-20 is correct.
• You must sign the first page of your OPT I-20.
• USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the day your I-20 was issued.
• After you mailed your application and submitted it to USCIS for processing, it is not possible to change your OPT start date.
ATTENTION

Be sure to sign your I-20 on the first page!
What are the passport photo requirements?

- For more detailed information go to: [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photo-composition-template.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photo-composition-template.html)
- Take your picture in front of a white background.
- Do NOT wear a white shirt.
- You shirt must be in color.
- Take picture at Walgreens or Kinkos.
What about the check/money order?

• Please use only **ONE** method of payment
• You may use **G-1450** [https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450](https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450)
• Use a money order or cashier’s check (can be purchased at banks, post offices and some grocery stores)
• Use a personal check
• Fill it out like this
• USCIS application fee is $410
2) Collecting your Documents

ATTENTION

• When using a personal check, make sure your bank account is still open and $410 are in the account!
• Please be sure to use only one form of payment.
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E-Filing: Can I file my PC-OPT online through USCIS?

- What is e-filing?
  - USCIS e-filing allows you to:
    - Create a USCIS account
    - Pay the USCIS I-765 fee online
    - Complete the I-765 form online and upload documents
    - USCIS will send all notifications to you via your online account. These include pending notices, requests for evidence, denials and approvals.
    - USCIS will also send you these notices in paper form through the mail.

- Filing online
  - Our office is not currently able to provide advising on the exact process and high levels of support in reviewing your application, since we are not able to directly access the online application.
  - If you submit the I-765 online BEFORE you receive your OPT I-20, your application will be DENIED. Don’t submit the I-765 until you have your OPT I-20.
  - If you choose to file online, please compile your complete application packet and email it toward our office for review before submitting online.
3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet

File by mail: Where do I get my Form I-765 and G-1145?

• You can download both forms on the USCIS website:  

• You can either complete both forms online and print them out or you can print them out and write in them.

• Please be sure to use the most current USCIS version of the I-765 from USCIS website directly.
How do I complete Form I-765?

- Complete this Form with black pen and write clearly.

- Your last name and first name must match your passport information.
How do I complete Form I-765?

• Put the address your EAD card should be mailed to once it has been issued. The address must be valid for 5 months. If you plan to move, use a friends or relatives address instead (c/o: John Smith)
How do I complete Form I-765?

- This is your 11-digit I-94 admission number
- This is the date you arrived in the US, not left your country
- Usually the first airport you arrived in in the US
- Usually F1 (sometimes H4, B2 or other, if you did a change of status in the US)

Information About Your Last Arrival in the United States

21.a. Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)

21.b. Passport Number of Your Most Recently Issued Passport

21.c. Travel Document Number (if any)

21.d. Country That Issued Your Passport or Travel Document

21.e. Expiration Date for Passport or Travel Document (mm/dd/yyyy)

22. Date of Your Last Arrival Into the United States, On or About (mm/dd/yyyy)

23. Place of Your Last Arrival Into the United States

Example: San Francisco

24. Immigration Status at Your Last Arrival (for example, B-2 visitor, F-1 student, or no status)

F1 Student
How do I complete Form I-765?

3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet

- This is the code for the OPT
- Do not enter anything in below number #28, it only applies to STEM applicants
How do I complete Form I-765?

If you have done any CPT/OPT/EH or had different SEVIS ID in the past, please provide the information under part 6.

- Write your name
- Write USCIS# on EAD card (if you had OPT in the past)
- Write page, part, item number
- Write previous CPT/OPT/EH information
  
  Or Previous SEVIS ID

### Part 6. Additional Information

If you need extra space to provide any additional information within this application, use the space below. If you need more space than what is provided, you may make copies of this page to complete and file with this application or attach a separate sheet of paper. Type or print your name and A-Number (if any) at the top of each sheet; indicate the Page Number, Part Number, and Item Number to which your answer refers; and sign and date each sheet.

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<td>1.a.</td>
<td>Family Name (Last Name)</td>
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<td>1.b.</td>
<td>Given Name (First Name)</td>
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<td>1.c.</td>
<td>Middle Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A-Number (if any)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.a.</td>
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<td>3.c.</td>
<td>Item Number</td>
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*Example: CPT Bachelor CPT start date / end date Company’s name*
3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet

ATTENTION

Please make sure that your signature on I-765 is a "wet" signature (print first, then hand sign), not a digital one.
How do I complete Form G-1145?

- Your name on the form must match the name in the passport

3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet

Paperwork Reduction Act

An agency may not conduct or sponsor an information collection and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated at 3 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions and completing and submitting the form. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Regulatory Coordination Division, Office of Policy and Strategy, 20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20529-2140. OMB No. 1615-0109. Do not mail your completed Form G-1145 to this address.

Complete this form and clip it on top of the first page of your immigration form(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full Last Name</th>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full First Name</th>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full Middle Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your Family (Sur) Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Your First Name</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail Address</td>
<td>Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Your email address</strong></td>
<td><strong>Your phone number</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What about the OPT I-20?

- Make sure your OPT I-20 is signed by AAU and you.
- Make sure you mail your I-20 within 30 days of the Date I-20 was issued.
- Make sure the OPT Start Date on the second (2) page is correct.
- Make a photocopy of your OPT I-20 and all previous I-20’s.
ATTENTION

USCIS must receive your OPT application within 30 days of I-20 issuance, otherwise your application will be denied!
What about my F1 visa and passport?

- Make a photocopy of your F1 visa, if applicable.
- Make a photocopy of your passport biographic page with photo.
- Your passport must be valid.
3) Preparing your PC-OPT Packet

What about my I-94?

- Your I-94 will be either:
  - 1) a white card stapled in your passport like this
  - or -
  - 2) a digital form that you can download online from the following link: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search)

Note: If you have the I-94 stapled in your passport, you must include a copy of the back and front of your I-94.
What about previous I-20’s and EAD’s?

• You must include a photocopy of all your previous I-20’s. If you no longer have all your previous I-20’s then only include the most recent ones.

• The photocopy of your PC OPT I-20.

• If you previously received CPT, you must include a photocopy of all your I-20’s with the CPT authorization.

• If you were issued an EAD before, because of previous OPT or Economic Hardship work authorization, you must include a photocopy of the back and front of your previous EAD.
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Where do I mail my documents?

• If the address on your Form I-765 is in California, mail your application to the USCIS Chicago Lockbox:
  – For Regular mail (USPS):
    • USCIS
      PO Box 805373, Chicago, IL 60680
  – For Express mail (FedEx or UPS):
    • USCIS, Attn: I-765 C03
      131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor, Chicago, IL 60603-5517

• If the address on your Form I-765 is outside California, look at this website to confirm which mailing address you should use:
  – http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses
When do I mail my documents?

• **USCIS must** receive and accept your application for processing **within 30 days** of the issuance of your OPT I-20.

• It is highly recommended to mail your application packet **as soon as possible** to avoid a denial of your application.
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How long does it take to get my EAD?

• USCIS will process your application within approximately 3-5 months.
• If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), USCIS will stop processing your application until you submitted the requested documents. Receiving an RFE will delay your application and it may take a total of 4-6 months to receive your EAD. Please come to the International Office when you receive an RFE.
5) Waiting for your Approval & EAD

What is the authorization process?

• 2-6 weeks
  – Within two-six weeks of submitting your application to USCIS, you will receive a text message and/or email with your receipt number. Receiving a receipt number confirms USCIS accepted your application for processing.

• 6-8 weeks
  – Within six-eight weeks of submitting your application to USCIS, you will receive a letter, named Notice of Action. This confirms that USCIS has the correct mailing address on file for you. Check if your name and date of birth is correct.

• 12-20 weeks
  – Within 12 -20 weeks of submitting your application to USCIS, you will receive an Approval Notice and within a few days afterwards you will receive your EAD.
What happens after I received my EAD?

• After you received your EAD, make sure your name is spelled correctly, your Date of Birth and OPT start/end date is correct.

• **If something is incorrect, contact** the AAU International Office for next step.

• If your EAD is correct, you can report your employment to AAU.
What if I do not get an email/ text message with a receipt number?

• If this is the case, you either forgot to mail Form G-1145 or your application was rejected and mailed back to the address on your Form I-765.

• **If your application packet is returned back to you**, please contact the AAU International Office to request a new Form I-20 with a new OPT recommendation. (Remember USCIS must receive your application and accept it for processing within 30 days of issuing your OPT I-20)
What if I do not receive a Notice of Action?

• If you do not receive a Notice of Action within 6 weeks of submitting your application, but you received an email/text message with your receipt number, chances are that USCIS has the incorrect mailing address on file for you.
• If this is the case, you must call the USCIS Customer Service Hotline and confirm your mailing address.
• You can call USCIS at: 1-800-375-5283
• When calling USCIS you must have your receipt number on hand.
What if I do not receive my EAD?

- If you do not receive your EAD within 12 -20 weeks of submitting your application, but you received an email/text message and approval notice, you should contact the International Office.
- It may be that there is a processing delay or your EAD was processed and mailed out, but for some reason you did not receive it.
- The International Office will work with you on the next steps.
What if I get a Request for Evidence (RFE)?

- Sometimes students will receive a blue letter, named Request for Evidence. This means that USCIS is asking for more documents. For example:
  - Updated passport pictures
  - Your signature on the I-765
  - You forgot to sign your I-20 or forgot to submit documents
  - You were previously authorized for CPT or OPT and did not submit a copy of your I-20 with the CPT or OPT authorization

- **If you receive an RFE**, please contact the International Office at AAU.
5) Waiting for your Approval & EAD

What if I move and need to change my address while my application is still pending?

- USCIS does not forward any mail.
- Before moving to your new address, you must contact USCIS and update your old address to the new one.
- You can update your address in two ways:
  - Call the Customer Service Hotline: 1-800-375-5283
  - Update your mailing address online: [http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange](http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange)
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Where can I check the status of my application?

- You can check your application status online at: https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do
- You will need your receipt number to check the status.
- Your application will remain in “initial” status for a while. Remember the authorization process and that the average processing time is 90 days. If you have approached the 90 days and your status is still “initial”, contact the International Office.
Can I travel outside the US on PC-OPT?

- Make sure to have all the necessary re-entry travel documents before your departure.
- Do not enter the US in a status other than F1, unless you are willing to give up your OPT.
- Time spent outside the US while on OPT will count towards your 90 days of unemployment, unless you are on a paid vacation, company approved leave or business trip as part of your employment.
- While OPT is a legitimate benefit of your F1 status, students who have to apply for a new F1 visa, must consider the risk of being denied and not being able to re-enter the US to continue their OPT.
## 6) Frequently Asked Questions

**Can I travel outside the US on PC-OPT?**

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<tr>
<th>Before Program Completion &amp; Before Getting EAD</th>
<th>After Program Completion &amp; Before Getting EAD</th>
<th>After Program Completion &amp; After Getting EAD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• OPT I-20 with a valid travel signature on the third page.</td>
<td>• OPT I-20 with a valid travel signature on the third page.</td>
<td>• OPT I-20 with a valid travel signature on the third page.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Valid passport – must be valid for at least 6 months into the future</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Valid F1 visa</td>
<td>• Valid F1 visa</td>
<td>• Valid F1 visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Print out of Semester Registration from your Student Self Service Account to confirm enrollment</td>
<td>• USCIS Notice of Action to confirm pending OPT application</td>
<td>• Valid EAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Letter from Employer is strongly recommended</td>
<td>• Letter from Employer or contract confirming employment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do I have to apply for a new F1 visa when on PC-OPT?

- If you are traveling outside the US and your F1 visa is expired, you must obtain a new F1 visa before your return.
- To apply for a new F1 visa, you must have the following documents:
  - Valid OPT I-20 with a travel signature that is not older than 6 months
  - Valid passport – must be valid for at least 6 months into the future
  - Valid EAD
  - Valid Letter of Employment
  - Current Financial Support Documents
  - Visa Renewal Letter from the International Office at AAU
  - Official Transcript from AAU
  - Any other documents required by the US consulate/embassy
Do I need to pay US taxes?

- You are required to file a tax return although you are not a US citizen.
- When employed, taxes are usually automatically taken out of your paycheck unless you are doing contract or freelance work or you are a self-employed business owner. In this case, no taxes will be taken out of your paycheck and you must pay taxes when filing your tax return.
- AAU does not advise on taxes, but for more detailed information, please visit:
  - http://www.academyart.edu/students/my-academy/student-resources/international-student-resources
What do I do, if I did not receive an email/text message with my receipt number, but my check was cashed?

• If your check was cashed, but you did not receive a receipt number, you should contact the International Office immediately and provide a copy of your bank account confirming that the money was taken out of your account. The International Office will work with you on the next steps.
6) Frequently Asked Questions

What are my options after PC-OPT?

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<tr>
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<th>Apply for a Change of Status with USCIS</th>
<th>Apply for 24 Months STEM Extension</th>
<th>Continue your Education</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| The day after your last day of OPT, your 60 day grace period will begin. During the grace period you will not be allowed to work, however, you may travel throughout the US and prepare your departure before your return home. | You may decide to apply for a change of status from F1 to another status with USCIS. You may do so while on OPT or during your 60 day grace period. When applying for a different status, you must ensure to be in valid F1 status. | If you completed your degree STEM qualifying major, you will be eligible for the 24 Months STEM Extension. For more qualification details, review the Info Sheet and STEM tutorial on the Int’l Student Website. | If you want to continue your studies in the US, you can do so by:  
• Obtaining a Change of Level I-20 from AAU  
• Transferring out to another school and obtaining a transfer I-20. |
What do I do to apply for a Change of Status while or after PC-OPT?

- Start by taking a look at the USCIS website: www.uscis.gov
- Consult with an immigration attorney. For referrals, contact the International Office or look at AILA: http://www.ailalawyer.com/
- Visa types most commonly used by AAU students after OPT:
  - H1B (Specialty Occupation, Employer Specific)
  - O1 (Individuals with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement, Employer Specific):
    - http://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/o-1-individuals-extraordinary-ability-or-achievement/o-1-visa-individuals-extraordinary-ability-or-achievement
  - TN (NAFTA Professionals from Canada or Mexico)
  - Permanent Residency through family or employment
    - http://www.uscis.gov/greencard
How can I request a transfer to another school during or after PC-OPT?

• Contact the International Office and submit the following documents:
  – Copy of your Acceptance Letter to your new school
  – Transfer Release Form from your new school
• The International Office will process your request within 3 business days.
• Note: The moment your SEVIS record is release to another school, your OPT will end. If you have already completed your OPT, your SEVIS record must be released before the end of the 60 day grace period.
Can I take classes while on PC-OPT?

- You can take personal enrichment classes at AAU while on PC-OPT, but you cannot take degree seeking classes.
- If you plan to pursue another degree and take degree seeking classes, you have two options:
  - Wait until the end of your OPT and receive a new I-20 to continue your studies during the 60 day grace period.
  - Discontinue your OPT and receive a new I-20 to continue your studies.
Can students engaged in OPT work remotely when appropriate and permitted by the employer?

- Students currently participating in OPT may work remotely and the employer can assess student engagement using electronic means.
Will there be an extension or suspension of the 90-day allowed period of unemployment for OPT and STEM OPT during the COVID-19 emergency?

- DHS is evaluating this issue but has not yet determined whether to implement a specific exemption for exceeding the regulatory limits for unemployment of 90 days for OPT
Due to COVID-19, what is SEVP’s advice to students who want to apply for OPT? Is there any chance that students would be able to apply for post-completion OPT from outside the United States?

- DHS is evaluating these issues and may issue additional guidance. In the meantime, since USCIS adjudicates OPT employment authorization requests, SEVP recommends reaching out to USCIS for further guidance. As of right now, you are still required to file OPT application in the US.