

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment benefit available to students in valid F-1 status. OPT allows students to work in a temporary position that is directly related to their field of study, as indicated on the form I-20, for up to 12 months. Applications for OPT are reviewed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and take approximately 3-4 months to process. Students must attend an OPT informational workshop offered before requesting a recommendation for OPT.

Eligibility for OPT

Students in valid F-1 status are generally eligible to apply for OPT if they meet the following requirements:

1. Have been enrolled full-time in a USCIS-certified school in lawful non-immigrant status for 9 months (3 terms).
2. Are currently engaged in a degree-seeking academic program, or a structured non-degree program that is part of an established OSU curriculum.

Limitations of the OPT Authorization

Students are limited to 12 months of OPT per education level completed (undergraduate, master's, doctoral). Some students may be eligible for an additional 17 months of employment authorization (see *17-Month STEM Extension* section below). Earning another degree at a *higher* education level entitles you to apply for an additional 12 months of OPT based on that degree. Students who have been authorized for 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are **not** eligible to apply for OPT for the same degree level.

Pre-Completion OPT (before completion of studies)

Students may choose to use some or all of their 12 months of OPT before the completion of studies. While school is in session, students are limited to part-time OPT (20 hrs or less per week) and must continue to enroll full-time. During the annual vacation term and when school is not in session, students may engage in full-time OPT (more than 20 hrs per week). Part-time OPT is calculated at one-half the full-time rate (2 months of part-time OPT = 1 month of full-time OPT). Students who engage in pre-completion OPT may not be eligible to apply for a 17-month STEM extension. For more information about pre-completion OPT, please make an appointment with an international student advisor.

Post-Completion OPT (after completion of studies)

When to Apply

Students may apply for post-completion OPT *no earlier* than 90 days (3 months) prior to the completion of studies and *no later* than the end of the 60 day grace period following the final term of registration. For students on a graduate assistantship during the final term of registration, the grace period begins the day after the assistantship employment ends. The application must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of the signature date on the I-20 with the OPT recommendation.

Processing Time

USCIS takes approximately 3-4 months to process OPT applications. You may not engage in any employment after the completion of your program (or your assistantship contract) until you have received a valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD). We strongly encourage you to submit your OPT application as early as possible to ensure you receive your employment authorization before your desired employment start date. Students with a pending job offer may submit a request for expedited processing with their OPT application.

OPT Authorization Dates

If your OPT application is approved, USCIS will authorize you for practical training during the 14-month period following the completion of studies (2 months grace period + 12 months possible OPT). You may request that your OPT begin anytime between the completion of studies date and the end of your 60 day grace period. USCIS will use either the recommended start date on your OPT I-20, or the date of adjudication, whichever is later.

Immigration Status during OPT

You may remain in the United States following the completion of your program while your OPT application is in process, provided you have submitted your application before the end of your 60 day grace period following your final term of registration. If your OPT application is approved, your F-1 status will be extended from the date your application is filed to the end of the 60 day grace period following the completion of your OPT authorization period, as indicated by the end date on your EAD.

Grace Period following OPT

You will receive a 60-day grace period following the completion of your OPT authorization period. During this time, you may request a change of level to begin a new program at OSU; request a SEVIS transfer to begin a new program at another school in F-1 status; secure an alternative immigration status; or prepare for your departure from the United States. You are not eligible to work during the 60-day grace period.

Unemployment

Your F-1 status is dependent upon engaging in practical training (at least 20 hours per week) during post-completion OPT. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12-month OPT authorization period. Students who are authorized for a 17-month STEM extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the entire 29-month OPT authorization period (initial post-completion period and the subsequent 17-month extension). You should plan to depart the country before you reach your unemployment limit if you are unable to find employment.

Travel

Students may travel outside the U.S. before the completion of their program and after OPT has been authorized by USCIS. It is not advisable to travel outside the U.S. after the completion of studies if your OPT application is still in process. If you must leave the country during this time, please make an appointment with an international student advisor before your departure. While on OPT, the travel signature on your I-20 will be valid for six months from the signature date. To re-enter the country, you will need a valid travel signature on the form I-20, a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport, and a valid EAD. Students are also encouraged to have verification of employment or search for employment with them in case they are questioned at the Port of Entry.

Reporting Requirements

While on OPT, you must continue to notify ISAS of a change of address, legal name, or immigration status within 10 days. You must also notify our office when you begin, end, or change employment. For a complete list of reporting requirements while on OPT and ways to notify our office, please review the *Reporting Requirements during Optional Practical Training* handout.

17-Month STEM Extension

Students who have completed a degree in certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields may be eligible to apply for a 17-month extension of their OPT benefit, for a total authorization period of 29 months. To be eligible for a 17-month extension, you must have completed a degree in an eligible STEM field **and** have a job offer from a company that has registered with the federal E-Verify program. ISAS maintains a list of eligible OSU majors that are considered STEM fields under federal immigration regulations on our website. For more information, please refer to the *17-Month OPT STEM Extension* packet.

H-1B Cap Gap Employment Authorization

If your employer has filed an H-1B petition on your behalf, you may be issued an extension of your employment authorization to cover any gap period between the end of your OPT and the start of your H-1B status. An international student advisor may issue this "Cap Gap" employment authorization if your H-1B petition has been filed in a timely fashion **and** it is either in process or has been approved. If your H-1B petition is denied or withdrawn, any Cap Gap employment authorization issued will be rescinded. Please submit a copy of your form I-797 Notice of Action/Approval to our office to request the employment authorization, or to notify us of an intended change of status. If you are eligible, you will be issued a new I-20 with an employment authorization on page 3, which you may present to your employer as proof of continued employment eligibility.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR OPT

Step 1: Attend an OPT information session offered by International Student Advising and Services (ISAS).

Sessions are generally offered two times per month. To view the current OPT session schedule or to reserve a seat, please visit our website at <http://oregonstate.edu/international/atosu/news>. You may also reserve a seat by calling our office at 541-737-6310.

Step 2: Request an OPT recommendation from ISAS.

Submit a complete *Optional Practical Training Recommendation Request Form* (included in this packet) to our office. An advisor will review your packet and if you are eligible, will enter a recommendation for OPT in SEVIS and issue you a new I-20. ISAS only recommends students for OPT; actual authorization is given by USCIS and takes 2 - 4 months to process. Your new I-20 should be ready to pick up within 5 business days of submitting your request form. ISAS will provide an original I-20 and a photocopy, both of which you must sign. Keep the original I-20 for your records and submit the photocopy with your application to USCIS.

Step 3: Prepare the following documents for submission to USCIS:

- ☐ Form I-765: Copies of this form are available in our office and at <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Type the form online, and then print and sign it. This helps with accuracy when the Lockbox scans your application.
 - If you move while your application is in process, the Post Office will not forward documents related to the application to your new address. You may enter an alternate address in form I-765 if you anticipate moving. If you enter an address outside Oregon, review the form I-765 instructions to determine which USCIS lockbox should receive your application. Enter "C/O" and the full name of the recipient's address if different than your own.
 - Enter "N/A" for any questions or fields that do not apply to you. Enter all dates in the format MM/DD/YYYY.
 - For question 16, enter (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT.
- ☐ Two (2) color passport-style photos. Guidelines for photos are included in this packet. Lightly print your full legal name and I-94 number (found on the upper left corner of the I-94 Arrival/Departure card) in pencil on the back of each photo and put them in a small, clear bag.
- ☐ \$380 check or money order, made payable to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- ☐ Photocopy of form I-20 containing the OPT recommendation from ISAS (all pages). ISAS will provide you with an original and a photocopy of your new I-20. Sign both the original and the photocopy. Send the photocopy of the new I-20 with your OPT application to USCIS. Keep the original I-20 for your use.
- ☐ Photocopy of all previously issued I-20's (pages 1 and 3).
- ☐ Photocopy of form I-94 (both sides).
- ☐ Photocopy of the F-1 visa page from your passport (If the visa in your passport does not match the immigration status you currently hold, include a copy of the approval notice from your change of status petition).
- ☐ Photocopy of the identification page from your passport. Include copies of your passport validity dates and any renewal or extension pages. You must have a valid, unexpired passport to be eligible for OPT.
- ☐ Photocopy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (if applicable).

Step 4: Mail all of the necessary documents to the USCIS Phoenix Lockbox at: USCIS, P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036

Keep copies of all documents sent and track your application by using certified mail and return receipt through the US Post Office, and/or the E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145 at <http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145> which you attach to the first page of your I-765 application for email or text notification). If you no longer live in Oregon, or if you plan to use Express mail/courier service delivery, please refer to the appropriate address as listed in the I-765 instructions (p. 10) at <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. The USCIS Lockbox Facility will then forward your application to the correct USCIS Service Center for processing. Allow 2-4 months processing time. To check the status of your application, visit the USCIS Case Status Service at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>.

Step 5: Fax, mail, or email a copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to ISAS. Report the receipt of your EAD and any changes of name, address, employment status, or immigration status to our office within 10 days. You may reach our office by fax at 541-737-6226, by email at isas.advisor@oregonstate.edu or at <http://oregonstate.edu/international/atosu/reporting>. For a complete list of reporting requirements while on OPT, please review the [Reporting Requirements During Optional Practical Training](#) handout at <http://oregonstate.edu/international/atosu/students/forms>.

PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATIONS

You are required to submit two passport-style photos with the I-765 form (application for employment authorization). Specifications for these photos are listed in the instructions for form I-765. Photos should be in color with a white background and taken no earlier than 30 days before the application is submitted to USCIS. Lightly print your full legal name and your I-94 number (found in the upper left corner of your I-94 Arrival/Departure card) on the back of each photo in pencil.

7 Steps to Successful Photos

Taken from: (http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/photocomptemplate/photocomptemplate_5297.html)

- ☒ Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open.
- ☒ Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).
- ☒ Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below).
- ☒ Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo.
- ☒ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background.
- ☒ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background.
- ☒ Encourage subject to have a natural expression.

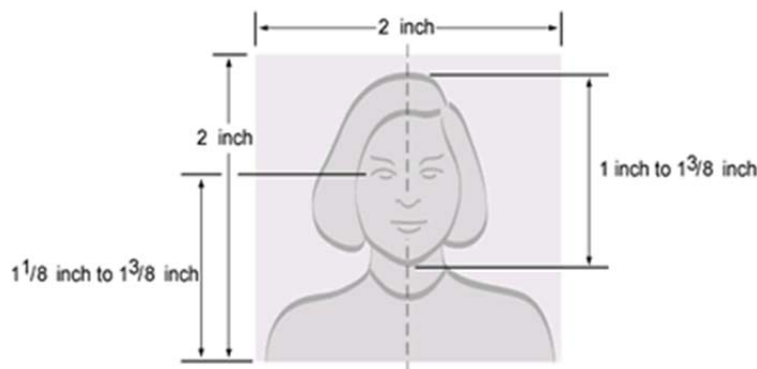


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-Composed Photos



OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM

Complete this form with your academic advisor and submit it to International Student Advising and Services (ISAS). If approved, a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation will be issued within 5 business days. Please note that you must still submit a complete OPT application to USCIS in order to receive employment authorization.

PART I (to be completed by the student)

Last Name (Family) _____ First Name (Given) _____

Student ID _____ - _____ - _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Current U.S. Address : Street _____ Apt. _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Primary Academic Program ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate Major _____

Estimated date of completion for primary academic program ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Secondary Academic Program ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate Major _____

Estimated date of completion for secondary academic program ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

For post-completion OPT, you may request your OPT to begin anytime between the completion of studies date and the end of your 60 day grace period (actual date is determined by USCIS). Graduate students who have completed all required coursework may request pre-completion OPT to begin prior to completion of studies. Indicate when you would like your OPT to begin below:

- ☐ The day after the completion of studies date.
☐ On this specific date: ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

PART II (to be completed by the academic advisor)

The information requested below will be used to issue a recommendation to the student for Optional Practical Training based on completion of the primary degree program, which may be the last day of the final term of registration, the date of submission of thesis/dissertation copies to the library, or the date of the oral defense or final exam. Please provide your best estimate of dates.

Estimated completion of studies date ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Estimated final term of registration at OSU ☐ Fall ☐ Winter ☐ Spring ☐ Summer 20 ____

For Graduate Students Only

What type of program is the student engaged in?

☐ Thesis ☐ Non-Thesis

Will the student be on a graduate assistantship during the final term of registration?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Assistantship end date

____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Estimated date of oral defense

____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Estimated submission date for thesis/dissertation final copies

____/____/____ (month/day/year)

AUTHORIZING SIGNATURES

Academic Advisor _____ Title _____

Department _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Academic Advisor Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

GRA/GTA Coordinator Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

International Student Advising and Services use only

OPT Recommendation: ☐ Approved ☐ Denied

Advisor Initials _____ Date entered in SEVIS ____/____/____