OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) INFORMATION

Definition
Optional Practical Training (OPT) offers F-1 students an opportunity for temporary employment (up to 12 months; with the possibility of an additional 17-month extension for students in STEM disciplines) directly related to their **Major** area of study (employment cannot be related to a Minor).

Eligibility
Students become eligible after they have maintained their F-1 status for at least one academic year **prior** to applying by enrolling full-time each semester and possessing a valid I-20. Approved full-time study abroad may also be counted toward the required two semesters, as long as the student completed at least one semester in the U.S. prior to studying abroad.

Time Permitted on OPT
A maximum of 12 months of full-time OPT per degree level may be granted. Students become eligible for an additional 12 months **with each higher degree level**. If a student participates in 12 months (365 days) of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), they lose the opportunity to pursue OPT in that degree program. OPT must be completed within 14 months of the program end date (unless the student is granted a 17-month STEM extension).

Applying for OPT
Eligible students should plan to apply for OPT prior to the Program End Date listed on their I-20, or the date they complete their program – whichever comes first. Processing an OPT application can take USCIS **up to 90 days**, or more. Eligible students should compile a complete OPT Application Packet and submit it to their advisor in ISAS who will review the packet for completeness and issue an **OPT-Authorizing I-20** to the student. A copy of this new I-20 **must** be included in the OPT Application Packet or USCIS will deny the application.

❖ To get an OPT I-20, you must present the following to your International Student Advisor in ISAS:
- The completed Form G-1145 (www.uscis.gov/g-1145)
- The completed Form I-765 (www.uscis.gov/i-765)
  - Type directly into the form, or print legibly in all capital letters in **BLACK** ink
  - Check the box for "Permission to accept employment" in the "I am applying for" *Part* of the form
  - Answer all questions accurately and fully
    - If an *Item* if not applicable, enter "N/A"
    - If the answer is none, write "None"
  - **Item 16** of I-765 should read: **(c) (3) (B)**
  - Verify that the Certification Signature is **below** the line: it must be imaged for the EAD card
- Check or money order for **$380.00** made payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**
  - You **must** spell out U.S. Department of Homeland Security in its entirety; do NOT use the initials "USDHS" or "DHS"
  - Confirm the required fee, which is regularly updated, at http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/index.htm
- Two passport type photos (http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html)
  - It is recommended that these go in a plastic sheath such as a Ziploc sandwich bag and that you print your name on the back of each photo. However, do not staple through the photos
- Copy of the front and back of any previously issued EAD card(s) (*if applicable*)
  - You might have one of these for OPT from a previous degree level, an *Economic Hardship* work permit, etc…
- Copies of pages 1 & 3 (**pre**-June 26, 2015) and/or pages 1 & 2 (**post**-June 26, 2015) of **ALL** CPT-authorizing I-20s (*if applicable*)
  - If you do not have all of their CPT authorizing I-20s, you may request a full list, signed by the DSO, of all CPTs which should include: educational level, dates of CPT authorization(s), description of employment, and part-time/full-time authorization(s)
- Print-out of your I-94 Admission Record
- Copy of your most recent visa used to enter the U.S.
- Copy of the biographical page of your passport

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- ➢ **ISAS will not issue an OPT Authorizing I-20 until a _complete_ application packet is submitted.**
  - ❖ You **must** have an OPT-Authorizing I-20 in order to apply for OPT. If you try to apply for OPT on your own and apply for OPT without an OPT I-20 from ISAS, USCIS will deny your OPT application.

  - ❖ When you receive your new, OPT Authorizing I-20, make photocopies of pages 1 & 2 to include in your OPT Application Packet. Also, be sure to make a photocopy of the entire application packet to keep for your personal records.

- ➢ Documents should be submitted **_in the following order_** to USCIS:
  - Check or money order for **$380.00** made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
  - Two passport type photos
  - Completed G-1145 (**original**)
  - Completed I-765 (**original**)
  - **Copy** of pages 1 & 2 of the new, OPT Authorizing I-20
    - o **(Keep the original I-20)**
  - Copies of pages 1 & 3 (**pre**-June 26, 2015) and/or pages 1 & 2 (**post**-June 26, 2015) of **all** CPT I-20s
    - o In lieu of this, a full list, signed by the DSO, of all CPTs **_may_** be submitted. The list should include: educational level, dates of CPT authorization(s), description of employment, and part-time/full-time authorization(s).
  - Print-out of your I-94 Admission Record
  - Copy of your most recent visa used to enter the U.S.
  - Copy of the biographical page of your passport

  ❖ **You should send these items to the following address (if you reside in Missouri or Kansas)** ❖

If mailing via the **U.S. Postal Service (USPS)**:
(certified return receipt **highly** recommended)

USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

If shipping via **Courier Service**:
(FedEx, UPS, DHL, etc...)

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

After your application is submitted:
Within one month of receiving the application materials noted above, you should receive a receipt notice (I-797) from USCIS that includes a receipt number (it should begin with the letters 'LIN'). This number is critical for correspondence purposes if problems arise regarding the application. A receipt number is required to check the status of your application online at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do.

Important points to note:
- o You may **not** begin employment until the Start Date indicated on your EAD.
- o You are limited to _no more than_ **90 days** of unemployment during your authorized OPT period.
- o You are responsible for notifying ISAS of any change in personal information (name, address, permanent email, etc…), **and** for reporting your employment information to ISAS.
  - a. You will continue to accrue unemployment until you report your employment information to ISAS.
  - b. Failure to report your employment information to ISAS in a timely manner could jeopardize your OPT authorization and result in DHS's _Cancellation_ of your OPT authorization.
- o If you transfer to another school or begin studying at another educational level, the OPT authorization to work is automatically and **immediately** terminated.