

## Optional Practical Training OPT FACT SHEET



### DEFINING OPT

- Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment option available to F-1 students **when the employment is directly related to the major area of study**. The OPT application process is facilitated through the student development office, but final authorization is processed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It is the **student's responsibility** to ensure that the application is submitted to USCIS before the completion of the student's program. **All forms must be submitted to USCIS prior to the student's program completion date.** Since you must have the authorization before you begin to work, be sure to apply well in advance, as the processing time at USCIS can take several weeks. No job offer is required to receive OPT authorization, but the student is expected to work or be actively seeking employment after the OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) is issued. You must document what steps you are pursuing to obtain employment. <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> is the website to find additional information. Select the tab immigration forms and then select employment.
- Effective on April 8, 2008 under the provisions of 8 CFR 214.2 (f)(10)(ii)(C) a 17-month extension to the OPT was approved for students in the (STEM) degrees – science, technology, engineering, or math.

### STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

- To be eligible for OPT a student must have maintained legal F-1 status for one full academic year.

### APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Obtain an OPT application form (available online and in the student development office).
2. Determine your employment start and end dates, your program completion dates, and obtain appropriate academic advisor's signature.
3. Submit completed OPT application documents to the DSO in student development at a **scheduled appointment time**
4. Bring with you to your appointment time the following:
  - a. Completed **OPT Application form**
  - b. Check payable to USCIS (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services); Application fee: \$340 (as of November 2007)
  - c. 2 **Passport-style photos** (color photo, full frontal view).
  - d. Form I-765 The eligibility code (c)(3)(i) will no longer be used and has been replaced with the following three codes: (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT, (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT, and (c)(3)(C) for a 17-month extension for an F-1 student who has received a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM), that appears on the STEM designated Degree Program List
  - e. Copy of I-94 card (front and back)
  - f. Copy of Passport I.D. pages(s) including expiration date
  - g. Copy of **ALL PREVIOUS I-20s**
  - h. Copy of all previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD cards)
  - i. **Documents must be submitted in the following order to USCIS Service Center**
    - i. I-765 application; filing fee (check made out to US Department of Homeland Security; copy of I-94 (Front & back); 2 identical color photographs of yourself taken within 30 days of filing your application. The photos must be passport style.; New I-20 with OPT authorization by DSO. (Check end date of program to be sure it is later than start date of EAD application).
5. The DSO will review the application with you, issue a new I-20 for OPT authorization for mailing the completed OPT application packet to Immigration (USCIS). Do not begin employment until you receive the EAD for approved OPT authorization. The EAD is a license-sized picture card that indicates the approved employment start and end dates. Employment is not permitted before the approved start date or after the approved end date. OPT is **not** contingent upon an employment offer. **Since you must have the authorization before you begin to work, be sure to apply well in advance of your completion of your degree as the current processing time at USCIS can take from 3-6 months.**
6. All students that have been approved for OPT **MUST** report any changes in employment and addresses to the DSO school official. **The DSO has to have an update from the student every 90 days to keep the student in compliance. The DSO is required to terminate any student that has not complied with the DHS law. Notification can be through email, phone or mail.**

### CHANGES TO OPT:

1. Changes to the OPT start and end dates are not easily made. Please be certain of your anticipated employment start and end dates prior to scheduling your appointment with your International Student Adviser. Changes may delay receipt of the EAD.
2. Cancellation of the OPT Application must be submitted prior to issuance of the EAD; Application fee will not be refunded.
3. Job change is possible; OPT is not related to a specific employer or place of employment. **Submit changes of address to the student development office.**
4. Reapplications are possible. If you are eligible to apply for OPT more than once (total approved time may not exceed 12 months per degree level), you must complete new OPT application forms and submit the required fee each time. **Applications cannot be accepted after academic program is completed.**

### OPT HOURS & LIMITATIONS

1. Employment on OPT must be directly related to your major area of study and commensurate with your educational level
2. If previously authorized for 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training, you will not be eligible for OPT
3. Part-time OPT is authorized for up to 20 hours per week; Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12-month limit at 50%
4. OPT may be used while school is in session, prior to course completion, provided that it does not exceed 20 hours per week
5. OPT may be used full-time only during official annual summer vacation or after all course work is completed for your degree
6. OPT after program degree completion is granted for full-time use.
7. **OPT start date must fall within 60 days of program completion** (this is not necessarily the same date as graduation day)
8. On full-time OPT, you may enroll in classes that are "incidental" to the employment. Do not begin a new degree program on OPT.

### TRAVEL AND REENTRY ON OPT

- After program completion, you should **NOT** depart the U.S. before you receive the EAD. If you travel with the EAD, you must present the following at the U.S. Port of Entry: valid I-20, valid EAD, valid visa, valid passport, and proof of employment/offer. Please note that travel signatures are valid on page 3 of the I-20 (same page as the OPT recommendation) for only 6 months while on OPT!

**OPT APPLICATION FORM**  
**Optional Practical Training**  
**International Student & Scholar Services**



**STUDENT INFORMATION**

Student ID number \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Last/Family Name (must match passport name exactly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
First/Given Name Middle

\_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Degree Level

\_\_\_\_\_  
OPT start date \_\_\_\_\_ OPT end date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date expected to complete all requirements for graduation

\_\_\_\_\_  
OPT Employer/Company Name (if known)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ yes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
OPT Employer/Company Telephone Number

If yes,

\_\_\_\_\_  
CPT start Date \_\_\_\_\_ CPT end date

\_\_\_\_\_  
OPT Employer/Company Street Address State Zip

Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
CPT start Date \_\_\_\_\_ CPT end date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Hours (full-time if known) Hours (part-time if known)

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) \_\_\_\_\_ (ID#) certify that I understand that OPT must be related to my field of study and I understand that I must apply for OPT prior to academic degree completion (graduation).  
Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**TO THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR**

To be completed and signed by the Academic Advisor or Department Head or Dean. Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment option available to F-1 students when the employment is directly related to the major area of study. The OPT application process is facilitated through the student development office, but final authorization is processed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the application is submitted to USCIS prior to graduation. All forms must be submitted and receipted at the appropriate USCIS center prior to the student's program completion date (It is best to apply at least 90 days prior to graduation but **MUST** be received by USCIS before graduation date).

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_