

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Packet

If you intend to apply for optional practical training (OPT), please use this OPT packet and follow the instructions below. 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. OPT Packet Contents: 1) Required Information 2) Checklist 3) Sample advisor letter

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 [STEM OPT Extension Packet](#).

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 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:

Pre-completion OPT	Post-completion OPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May work full time. • Is not subject to the unemployment provisions, and may receive a program extension. • May not apply for the STEM extension from a period of pre-completion OPT. • Would not be eligible for the cap-gap extension of OPT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May work full time. • Would be eligible for the cap-gap extension. • May apply for the STEM extension if otherwise eligible. • Would be subject to the unemployment provisions. • Would be unable to receive an extension of his or her program.

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. Please also consider that ISPS requires an additional two weeks to process a complete OPT application. Also factor in time needed for mail delivery. As such, ISPS will not accept OPT applications that are 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. ISPS 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 ISPS 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 ISPS 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 only have thesis or dissertation. Please see an ISPS 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 begin and end, date of OPT. As a result, the EAD card may reflect begin and end dates that are different than those indicated on Form I-20. You may not begin employment prior to the approved starting 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 at: **Federal Register** / Vol. 73, No. 68 / Tuesday, April 8, 2008 / Rules and Regulations and PDF version: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/E8-7427.pdf>

Important Reporting Requirements while on OPT

Regulations require that you report the following:

1. Name (if your name has changed, send a copy of your passport indicating your new name to ISPS)
2. Residential address
3. Mailing address (if different than your residential address)
4. Employer /Business Name

5. Employer worksite address
6. Start date and end dates of employment

Any change of name, address, employer name & address, and interruption of employment be **reported within 10 days** of the date the change occurs. You may accrue up to 90 days of unemployment during the 12-month period while on post-completion OPT.

ISPS has established a website to facilitate the reporting of these items. Once you have received your EAD card and begin employment, you must submit a copy of your EAD card to ISPS either by fax 520-621-4069 or email to optinfo@email.arizona.edu (must be in jpeg or pdf format). You must report the abovementioned information using the OPT Reporting Form. This form is accessible from the ISPS homepage: <http://internationalstudents.arizona.edu> under the Forms menu item. If you have any questions, please direct them to OPTinfo@email.arizona.edu

You will be given a handout regarding this requirement when you pick up your OPT recommendation from ISPS. It is extremely important that you understand your responsibilities in order to not jeopardize your status while on OPT.

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 the student 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)(ii)), 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 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 ISPS while your OPT is still being processed and pending approval.

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.

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 ISPS 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.

If you have read the packet information and still have questions, please contact ISPS at 520-621-4627 to schedule an appointment with an advisor or check our website for walk-in advising times.

OPT Request Form
Name: _____
(Please print) Last First Middle

Student ID: _____ **Phone:** _____ **Email:** _____

Non UA Email: _____

Date of Birth: ____/____/____ **Gender:** Male Female **Major:** _____
mm dd yyyy
Country of Citizenship: _____ **Country of Birth:** _____

ISPS OPT Procedure Checklist
Step 1

- Read all information above to understand eligibility, responsibility, and processing.
- 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.
- Make sure you have updated 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.
- Make a photocopy of the front and back of your **I-94** admission card.
- Obtain the faculty or academic advisor's **recommendation letter**.
- Submit the completed documents above with your **original Form I-20** to ISPS and if you prefer, make an appointment to see an advisor. Also, bring all original Form I-20s issued to you, including from previously attended institutions. Provided you are eligible for OPT, ISPS will return your documentation in preparation for Step 2 within ten (10) business days from the date you submitted your **complete** application.

OPT Supplemental Information:

 1) I am applying for: Pre-Completion OPT Post-Completion OPT STEM OPT Extension

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

 3) Requested OPT Begin Date: ____/____/____
mm dd yy

**For post-completion OPT, begin date must be within 60 days after your program completion date. The Service Center may change your actual begin date without notice.*

**For STEM OPT Extension, begin date will be day after current EAD expiration date.*

 4) OPT End Date: ____/____/____
mm dd yy

** One full-year ends one day before the begin date (e.g., begins on June 1, 2010 – ends on May 31, 2011)*

(FOR OFFICE USE ONLY)

 Date Received: _____ Date Prepped: _____ Date Completed: _____ Date Emailed: _____
 By: _____ By: _____ By: _____ By: _____

Notes:

Step 2

Once you receive your OPT documentation back from ISPS, (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 (ISPS recommends that you mail the OPT application materials by certified or express mail.)

- ❑ The I-20 stamped "COPY" with original signatures (don't forget to sign bottom of page 1)
- ❑ Photocopy of any previously I-20s issued to you from all US schools attended.
- ❑ A photocopy of your I-94 card, front and back.
- ❑ Form I-765 with check or money order for \$340 if postmarked prior to November 22. OPT applications mailed, postmarked, or otherwise filed on or after November 23, 2010 must include the new fee of \$380. Checks should be made payable to Department of Homeland Security.
- ❑ Two (2) passport-style photos – for specifications, please refer to page 6, item C, of the I-765 instructions you downloaded from USCIS.
- ❑ A copy of your last EAD (front and back). If no prior EAD, you **must** submit a copy of a federal government issued identity document, such as a passport or visa showing your picture, name, and date of birth.
- ❑ PLEASE REMEMBER MAKE A COPY OF YOUR APPLICATION FOR YOUR RECORDS BEFORE SENDING IT TO USCIS.
- ❑ USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of when ISPS has issued your I-20 recommending OPT. See item #10 on your I-20 for date issued.
- ❑ If you live in Arizona, send all materials to the following address:

Express Mail may be sent to:

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

If you do not live in Arizona, please check the I-765 instruction packet for the appropriate mailing address for the Service Center serving the state in which you are residing.

Step 3

- ❑ Once you have received your card, submit OPT reporting form available on ISPS webpage.
- ❑ Submit copy of EAD card to ISPS either by fax (520) 621-4069 or by email to optinfo@email.arizona.edu (jpeg or pdf format)

<p>USCIS will confirm the receipt of your application on the I-797 "Notice of Receipt" form within 3-5 weeks. Keep this notice for future reference regarding OPT application.</p>

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 Programs and 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 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