OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
FOR F-1 STUDENTS
IMPORTANT TERMS

- **DSO**: Designated School Official – OU International Student Advisor
- **USCIS**: US Citizenship and Immigration Services
- **OPT**: Optional Practical Training
- **EAD**: Employment Authorization Document (card)
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

DEFINITION

- Temporary employment authorization granted by USCIS for practical training that is directly related to the student’s major area of study.
- OPT can be taken during annual summer vacation, part-time during regular school session, after completion of course requirements or after completion of course of study.
# OPT FACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preconditions</th>
<th>Enrolled fulltime for one academic year (fall and spring semesters)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>All OPT must be approved before work begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Must be directly related to a major indicated on the I-20. It is the student’s responsibility to verify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>The equivalent to 12 months of fulltime employment possible initially, additional 17 month extension possible for STEM graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>A student does not need to obtain employment before making application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Types of OPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Completion OPT</th>
<th>Post-Completion OPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>Must maintain fulltime enrollment during employment (unless OPT is during the summer)</td>
<td>No enrollment requirement during OPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hours per week</strong></td>
<td>Must be part time during the fall/spring semesters</td>
<td>After degree completion all OPT employment must be full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be fulltime during the summer break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>Time of pre-completion OPT used deducts from the amount of time that can be applied for in Post Completion OPT (part time employment deducts from Post completion at 50%)</td>
<td>The equivalent of 12 months of fulltime employment initially, with the option to apply for a 17 month extension for STEM graduates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# OPT Eligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Completion</th>
<th>Post-Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As full-time, pre-completion OPT (20+ hours/week) during summer vacation</td>
<td>In final semester of degree program (undergraduates: last day of semester; graduate students: defense date, or last day of semester in which defense took place)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As part-time, pre-completion OPT in fall or spring semesters (20 hours or less per week). Minimum enrollment requirements apply!</td>
<td>In final semester that you complete all course requirements for the degree, excluding research hours (I-20 cannot be extended if degree is not completed by the end of the OPT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POST COMPLETION OPT: WHEN TO APPLY

- We recommend that you apply for post-completion OPT before you graduate – beginning 90 days prior to degree completion.
- You can apply for post-completion OPT up to 60 days after graduation.
  - Applying for OPT after graduation may cause you to lose weeks of work authorization. USCIS processing takes 90–100 days.
**POST-COMPLETION OPT — DETERMINE YOUR START DATE!**

- Post-completion OPT must begin *after* your degree completion date.
- *Last possible date to start OPT*: 60 days after degree completion
- Indicate your preferred OPT start date in the online OPT I-20 Request form on the ISS website.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

If you choose a completion date that is mid-semester or NOT the end of the regular semester:

- You must not continue any employment, paid or unpaid, on campus after your completion date.
- You may no longer be eligible for tuition waiver as of your completion date.
- You may be required to pay back your tuition waiver.
- You will not be eligible for on-campus employment after that date.
- You will not be eligible to continue graduate assistant appointments after that date.

The only way to avoid these complications is to SELECT THE PROGRAM COMPLETION DATE THAT IS THE END OF THE SEMESTER.
WHAT ARE THE OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS?

- Student must report US employer work address and personal address to OU ISS
- Student must report start and end dates of any period of unemployment to OU ISS
- Information is reported in SEVIS by OU ISS
- 90+ days of unemployment = F-1 status violation
- US employer must report to OU ISS the departure of F-1 student within 48 hours
- Student must report employment and address changes by filling out the OPT Employment and Address Report form on the ISS website
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
FAQ 1
DO I NEED TO OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT BEFORE APPLYING FOR OPT?

No.

- A student does not need to obtain employment before making application for OPT
FAQ 2

CAN I WITHDRAW OR CHANGE MY OPT APPLICATION?

_Maybe._

- It is difficult to change start date of the OPT application after submission.
- Cannot cancel OPT once EAD card is in production.
- If you choose to withdraw your OPT application, your I-20 must be extended to a new program completion date.
- Can take months to resolve on-campus employment and status issues.
- Must pay USCIS OPT application fee again if you reapply later.
- **Due to F-1 status issues and cost to student, we urge students to choose a firm degree completion date and OPT start date.**
FAQ 3
CAN I STUDY WHILE ON OPT?

YES, if...

- Remaining requirements, such as a thesis or dissertation, for a current degree program
- A required course that you were unable to take in your final semester of your degree program
- If not related to degree on OPT I-20, the study must be part time.
FAQ 4
CAN I CHANGE EMPLOYERS DURING OPT?

Yes.

- ALL employment must be directly related to the field of study on the I-20
- Routinely report your work address to OU ISS.
FAQ 5
CAN I TRAVEL OUT OF THE US WHILE ON OPT?

Yes.

- OPT = F-1 Status
- Return from travel abroad with:
  - I-20 signed for travel by OU DSO
  - EAD card
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - employment confirmation letter
FAQ 6
DO I GET A GRACE PERIOD AFTER I COMPLETE OPT?

Yes.

- 60-day grace period following the completion date of OPT.

- During your grace period you need to either; Change immigration status, obtain an I-20 for a new degree program, or depart the US.

- You are NOT work-authorized during the grace period.
FAQ 7
CAN I GET MORE OPT AT A LATER DATE?

Yes ... maybe.

- 12 full months of full-time OPT per degree; subsequent degrees must be at higher degree level.

- Certain STEM graduates may qualify for an 17 additional months of authorization.

- F-1 students with H-1B receipt notice or approval notice may apply for an extension to October 1.
FAQ 8
DO I HAVE TO HOLD A JOB DURING THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF MY OPT?

No.

- The Federal Regulations allow for up to 90 days of unemployment.
- This is a cumulative amount and can be accrued at any point during the period of OPT.
- Please make sure that you update the OU ISS office anytime you start or finish a period of unemployment.
STEP 1

FILL OUT THE OPT I-20 REQUEST FORM ON THE ISS WEBSITE

Once you receive your I-20 from the ISS office.....
STEP 2
MAIL YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS

In your application, include the following......
When you mail your application to USCIS you must include:

✓ Completed I-765 form
✓ I-20 (copy)
✓ Passport (copy)
✓ Visa (copy)
✓ I-94 record
✓ 2 passport photos
✓ Check or Money Order for 380.00 payable to Department of Homeland Security
✓ If Applicable, Prior EAD (copy)

***IN ORDER TO APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING YOU MUST MAIL YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS FOR PROCESSING.

***ISS DOES NOT MAIL THIS APPLICATION ON YOUR BEHALF
NOTES ON OPT APPLICATION PROCEDURE

- US mail will NOT forward immigration documents or USCIS receipt notice
- With your receipt number you can track your application status on www.uscis.gov
- DO NOT begin employment until you have the EAD and the start date is current (pre-completion and post-completion OPT)
- OPT employment authorization is strictly regulated under US federal immigration law.
- Working before the OPT start date on your EAD is a serious visa violation and can result in a loss of status.
F-1 TO H-1B STATUS
KEY CONCEPTS:

F-1
- OPT = F-1 status

H-1B
- For-profit US employers can submit H-1B petitions starting April 1
- Approved H-1Bs with for-profit employers have a start date of October 1

“Cap gap”
- Request cap gap extension of OPT from OU ISS as soon as you have H-1B receipt notice!
- Cap gap extension extends work authorization to Sept. 30

There is an OU fee of $100 for OPT “cap gap” extensions and $150 for OPT STEM extensions. This fee is for the maintenance of your SEVIS record while on the OPT STEM extension.
WHAT IS THE “CAP GAP”?  

- H-1B visa = most common employment-based visa in the US  
- 65,000 new H-1Bs available each year (the “cap”) – limited by US Congress  
- For-profit companies can submit H-1B visa applications starting April 1 each year  
- Non-profit companies are not subject to the H-1B cap (hospitals, universities, etc.). Can submit H-1B petitions at any time.  
- H-1B visas begin on October 1 (for-profit companies; start of federal fiscal year)  
- OPT frequently ends before October 1, creating a “gap” in the work authorization and visa status  
- The H-1B “cap gap” is now eliminated by extending OPT employment and status for those who are beneficiaries of an H-1B petition with an October 1 start date
TRANSITION FROM [F-1 STUDENT] TO [H-1B EMPLOYEE] – TYPICAL TIMELINE

- F-1 student graduates! 9 May 2017
- OPT starts 10 Jul 2017
- Student wows employer with performance!
- H-1B petition submitted 1 Apr 2018
- H-1B receipt notice issued 3 Jun 2018
- Cap gap extension of OPT: 9 July 2018 to 30 Sep 2018
- 10 Jun 2018 – student contacts OU ISS for cap gap extension
- Initial OPT ends 8 July 2018
- H-1B starts 1 Oct 2018
- H-1B status
- F-1 status
STEM DEGREES

12-month limit on OPT extended by 17 months, for a total of 29 months for certain students who have completed STEM degrees in the US ONLY.

**STEM Fields include:**

- Actuarial Science
- Computer Science Applications
- Engineering, including Chemical Engineering
- Engineering Technologies
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences
- Mathematics and Statistics
- Military Technologies
- Physical Sciences
- Science Technologies
- Medical Scientist (MS, PhD)

Many fields are not included in the STEM list, including Business, Architecture, Human Relations, and Fine Arts.

Students are eligible to apply for the 17-month STEM extension 120 days prior to their EAD expiration date.

Go to [www.ou.edu/cis/iss](http://www.ou.edu/cis/iss) for complete information and application materials.

Limit of 120 days of unemployment during 29-month OPT period.
YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE OPT WORKSHOP!

PLEASE PROCEED TO THE OPT QUIZ

Please contact the OU ISS office if you have any further questions.