F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)

GENERAL INFORMATION
WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?
OPT is employment authorization designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain practical experience in your field of study; complementing your academic work. While on OPT you remain in F-1 status and need to comply with F-1 regulations. OPT is authorized by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). The USCIS issues the Employment Authorization Document (EAD), which is the official approval of OPT.

AM I ELIGIBLE FOR OPT?
F-1 students who have been full-time enrolled for one full academic year and who are in good standing may apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for OPT work authorization. A job offer is NOT required at the time of application.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF OPT? WHEN CAN I USE THEM?
Pre-Completion OPT:
- During annual vacations, provided you are eligible and will register for the next semester
- While school is in session, provided your employment does not exceed 20 hours per week

Post-Completion OPT (standard):
- After completion of course requirements, excluding a thesis/dissertation or final project
- After completion of all academic program requirements

HOW MUCH OPT CAN I APPLY FOR?
F-1 students may be authorized for up to 12 months of standard OPT per each higher educational level (e.g. from a Bachelor’s to Master's). Any pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the total OPT available for that degree level. Part-time OPT is deducted at ½ rate (i.e. 6 months of part-time OPT = 3 months deducted from the total 12 months).

HOW MANY HOURS MAY I WORK?
Pre-completion
During academic semesters
- Limited to part-time (20 hours per week or fewer)
During semester breaks
- Part-time or full-time (more than 20 hours per week) allowed

PhD candidates only: After completion of required coursework
- Graduate students who have completed all course requirements and are engaged in thesis/dissertation preparation are eligible to apply for full-time (more than 20 hours per week) OPT during the academic year only if the training constitutes an integral part of their thesis/dissertation research.

Post-Completion
Any post-completion OPT authorization (including approved STEM extensions) is automatically issued for full-time (more than 20 hours per week) employment.

WHAT TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT CAN I DO DURING OPT?
ALL employment while on OPT must be directly related to your academic field of study and appropriate for someone with your level of education.

If you had a change of degree level (e.g. Ph.D. to MS) or your current academic concentration is not yet reflected on your I-20, this information must be updated prior to applying for OPT. Undergraduate students must have declared an academic concentration before OPT can be requested.
HOW MANY DAYS CAN I BE UNEMPLOYED WHILE ON OPT?
Once approved for Post-Completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment.

- **Post-Completion OPT** – You **may not** accrue more than 90 days of unemployment during the OPT period authorized on the EAD card. A legitimate volunteer position (in accordance with U.S. Department of Labor regulations) qualifies as a substitute for paid employment during Post-Completion OPT.

CAN I CHANGE MY EMPLOYER WHILE ON OPT?
While on OPT, you are permitted to have multiple employers and to change employers provided each new job is directly related to your academic field of study and commensurate with your level of education. You are required to keep record (employer name, dates, & location) of all employment while on OPT.

DO I NEED TO CONTACT OISSS WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT?
Yes, while on OPT, you are **required** to report to OISSS any change in residential address, employer name/address, dates of employment or periods of unemployment and change of immigration status within 10 days of that change. You may be working on the other side of the country, but your immigration status is still managed by Brown University’s OISSS. Please utilize the OPT Employer and Address Update Form. [http://brown.edu/Administration/OISSS/students/OPTEmploymentUpdate.html](http://brown.edu/Administration/OISSS/students/OPTEmploymentUpdate.html)

CAN I TRAVEL WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT?
If you travel outside the U.S. after completion of studies, **you must re-enter in F-1 status; otherwise your OPT authorization will end**. Students engaged in Post-Completion OPT must present to the inspecting officer at the U.S. port of entry:

- Form I-20, endorsed for travel by an OISSS Advisor within the last six months;
- Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD);
- Valid F-1 visa (unless Canadian or eligible for automatic revalidation of an expired visa); and
- Letter from your employer with either a job offer or confirmation of current employment (if returning to the U.S. after the employment start date listed on the EAD).

**Students who do not meet these requirements may be denied re-entry into the U.S. You are encouraged to consult with an OISSS advisor prior to any travel outside the U.S. during OPT.**

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHANGE MY IMMIGRATION STATUS, LEAVE THE U.S. PERMANENTLY, OR START A NEW FULL-TIME ACADEMIC PROGRAM?
You **MUST** inform OISSS as soon as possible of any changes in your status, so that your F-1 record can be appropriately updated.

- **Change of immigration status**: If approved for a change of immigration status (i.e. F-1 to H-1B) your F-1 status and OPT will end upon the start date of the new immigration status.
- **Leave the U.S. permanently**: If you decide to leave the U.S. for longer than 5 months, your post-completion OPT is no longer valid.
- **Start new full-time academic program**: If you are admitted into a new full-time academic program, your SEVIS record must be updated with the new program’s information or transferred to your new school. Your OPT is officially ended when the SEVIS record is updated.
APPLYING FOR OPT

WHY IS MY COMPLETION DATE IMPORTANT?
When applying for post-completion OPT both application deadlines and employment start dates will depend on the date you complete your academic program.

Undergraduate students or graduate students without a thesis/dissertation – Completion date is last day of semester

Graduate Students with thesis/dissertation requirements – Completion date is the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, **not** the date you participate in graduation ceremonies or receive a diploma.

End date (completion of program) - Regardless of the program end date on your I-20, your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date you complete all degree requirements. You are expected to have left the country by then, **unless you have timely filed an application for OPT** or have made other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S. (e.g. change immigration status, begin new academic program)

CAN I CANCEL MY OPT ONCE IT HAS BEEN APPROVED?
Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted by USCIS, it cannot be rescinded or canceled.

WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION DEADLINES AND PROCESSING TIMES?
You are strongly advised to submit your OPT application to USCIS 90 days prior to your expected employment begin date (for Pre-Completion OPT) or program completion date (Post-Completion OPT). The OPT application process can take up to 3 months.

Please contact the OISSS well in advance of your program completion date so that an advisor can determine if you meet OPT eligibility requirements. Although not advisable due to the lengthy application processing time, you may submit your application for post-completion OPT up to 60 days following the completion of your academic program. **You must be in the U.S. at the time you submit your application to USCIS.**

AFTER APPLICATION IS MAILED

NOTICE OF ACTION – RECEIPT NOTICE
The Notice of Action (receipt notice) will be mailed to the address you indicated on Form I-765. This receipt notice indicates the date your application was received by USCIS and receipt # that can be used to track the status of your application online (https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp). Keep the receipt notice and refer to receipt # for any future communication with USCIS about your application.

If you have not received your paper receipt within 3 weeks from the date you sent the application, contact OISSS immediately. Applicants who anticipate changing addresses should note that USCIS mail will not be forwarded by the Postal Service. Please update OISSS and USCIS (www.uscis.gov) with any address changes.

APPROVAL NOTICE AND EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT (EAD)
The evidence that you have been approved for OPT is the **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**, a laminated card with your photo and employment authorization begin and end dates.

**Please provide OISSS with a copy of your EAD once you have received it.**

You should receive the approval notice and EAD card within 90 days (normal processing time) of the receipt date listed on the receipt notice. If you have not received the EAD card within the normal processing time, contact OISSS immediately.

WHEN CAN I START WORKING?
You may not begin employment until all three of the following requirements are satisfied:
- You have obtained an EAD from the USCIS;
- The date of your authorized employment period has begun (see dates on your EAD card); and
- You have completed all course requirements for your program of study (Post-Completion OPT only)
OPT (PRE & POST) APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. ATTEND OPT WORKSHOP – Please attend an OPT workshop (offered twice each semester). Visit the OISSS website for further information.

2. READ THIS DOCUMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY BEFORE MAKING AN APPOINTMENT

3. MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR OPT CONSULTATION WITH OISSS ADVISOR
   Bring the following documents to your consultation:
   • OISSS OPT Request Form – complete all fields. OPT REQUEST FORM NEEDS TO BE TYPED.  
     http://brown.edu/Administration/OISSS/students/docs/OPTRequestForm.pdf
   • Completed Form I-765 (I-765 NEEDS TO BE TYPED, Sign in blue ink):
     • In question #16 enter the code appropriate to the OPT you are applying for:
       Pre-Completion: (c) (3) (A)
       Post-Completion: (c) (3) (B)
   • Graduate students only: a memo from your department chair or graduate advisor confirming completion of degree requirement with a specific estimated completion date (mm/dd/yy)
   • Copy of current Form I-20
   • Copy of valid passport biographical page
   • Copy of I-94 card (front and back) OR I-94 printout (www.cbp.gov/i94)

4. PICK UP NEW I-20 - Upon the fulfillment of all application requirements, OISSS will issue a new Form I-20 with a recommendation for OPT on page 3. Please allow 5 business days for processing.

5. MAIL OPT APPLICATION - Mail to the USCIS Lockbox facility having jurisdiction over the address listed on the I-765. For Rhode Island addresses this will be the Texas facility (if your address is outside Rhode Island, contact OISSS for correct mailing address):
   U.S. Postal Service, Certified or Express Mail
   Courier deliveries (i.e. FedEx, UPS, DHL):
   Deliveries: USCIS
   USCIS
   PO Box 660867
   Dallas, TX 75266
   PO Box 660867
   Dallas, TX 75266

   E-Notification of application being received by USCIS: Request e-mail and/or text message confirmation of receipt of your OPT application at the USCIS Lockbox facility by completing Form G-1145 (access online: http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) and clipping it to the first page of your application.

Checklist of Documents to be Included in Your OPT Application:
   □ Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional, see above paragraph)
   □ Completed original Form I-765
   □ Two passport-style photographs taken within 30 days with name and SEVIS ID number written lightly on the back of each photo (SEVIS ID# is above the barcode on your I-20). See photo guidelines online: http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/photocomptemplate/photocomptemplate_5330.html
   □ Personal check for $380.00 payable to “Department of Homeland Security”
   □ Copy of the Form I-20 with OPT recommendation (will be generated by an OISSS advisor)
   □ Copies of all previously issued I-20s (pages 1 and 3 only)
   □ Copy of the passport biographical page(s) showing the passport expiration date
   □ Copy of I-94 card (front and back) OR I-94 printout (www.cbp.gov/i94)
   □ Copy of F-1 visa stamp
   □ Copy of EAD(s) (front and back) if previously authorized for OPT

**Your application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the OISSS advisor’s recommendation date.
Send the application via traceable mail – USPS certified mail-return receipt requested or courier (e.g. Fed Ex, UPS, DHL). Keep copies of all documents you send to USCIS.

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