Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Overview

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What This Session Is About

- You are not required to attend this workshop to apply for OPT.
- You are required to take OPT online course (even if you have attended this session) to apply for OPT.
- No OPT requests submission at the end of this session!
- This is information-only presentation.
What Is OPT?

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

An *optional* F-1 benefit that allows you to work *off-campus*

- **Benefit of** F-1 student immigration status
- **Temporary** work authorization (up to 12 months)
- Employment must be in a position **related** to your field of study
- **NOT** employer-specific & no job offer needed to apply
Eligibility for OPT

To be eligible for OPT, a student must:

- Be in legal F-1 immigration status at the time of application
- Have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year
- Have used less than 12 months full-time CPT
- Not have been previously approved for 12 months of OPT at the same degree level
Initial 12 Months of OPT: Types of OPT

**Pre-Completion**
Employment begins & ends BEFORE completion of enrollment requirements

**Post-Completion**
Employment begins & ends AFTER completion of enrollment requirements
What is your Completion Date?

**Completion Date** = the last day of the last month you are enrolled in credits required for your degree program.

- **Winter** = April 30
- **Spring/Summer** = August 31
- **Spring** = June 30
- **Fall** = December 31

- Professional schools (i.e. Law School) may have end dates in May.
- PhD students have the option of using their defense date instead of the end of the term in which they defend.
Types of OPT Employment

- Paid employment
- Short-term multiple employers (i.e. performing artists)
- Work for hire (i.e. contractor/consultant)
- Self-employed business owner
- Employment through an agency
- Unpaid employment

Part-Time = No Minimum, 20 hrs Maximum
Full-Time = 20 hrs Minimum, No Maximum
Length of OPT

Maximum - 12 months of full-time OPT *per degree level*

- If you think you will return to school for another degree at the same level (i.e. 2nd masters) you can “save” some of your OPT time.

- If not - apply for 12 months, even if you are not likely to use all 12 months.

We will talk about post-completion OPT extension later, i.e. STEM extension & cap-gap
Pre-completion OPT is uncommon. Why?

- Usually easier to get CPT (faster, no cost). Students who are eligible for CPT - apply for CPT!

- Using pre-completion OPT will mean less time on post-completion OPT.

- Most likely - break in employment between pre- and post-completion OPT, due to OPT approval timing.

Still interested in pre-completion OPT?
Pre-Completion OPT
Employment begins and ends **BEFORE** the completion of your degree program

**Three Types:**

1. **During Annual Vacation** *(spring/summer)*
   - you must intend to register full-time for the following term
   - may be part- or full-time

2. **While School is in Session** *(fall & winter)*
   - **full-time** registration is **required** during that term
   - may be part-time **only**

3. **After Completion of All Course Requirements** *(excluding thesis/dissertation)*
   - If authorized for **part-time**, **you must be registered full-time**.
   - If authorized for **full-time**, full-time registration **is not** required.
When can I apply?

- USCIS takes up to 90 days to process an OPT application - *Plan Accordingly*!

- One academic year *NOT* completed:
  - USCIS will not accept the application more than 90 days before completion of one academic year.

- One academic year completed:
  - USCIS will not accept the application more than 90 days before employment start date.
Post-Completion OPT

Employment begins and ends AFTER the completion of your degree program

- **Initial 12 months - highlights:**
  - Job offer not required
  - Start date must be during 60 day grace period
  - No more than 90 days of unemployment allowed
  - Can apply:
    - No more than 90 days before your completion date
    - No more than 60 days after your completion date

OPT application with USCIS may take as long as 90 days! Plan accordingly!
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

- 90 days
  - Apply up to 90 days before completion date

- 60 days
  - OPT BEGINS
    - Any day during 60 day grace period

Completion Date
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

90 days

Completion Date:
April 30

60 days

June 30
End of 60 day grace period
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

90 days

Completion Date: April 30

60 days

OPT Begins: June 1

June 30
End of 60 day grace period
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

90 days
Send your application to USCIS before:
March 1

Completion Date:
April 30

60 days
OPT Begins:
June 1

June 30
End of 60 day grace period
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

- Earliest date you can apply: February 1
- 90 days
- Send your application to USCIS before: March 1
- Completion Date: April 30
- OPT Begins: June 1
- 60 days
- June 30
- End of 60 day grace period
**OPT Timeline**

**Initial 12 Months**

**OPT Application Period**

- **Earliest date you can apply for OPT**
- **Latest date USCIS can receive your application to allow full 90 days for processing**
- **Completion Date**
- **NO WORK (on or off campus)**
- **OPT Begins**
- **End of 60 day grace period**
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

OPT Application Period

February 1
Earliest date you can apply for OPT

Latest date USCIS can receive your application to allow full 90 days for processing

April 30 / May 1
Completion Date

OPT Begins

June 30
End of 60 day grace period
Choosing a Start Date

- If your job starts during 60 day grace period, use job start date or earlier.
- If your job starts after 60 day grace period, use the latest date possible (59th day of grace period).
Choosing a Start Date

- **YOU** must choose the start date, even if you don’t already have a job offer.

**REMINDER:** If there is a gap between your completion date & OPT start date, you have **no** work authorization during the gap!
If you choose an earlier date:

- **PRO** - Your employer will be impressed that you can start your new job so quickly.
- **CON** - If you don’t find a job quickly, you may risk being unemployed for 90 days and would need to leave the U.S.
No Job Offer Yet?

- If you choose an earlier date:
  - **PRO** - Your employer will be impressed that you can start your new job so quickly.
  - **CON** - If you don’t find a job quickly, you may risk being unemployed for 90 days and would need to leave the U.S.

- If you choose a later date:
  - **PRO** - You have less of a chance to be unemployed for 90 days and be required to leave the U.S.
  - **CON** - A job offer could be rescinded if your employment start date is uncertain or too far in the future.
No Job Offer Yet?

- What if you choose to send your application during your grace period to postpone your OPT start date as late as possible?
No Job Offer Yet?

- **PRO** - Lots of time to find a job. Save unemployment time.
- **CON** - OPT start date will be uncertain.
- **CON** - A job offer may be rescinded.
- **CON** - You will not get all 12 months of OPT.
OPT Timeline
Initial 12 Months

Apply up to 90 days before completion date

OPT application period

90 days

Completion date
April 30

Application Received by USCIS
June 29

USCIS Processing OPT Application

90 days

OPT Authorization Period

9 months

OPT Start Date
October 1

extension, transfer, change of status, or leave U.S.

OPT ENDS
June 30

NO WORK unless authorized for extension or change of status

OPT ENDS
June 30
**OPT Timeline**

**Initial 12 Months**

- **Apply up to 90 days before completion date**
- **Completion date April 30**

**NO Work Authorization**

- **5 Months**
- **9 months**

**OPT Authorization Period**

- **OPT Start Date October 1**
- **OPT ENDS June 30**

**OPT Authorization Period**

- **NO WORK unless authorized for extension, transfer, change of status, or leave U.S.**
- **USCIS Processing OPT Application**
- **Application Received by USCIS June 29**
- **NO Work Authorization**

- **60 days**
- **90 days**
- **60 days**
How do I obtain OPT authorization?

1. Determine a reasonable completion date with your Academic Advisor and get confirmation letter of this date.

2. Request an “OPT recommendation I-20” from the International Center.
   - This is NOT an authorization.
   - Processing time for OPT I-20 is 1-2 weeks.

3. Apply to USCIS for OPT authorization (I-765).
   - **REMINDER**: approximately 90 days to process application.

   - Will get EAD card approximately 2 weeks after approval.
Requesting an OPT I-20 from the International Center

1. Must have OPT online course certificate of completion dated within 4 months of requesting your OPT I-20.
# OPT Online Course Certificate

**Date of OPT Online Course Completion:**
- Date of completion must be during the same semester your OPT I-20 is issued.

**Type of OPT:**
- Choose from Pre-completion or Real-time completion.

**Dates of OPT:**
- Start date (approximate) and end date (approximate).

**Optional Practical Training (OPT) I-20 Request:**
- Designate # of: [ ] Pre-completion OPT
- [ ] Real-time completion OPT

**Certify the Following:**
- I am the person who completed the OPT online course.
- I understand my OPT application must be received by UDS within 60 days of the date my OPT I-20 is signed by an officer.

**Signatures:**
- [ ] Today's Date

**Required Documentation for OPT I-20 Request:**
- Letter from your department/advisor confirming your degree completion date
- Copies of all I-20s from your CURRENT degree level (if applicable, depending on OPT)
- Copy of the front of your most recent I-20 card.
- Copy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD cards), if applicable

**After You Receive Your OPT I-20:**
- Contact your office for a list of required documents for the OPT application and tips for preparing your I-20 application to UDSO. Make a packet that includes all documents on this list and send that packet to the appropriate UDSO office. Once UDSO has received your OPT application, it will take them up to 90 days to process.
Requesting an OPT I-20 from the International Center

1. Must have OPT online course certificate of completion dated within 4 months of requesting your OPT I-20.

2. Bring OPT certificate and required documentation to the International Center front desk

3. Please allow 2 weeks for processing *(you will get an email)*

4. USCIS must receive your OPT application no later than 30 days from the date the advisor signed your OPT I-20.
Requesting an OPT I-20 from the International Center

I will mail my OPT application as soon as I receive my I-20.
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OPT I-20 Employment Recommendation

- Documents to send to USCIS: (see OPT I-20 coversheet):
  - G-1145 form
  - Application fee (check/money order)
  - 2 Passport photos
  - Copies of documents (OPT I-20, all previous I-20s for current degree level, passport, I-94, F-1 visa stamp, previous EAD cards)

Follow instructions in online OPT course & OPT I-20 Cover Sheet exactly!
Most Common Errors on Form I-765 (= delays in OPT approval):

- “Permission to Accept Employment” box not checked
- Undeliverable Address (most common error!)
- Failure to sign p.1 of I-20
- No signature or signature on I-765 outside lines
- Application received by USCIS >30 days after OPT I-20 printed (p.1; date next to advisor’s signature)
Filing your I-765 with USCIS

Mailing your application to USCIS:

- Send to correct address! *(see IC & I-765 instructions)*
- Use trackable method *(Delivery confirmation, Tracking number)*
- **Do NOT** e-file your application
- **Do NOT** count on your application getting expedited!
While your OPT is pending

- Once your OPT is received by USCIS, you continue to maintain F-1 status (even if processing continues past your 60 day grace period).

- You will receive a receipt notice in 2-4 weeks.

- USCIS Case Status Check & G-1145 form
While your OPT is pending

No receipt in 4 weeks?
- Be concerned!
Possible address problems!
Call USCIS Customer Service and
e-mail lockboxsupport@dhs.gov
Travel while OPT is **pending**

- Travel is allowed
  - *Caution*: risk increases if you don’t have a receipt and travel after your completion date

- Carry additional documentation for re-entry
  - OPT I-20 signed within the last 6 months
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - Valid passport (6 months upon re-entry)
  - OPT receipt notice
Example EAD card

- EAD card should arrive approximately **2 weeks** after case is approved.

- You **CANNOT** begin work until your EAD card is received and start date has arrived!
Maintaining your F-1 Status while on OPT

- You continue to be in F-1 student status.
Maintaining your F-1 Status while on OPT

- You continue to be in F-1 student status.
- Report your address in wolverine access *(10 days)*.
- “OPT Employment Reporting” on IC website.
  - MUST report employment while on OPT!
  - Maximum period of unemployment = 90 days
    - Cumulative
    - Begins from start date of OPT (not completion date)
Maintaining your F-1 Status while on OPT
Maintaining your F-1 Status while on OPT

- Keep IC health insurance or apply for waiver
  - Apply for a waiver to prevent being charged
    [http://www.internationalcenter.umich.edu/healthins/waiver.html](http://www.internationalcenter.umich.edu/healthins/waiver.html)
Maintaining your F-1 Status while on OPT

U-M email

- Please make sure that email sent to your @umich.edu email address will reach you.

- The International Center **must** be able to contact you during your OPT.
  - Changes in immigration regulations
  - Issues with your immigration status

- You can forward your U-M email to another address.
  - [http://www.itcs.umich.edu/itcsdocs/s4384/](http://www.itcs.umich.edu/itcsdocs/s4384/)
  - [http://alumni.umich.edu/index.php](http://alumni.umich.edu/index.php) - online services
Travel after OPT is approved

- Travel is allowed
- Carry additional documentation for re-entry
  - OPT I-20 signed within the last 6 months
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - Valid passport (6 months upon re-entry)
  - Valid EAD card
  - Letter verifying employment
    - On company letterhead
    - Dates of employment
    - Salary
    - Brief description of job duties
Ending OPT Early

- **Reasons to end OPT early:**
  - Leaving the U.S. before OPT expires
  - 90 days of unemployment
  - Change of immigration status
  - Returning to school to pursue another degree
    (please contact IC to plan timeline for SEVIS transfer)

- **Submit our online “F-1 Departure Form”**
  - Your SEVIS record will be “completed” and OPT will be cancelled
  - Your health insurance will be terminated based on date your F-1 status ends
**Post-Completion OPT Timeline**

**Initial 12 Months**

- **Apply up to 90 days before completion date**: OPT application period

  - 90 days
  - 60 days

- **OPT BEGINS**: Any day during 60 day grace period

- **Completion date**

- **OPT Authorization Period**

  - 12 months

- **OPT ENDS**:
  - 90 days
  - 60 days

- **NO WORK unless authorized for extension or change of status**

- **extension, transfer, change of status, or leave U.S.**

- **Apply for STEM extension (if eligible)**

Division of Student Affairs

University of Michigan
After your initial 12 months

1. Leave the U.S. before the end of the 60 day grace period.
2. Start another degree and consult with an IC advisor about what to do with your immigration record.
3. Apply for a change of status before your OPT expires.
4. If eligible, continue OPT on 17-month extension, aka STEM.
STEM Extension

- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics
STEM Extension

- **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering, & **M**athematics

- Not all UM degrees included!
  - [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm)
  - See your I-20 page one under program of study and major, or
  - Page 3 at the top
STEM Extension

Special 17-month STEM Extension

General Information

Definition of STEM OPT

Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 29 months (12 months of "regular" OPT with a 17-month extension possible).

Eligibility Criteria for the 17-month OPT extension

- Students who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT; and
- Who have earned a degree in a field included on the U.S. Government's list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields; and
- Who are employed in a job directly related to his/her field of study; and
- Who are working for an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program.

Please Note: All four of the above criteria must be met in order for a student to be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension.

List of degrees in STEM fields

If a student earned a degree in a field that appears on the U.S. government's official list of STEM fields, he/she may be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension. In order to verify that your degree is on this list, look at the code listed under "Primary Major" on your Page 3 of your I-20 form, and then look for that code in the CIP code column of the Department of Homeland Sec.

http://internationalcenter.umich.edu/immig/fvisa/f_optextend.html
STEM Extension

- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics
- Not all UM degrees included!
  - [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm)
- May be approved for 17 more months of OPT.
- To be eligible:
  1. be in F-1 status on OPT
  2. OPT based on STEM degree
  3. work in a job related to your degree
  4. work for an E-Verify employer
  5. no previous STEM extension
Cap Gap Extension

- A “Cap” of 65,000 H1Bs are available each year for industry jobs (not academic).
  - Additional 20,000 for master or PhDs earned in U.S.
- H1Bs for industry jobs (not academic) start only on October 1 of each year.
- Application for H1B can be submitted to USCIS up to 6 months prior to start date (April 1).
- These date restrictions may cause a “Gap” in employment authorization for students on OPT.
OPT Timeline

“Cap Gap” Extension

Request Cap Gap Extension from the International Center

April 30

This Year

Degree Completion

GAP IN EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

Next Year

June 1

OPT Begins

OPT Timeline

May 31

OPT Ends

H1-B Timeline

April 1

H1B Application Period Begins

October 1

Earliest Date to Begin H1B
Cap Gap Extension

Eligibility:
- H1B filed by employer before expiration of OPT
- OPT expiration is between April 1 and October 1
Cap Gap Extension

Eligibility:
- H1B filed by employer before expiration of OPT
- OPT expiration is between April 1 and October 1

Those not eligible:
- OPT end date between October 1 and March 31
- Consular Processed H1B
- H1B filed during grace period of initial OPT (only F-1 status is extended, not employment authorization)

All H1B questions must be asked of employer
Where to find OPT information

- Where can I find answers to OPT-related questions?
  - Go through OPT online course (review version)
  - Look for the answer on the IC website
  - Ask an advisor
    - Email: icenter@umich.edu
    - Meet with an advisor

- When ready to apply - start with taking OPT online course (certificate version).