

Instructions for F-1 Optional Practical Training

Office of International Students and Scholars Eastern Illinois University

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work in your major field. OPT is authorized by the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level plus a possible H1B cap gap extension OR a 24 month extension for those whose STEM majors are listed on the official OPT Stem list. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you graduate. You may apply for POST-graduation OPT no earlier than 90 days before your graduation date and the immigration service MUST RECEIVE your application NO LATER THAN 60 days beyond your program end date.

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) been maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

In the following cases, you may apply for OPT.

- During your annual vacation period or when school is not in session*
- During the fall or spring semesters, for a maximum cumulative employment total of 20 hours per week*
- After completion of graduate course work, but prior to deposit of thesis or dissertation*
- After completion of your program of study.

*You must be registered, or intend to register, in the same program after your OPT experience.

Step One: Bring the following documents to your Designated School Official (DSO). Make sure you have them ready to hand over, do not wait until you are at the office to get your documents in order, and please, no staples. **DO NOT submit to OISS more than 90 days prior to your program end date! USCIS will deny your application.**

- Completed Form I-765. Instructions and form are available for download from the USCIS website at <http://www.uscis.gov> (Under the Forms tab)
- Passport, visa, and I-94
- Certification of Academic Department Official for OPT form signed by your academic advisor/graduate coordinator. (This form is for OISS only, you will not receive it back.)

If determined you are eligible for OPT, the DSO will enter a recommendation for OPT into SEVIS and create a new I-20 for you. You will be notified by email when your new I-20 is ready.

Step Two: Mail your application to one of the addresses below. **USCIS must receive your request within 30 days of the DSO Signature on your I-20.**

USCIS Phoenix Lockbox

For U.S Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:

USCIS
PO BOX 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For express mail and courier deliveries:

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

- Personal check, cashier's check, or money order made out to Department of Homeland Security.
- Two photographs. (Place photos in a clear ziploc bag.)
- Original form I-765
- Photocopy of SEVIS I-20 recommending OPT, and photocopies of any prior I-20(s) or other immigration documents showing another nonimmigrant status, including I-20's from other institutions.
- Photocopy of I-94
- Photocopy of identity page and US entry visa page from your passport, including passport expiration date
- Photocopy of your last Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and I-797 Notice of Action (if applicable)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING OUT FORM I-765

- **Part 1 Reason For Applying:** Check “initial permission to accept employment” or “renewal” if you are applying for a 24 month extension

- **Part 2 Your US Mailings Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 3 ½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address, the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the card is sent to an address you use, your card will be returned to the immigration service and destroyed. If you want to use a friend’s address, make sure your name is on the mailbox.

- **Other Information #8 Alien Registration Number:** In most cases you will use your I-94 number found on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport). It is usually an 11 digit number- sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.

- **#27 Eligibility Categories:** For post-completion (after graduating) OPT, fill out as (C) (3) (B)

- Remember to **sign and date** the I-765.

REMINDERS: REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON OPT

Required updates (Address/Phone/Email and Employment). Immigration regulations REQUIRE that while you are on OPT, you **MUST** notify OISS within 10 days when:

- You start a new job
- You change your address, phone, or email
- You are NOT employed

Updates can be made by filling out the OPT Report Form on our website at:

<http://www.eiu.edu/interntl/machform/view.php?id=7ON>

TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON OPT:

In order to re-enter the U.S. while you are on OPT, you must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the EAD or the receipt notice for your OPT application, and your job offer letter. We strongly advise against traveling abroad while your OPT is pending.

NEVER enter the U.S. in any visa status other than F-1 while on OPT (it will invalidate your OPT!)

Certification of Academic Department Official for Optional Practical Training

This form provides OISS with information when a student in F-1 student status is seeking a period of employment authorization for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Please complete this form and return it to the student. F-1 regulations permit a student to apply for OPT during one of the following times: while school is in session for up to 20 hours per week; during vacation periods, after completion of graduate course work but before deposit of thesis or dissertation; or after completion of studies.

Student Name _____

Major Field _____

.....
Name of Academic Advisor/ Graduate Coordinator _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please complete the appropriate section (A or B):

- A. Complete this section if the student is applying for work permission to begin prior to completion of studies:**

This student has completed all required course work for a graduate program, and is working on thesis: _____ (Yes) _____ (NO). The student will complete all degree requirements by the following date: _____

- B. Complete this section if the student is applying for work permission to begin after completion of studies:**

The student has completed/ will complete all degree requirements by the following date:

Important: students may not work on campus after the date of completion of studies noted on the practical training application form. Those with assistantships may use the final day of their appointment as a completion date for studies.

I certify the above information to be true and correct.

Advisor/Coordinator Signature

Date

OPT Start Date: _____

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR ACTIVE OPT

In order to maintain legal F-1 status while on OPT you are **required** to report the following changes **with 10 days:**

- Your legal name
- Your residential or mailing address
- Your phone number
- Your email address
- Change in employer
- You become unemployed

Changes in personal/contact information are to be submitted via the Change of Address form. Employment changes are to be submitted via the OPT Report Form. Both forms are on our website under Forms and Documents.

Employment letters need to include:

- Employment start date
- Job title and duties (MUST be related to your field of study)
- Full or part time
- Signature of employer

When you receive your Employment Authorization Documents (EAD card) you are to submit a copy to us. This can be done via the Employment Authorization Document form on our website under Forms and Documents.

You may be unemployed during OPT for a maximum of 90 days.

EVEN IF YOU HAVE ENTERED INFORMATION IN YOUR SEVIS PORTAL YOU MUST STILL SUBMIT THIS INFORMATION TO YOUR DSO!

FAILURE TO REPORT CHANGES TO YOUR DSO WITHIN 10 DAYS CAN, AND WILL, PUT YOUR IMMIGRATION STATUS AT RISK!

Traveling abroad while on OPT:

In order to re-enter the U.S. while you are on OPT you must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the EAD or the receipt notice for your OPT application, and your job offer letter. We strongly advise against traveling abroad while your OPT is pending.

NEVER enter the U.S. in any other visa status other than F-1 while on OPT; it will invalidate your OPT!