

## Standard Post-Completion Optional Practical Training

***Please read this entire packet!***

***You are responsible for understanding all the regulations!!***

### ***What is OPT?***

Standard Post-Completion Optional Practical Training, or “OPT”, is off-campus work authorization **in your field of study**. If granted by Immigration, the authorization is for full-time employment for a maximum of 12 months. **\*\*Please note regulations allow for an extension of OPT for an additional 24 months for students in STEM fields; see advisor.**

### ***Who can apply?***

Students who will complete their degree requirements within 90 days and have been in full time status for two consecutive semesters by the program completion date.

### ***When should I apply?***

It is **highly recommend** that apply **at least 8 weeks before your program completion**. The program completion date is the last day of your **final program requirement**, which can be the last day of the semester, the end of a summer session, or after completion of all degree requirements.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is able to receive Standard Post-completion OPT applications up to 90 days prior to the completion of a student's academic program. USCIS must have received and processed your **OPT application by the 60th day after completion of your academic program** (i.e. by the end of the grace period). Applications received after the 60th day **will not be considered**.

All Standard Post-completion OPT must be completed **within 14 months** of the program completion. This means if you apply during the post completion 60 day grace period, you will most likely lose OPT time. You must have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to begin working, and USCIS may take up to 90 days (or more) to process your application.

### ***How do I choose my OPT dates?***

Immigration allows you to begin working *up to* 60 days after the completion of your program. You must choose a start date between the day after program completion and 60 days later.

### ***What if I find a job before my card arrives?***

You may **NOT** work until you have your EAD card and are within the dates listed on that card.

### ***What if I am unemployed during my OPT?***

During the OPT period, maintaining F-1 status is dependent upon current employment. Students may not be unemployed for a total of 90 days or more during the initial OPT period. Students with 90 days or more time unemployed would be considered in violation of F-1 status.

### ***What counts as employment?***

- **Paid employment** at least 20 hours per week, including work for hire and employment through an agency. This employment may be with one or more employers.
- **Unpaid employment** at least 20 hours per week.

- **Self employment** if a student chooses to start a business. The student must be able to prove to Immigration officials that they have the proper business licenses.

***ALL Employment MUST be related to the student's degree program.***

The International Student Program (ISP) cannot provide a list of employers or types of employment for each degree. Students must be able to prove their job is related to their degree, if asked by Immigration.

***While I am on OPT do I have to inform ISP that I am employed or have moved?***

Yes, all students on OPT are required to report any change in name or address, their employer's name and address, and any breaks in employment to ISP. *Changes must be reported within 10 days. Email changes to ISP.*

***What if I would like to travel after I have applied for OPT?***

We strongly recommend that you travel outside of the US only if you have a job in the US to which you will return. Your EAD card states that it is not valid for entry to the US. This means that the EAD card alone is not enough to enter the country, you need all immigration documents. You are recommended to bring a copy of a pay check and a letter from your employer as evidence that you are engaging in practical training. *If you chose to travel, you are required to obtain a travel signature on page 2 of your I-20 every 12 months.*

***I am ready to apply for OPT, what do I do?***

Set an appointment with an ISP adviser. We will help you to begin the process and create a new I-20 for you. Once you have the needed documentation and photos, we will assist you in completing the online application.

***Items needed to apply for OPT:***

1. **Unofficial transcript:** Getting your unofficial transcript is convenient and free. The [One Stop has details outlined](#) as to how to download your transcripts.
2. **A Payment of \$410.00:** an e-check, or debit card, or credit card are all accepted.
3. **A passport style photograph:** Photos must be taken within the last 30 days and cannot have previously been used for a passport, visa, or other US government-related application. [See Department of State's guidelines.](#)
4. **Form I-94** Record; [obtained online.](#)
5. **New I-20** with OPT notation by ISP adviser and signed by DSO and student.
6. **Copies of:**
  - a. **Visa**
  - b. **Passport**
7. For students who have had either Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or OPT previously, you need to include **evidence documenting your previous CPT and/or OPT authorization.** This could include previously issued EAD for OPT or an I-20 that lists CPT or OPT authorization.

It is best to have digital versions of all required documents ready in a folder to drag and drop into the USCIS system. Make sure the files are clear and readable, not encrypted or passport-protected, in English, and in one of the following accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF.