Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Packet

If you intend to apply for optional practical training (OPT), please use this packet and follow the instructions below. The OPT Packet contains the following: general information and overview, checklists for each step of OPT, OPT request form, OPT reporting agreement, and a sample advisor letter. If you have read the packet and still have questions, please contact ISS at (520) 621-4627 to schedule an appointment with an advisor or check our website for walk-in quick advising times.

Purpose
This handout is designed for students in F-1 status. It provides information on a type of employment that is available before or after you complete your studies (for a maximum of twelve months). To review eligibility for a 17-month extension, please see the 17-Month Extension of OPT Packet on the ISS Forms page.

Definition of “Optional Practical Training”
Optional practical training is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession for a maximum of one year. Its purpose is to complement your academic work. Optional practical training falls into four categories: (1) full or part-time employment during your annual vacation if you are enrolled and intend to register for the next session; (2) part-time employment (20 hours per week or less) while school is in session; (3) full or part-time employment after you have completed your course requirements but before you have finished your thesis; or (4) full-time employment after you have completed your degree requirements.

Eligibility Requirements
The work must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone with your level of education. You do not need to have a specific job offer to apply for optional practical training but be aware that you cannot recover portions of the optional practical training period that you may have spent searching for employment. Pre-completion OPT may be full-time or part-time. Post completion OPT regulations indicate that you are expected to work full time. To be eligible for optional practical training, you must have been in lawful status and enrolled full time for at least one academic year prior to applying. Students who have done a leave of absence, had a prior status violation, or have been enrolled full-time in a status other than F-1 should check with an ISS advisor regarding eligibility for OPT.

NOTE: If you have a low GPA or are on Academic Probation, ISS reserves the right to hold your application until your grades are posted. Students enrolled in English language training programs are not eligible for optional practical training. Differences between pre-completion and post-completion OPT can be seen in the box below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-completion OPT</th>
<th>Post-completion OPT</th>
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<tr>
<td>May work full time.</td>
<td>May work full time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is not subject to the unemployment provisions, and may receive a program extension.</td>
<td>Would be eligible for the cap-gap extension.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May not apply for the STEM extension from a period of pre-completion OPT.</td>
<td>May apply for the STEM extension if otherwise eligible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would not be eligible for the cap-gap extension of OPT.</td>
<td>Would be subject to the unemployment provisions.</td>
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Application Deadline
USCIS will accept your application no earlier than 90 days prior to, and no later than 60 days after, the completion of your program of study. Average processing time by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) is 90 days. Please also consider that ISS requires an additional two weeks to process a complete OPT application. Also factor in time needed for mail delivery. As such, ISS will not accept OPT applications that are submitted 40 days after program completion.

Program completion date is defined for graduate students as the final submission of thesis or dissertation, or when all degree requirements have been met.
Importance of the Actual Date You Complete Your Program of Study
USCIS regulations refer to the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, not to the date you participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a certificate or diploma. USCIS recognizes that many students, especially graduate students in the thesis or dissertation programs, may complete requirements for a degree any day during the year. This means that the last day of an academic term may not be the date you complete program requirements. Please keep this in mind that the end date on your I-20 is NOT necessarily reflective of your actual program completion date. ISS may have to shorten your I-20 end date so you need to factor this in when looking at appropriate application timeline. Do not confuse program end date with I-20 end date as the two may not coincide. While we can shorten the I-20, we cannot extend an I-20 that has already expired! If you need to extend your Form I-20 in conjunction with OPT application, please see an ISS advisor.

Completion of Program of Study and On-Campus Employment
Once you apply for post-completion OPT, the program completion date on your Form I-20 (item number 5) will be changed to the date that your advisor has indicated on the recommendation letter. You will not be eligible to continue on-campus employment after your I-20 program completion date unless you have received your EAD from USCIS with an appropriate start date AND is in your field of study appropriate to your degree level. For students that have an I-20 end date that has been shortened, UA Payroll will be notified of the last day of your eligibility for on-campus employment. Please schedule an appointment with an ISS advisor to discuss the impact of your OPT application to employment on-campus.

Part-Time vs. Full-Time Optional Practical Training
Both part-time and full-time optional practical training count towards the twelve-month total you are allotted. Graduate students may request full time OPT if all coursework is completed and they only have thesis or dissertation. Please see an ISS advisor regarding applying for full-time OPT while still working on thesis/dissertation.

One Twelve-Month Period of Optional Practical Training is Available for Each Degree Program You Complete
You are allotted twelve months of optional practical training for each higher degree level you complete as an F-1 student (bachelors, masters, or doctoral). For example, if you complete a bachelor’s program and continue directly to a master’s program you will forfeit the 12 months of OPT that had been available at the previous level. You cannot then earn a second lower degree and regain the OPT option for that level, as you are only permitted 12 months of OPT per academic level. All standard post-completion OPT must be completed within the 14-month period following the completion of study.

Authorization May Not Be Rescinded or Deferred
Once authorization to engage in optional practical training is granted and the EAD is issued, it may not be rescinded, canceled, or deferred. This means that, after optional practical training is authorized by the USCIS, unexpected delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job, or loss of a job may reduce the time you have available for work.

Actual Date Practical Training Employment May Begin
Prior to requesting OPT: OPT may be recommended by the Designated School Official (DSO) to begin anytime within the 60 days following your program completion date. However, the USCIS Service Center will adjudicate the recommendation for OPT request and make a final decision of the start and end date of OPT. As a result, the EAD card may reflect start and end dates that are different than those indicated on the Form I-20. You may not begin employment prior to the approved start date on your employment authorization. Employment authorization will begin on the date requested or the date the employment authorization is adjudicated, whichever is later.

Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status
During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial 12-month post-completion OPT authorization. Additional information about this and other regulatory information can be found in Vol. 73, No. 68 of the Federal Register.

Duration of status while on post-completion OPT
For a student with approved post-completion OPT, the duration of status is defined as the period beginning when the student’s application for OPT was properly filed and pending approval, including the authorized period of post-
completion OPT, and ending 60 days after the OPT employment authorization expires (allowing you to prepare for departure, change educational levels at the same school, or transfer to another school).

**Travel Outside of the United States**
An F–1 student who has an unexpired EAD issued for post-completion practical training and who is otherwise admissible may return to the United States to resume employment after a period of temporary absence. The EAD must be used in combination with an I–20 endorsed for reentry by the DSO within the last six months (214.2(f)(13)(iii)), a valid F-1 visa stamp and passport valid for at least 6 months into the future and a letter of continuous employment or employment offer letter.

If you depart before you get a job, your OPT ends and you cannot reenter unless you have a written job offer. If you have a job, you may travel and reenter to resume work at the same job or if you have a written offer for another job. If you plan to travel prior to receiving your EAD, it is recommended you meet with an international student advisor at ISS while your OPT is still being processed and pending approval.

**USCIS mailing address and reporting your address changes while applying for OPT**
When filling out the Form I-765, you should use the address where you currently reside. This address should also match your current UA Street Address in UAccess Student. To locate the correct mailing address, go to the Direct Filing Addresses for I-765 website and scroll down to the (c)(3)(i) row and then to the bottom of the page.

If you will be moving while your OPT is pending, USCIS has provided instructions on how to update your address online or by mail. For a complete list of instructions, go to the USCIS homepage and type “Change of Address Information” in the search field.

**Step 1:** Fill out the Form I-765. The AR-11 mailing address can be found on the AR-11 form.

**Step 2:** Change your address on any pending or recently approved applications or petitions (online OR by phone at 1-800-375-5283). Use the USCIS Online Change of Address system to complete steps 1 and 2 at the same time. **If you use the Online Change of Address to complete Form AR-11, you do NOT need to file a paper Form AR-11.** USCIS will confirm the receipt of your application by sending the I-797 “Notice of Receipt” form in 3-5 weeks. You should keep this receipt for future reference. It will also contain your receipt number, which you will need to change your address.

Note: If you have already received your EAD card and would like to report a change in address, you can do so with the OPT reporting form. Instructions for OPT reporting are located on page 6 of this OPT packet.

**Employment Eligibility Verification**
When you begin to work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (USCIS Form I-9) which the employer retains. If your employer has questions about filling out Form I-9, they may want to review the M-274 Handbook for Employers.

**Tax Concerns**
In general, students who have been in the United States less than five years are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A.) taxes. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Students must file a tax return on or before April 15 of each year. Students may be entitled to a refund of taxes withheld from their wages if the amount of tax owed is less than the amount withheld. Please see ISS tax filing webpage for resources available to assist with completing your tax return at: Tax Filing Resources for UA students.

**Health Insurance**
While regulations do not indicate that students are required to carry health insurance after graduation and participating in OPT, it is nonetheless extremely important that you enroll in an insurance plan. Some employers offer this as part of a benefits package, while others do not. Either way, please be sure to seek appropriate health insurance coverage while on OPT.

**OPT Case Management Fee**
Students are required to pay a fee of $75 to International Student Services (ISS) when requesting post-completion OPT. Applications for pre-completion OPT do not require payment of the $75 fee. The fee will be utilized to cover
the cost associated with mandatory SEVIS compliance and record management for students on OPT after they graduate. Bring the receipt confirming fee payment with your OPT request to International Student Services. Initiate the payment process and obtain the receipt from the OPT Case Management Fee page.

Refund Information: The following is the refund policy for requests submitted to ISS for OPT recommendation. Refunds are allowed if an ISS advisor rejects the request for OPT due to ineligibility for OPT.

The reasons for a rejection and subsequent refund by ISS include, but are not limited to:

1. Late applications
2. Students that are determined to be out of status
3. Students that did not satisfy the 1 academic year requirement

No refunds are provided:

1. After an I-20 is issued with recommendation for OPT. For example, a request for new recommendation dates for OPT is considered a new application.
2. As a result of I-765 denial or delays of OPT adjudication by USCIS.

The fee is separate from the $380 processing fee required by USCIS when students submit Form I-765 to USCIS. For more information about the USCIS processing fee, please read step 2 of the OPT instructions outlined in this packet.

Students in STEM-eligible (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields who request recommendation of 17-month extension of OPT will be required to pay a fee to ISS of $150. To review eligibility for a 17-month extension, please see the 17-Month Extension of OPT Packet on the ISS Forms page.
OPT Request Form

Name: ________________________________________________
(Please print) Last ___________________________ First ___________________________ Middle ___________________________

Student ID: ___________________________ Phone: __________________________________________

UA Email: __________________________________@email.arizona.edu Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy): ____/____/____

Non UA Email: __________________________________________ Gender: □ Male □ Female


Step 1
☐ Read all information above to understand eligibility, responsibility, and processing.
☐ Update your current UA Street Address in UAccess Student. This is the address reported to SEVIS and must match the address used for the Form I-765.
☐ Read, sign and submit the OPT Reporting Agreement (Page 5 of the OPT packet).
☐ Complete the OPT Request Form.
☐ Complete the I-765 form (sign and date the form). Please read the Instructions for I-765 carefully to properly complete the form.
☐ Print out the I-94 admission number from the CBP I-94 retrieval site (full link: www.cbp.gov/i94) or make a photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 admission card if you received a paper card.
☐ Obtain the faculty or academic advisor’s recommendation letter (sample included on page 6).
☐ Submit all Form I-20s issued to you, including from previously attended institutions.
☐ Initiate the ISS OPT fee payment process, and obtain a receipt confirming fee payment of $75, at the OPT Case Management Fee page (full link: https://shop.global.arizona.edu/opt-case-management-fee?ga=1.213290644.1822393349.1438543456). *No fee payment is required for pre-completion OPT.
☐ Submit the completed documents above with your original Form I-20 to ISS.

Provided you are eligible for OPT, ISS will return your documentation in preparation for Step 2 within fifteen (15) business days from the date you submitted your complete application, including payment of the OPT application fee.

OPT Supplemental Information:

1) I am applying for: Post-Completion OPT Part-time Pre-Completion OPT Full-time Pre-Completion OPT

2) I am completing/have completed: Bachelor Master Doctorate

3) Requested OPT Begin Date: _____ / ____ / _____
   mm dd yyyy
   *For post-completion OPT, requested OPT begin date must be within 60 days after your program completion date. The Service Center may change your actual begin date without notice.

4) OPT End Date: _____ / ____ / _____
   mm dd yyyy
   *One full-year ends one day before the begin date (e.g., begins on June 1, 2014 – ends on May 31, 2015)

(FOR OFFICE USE ONLY)
Date Received: ________ Date Prepped: ________ Date Completed: ________ Date Emailed: ________
   By: __________ By: __________ By: __________ By: __________

Notes:
OPT REPORTING AGREEMENT
(You will receive a copy of this page when you pick up your documents from ISS)

OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: All students on OPT must report the following within 10 days of change:
Name (if your name has changed, send a copy of your new passport), street address, employer name, employer worksite address, periods of unemployment (see page 2 of OPT packet).

Once you have received your EAD card, you must report this information above using the OPT reporting form and submit a copy of your EAD card to ISS by fax 520-621-4069 or email to intl-opt@email.arizona.edu. The OPT reporting form is accessible on the Forms page of the ISS website (full link: http://global.arizona.edu/international-students/forms). Please send any questions to intl-opt@email.arizona.edu.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I understand these new reporting requirements as mandated by the Department of Homeland Security and that I am responsible for my immigration status as it pertains to my F-1 student visa. I understand that ISS holds no responsibility for verifying accuracy or content of data on the I-765 form. Signing below does not guarantee an ISS recommendation for OPT or USCIS approval of OPT.

_____________________________________  _________ ___________________
SIGNATURE      DATE            STUDENT ID NUMBER
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Step 2
Once you receive your OPT documentation back from ISS, (including two I-20s: one is now your current form and the other will be stamped “COPY” for mailing) you will need to mail the following materials to USCIS:

- Form I-765, current version, completed and signed, marked with the appropriate code at Item 16:
  - (c) (3) (a) for pre-completion OPT
  - (c) (3) (b) for post-completion OPT
- I-765 filing fee for $380 in the form of a check or money order payable to Department of Homeland Security. The I-765 must be received by USCIS prior to the 60th day following your I-20 end date.
- Two (2) identical passport-style photos – for specifications, refer to page 7, item C, of the I-765 instructions you downloaded from USCIS. The photos must have been taken within 30 days of filing your application.
- The I-20 stamped “COPY” with original signatures (don’t forget to sign bottom of page 1). USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of when ISS issued your OPT I-20. See item #10 on your I-20 for date issued.
- Photocopy of any previously I-20s issued to you from all US schools attended.
- If any, back and front photocopy of any previous employment authorization documents (EAD cards)
- Electronic print out of I-94 admission number, or a photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 card.
- Photocopies of the following passport pages:
  o Passport ID pages: photo page, page with passport validity dates, including renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc.
  o Photocopy of the F-1 visa page (if any)
- PLEASE REMEMBER MAKE A COPY OF YOUR APPLICATION FOR YOUR RECORDS BEFORE SENDING IT TO USCIS.

Optional: Use form G-1145 “E-Notification of Application Petition/Acceptance” to receive an email or text message notification of the status of your application. Note: USCIS states the form does not grant any status or benefit, and USCIS is not responsible for any cost associated with email/text message. View the instructions on the USCIS e-notification page (full link: www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf).

If you live in Arizona and would like to send your documents via express mail (recommended), send all materials to the address below. If you do not live in Arizona, check the USCIS instructions to find the Service Center serving the state in which you reside. To locate the correct mailing address, go to the Direct Filing Addresses for I-765 website and scroll down to the (c)(3)(i) row and then to the bottom of the page.

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034
Academic Department
To be printed on departmental letterhead

Academic Advisor’s Recommendation Letter
For Optional Practical Training
(Sample letter)

International students who have maintained F-1 nonimmigrant student status and are completing their educational programs are eligible to apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service for 12 months of post-graduation practical training (OPT) directly related to their field of study. The academic advisor’s recommendation is necessary for our office to prepare the endorsement required by the USCIS as part of the student’s application.

Date

International Student Services
International Center
915 N. Tyndall Avenue
Campus

To Whom It May Concern:

I hereby recommend that (student name, student ID), a student in the College of (name of college), at The University of Arizona, be authorized for a period of Optional Practical Training. (Student name) is expected to complete his/her degree in the field of (name of major field of study) on (date: month/day/year).

The student currently has a cumulative GPA of _________ and a major GPA of _________. The minimum major GPA required for students to graduate is _________.

The opportunity for practical work experience in his/her field of study will complement his/her academic program. (If student has informed the advisor about a job offer, briefly describe the nature of the work and how it is related to the student’s major field of study.)

Sincerely,

Faculty/Academic Advisor
Title and Department
Phone number
Email address