



## Office of International Students and Scholars

# Optional Practical Training (OPT)

### What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) offers you as an F-1 student the opportunity to gain employment experience in your field of study for up to 12 months. Its purpose is to complement or “round out” your academic work. You may apply for OPT after each level of study (associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral).

### Am I eligible for OPT?

To be eligible for OPT:

- You must currently be in lawful F-1 status, holding an unexpired passport and I-20.
- You must have maintained lawful F-1 status for a minimum of nine months leading up to your OPT application.
- You must not yet have completed your degree requirements (see reverse for definitions of *program completion*).
- You must not have previously exhausted your 12-month OPT benefit for your current degree.
- You must not have engaged in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for more than 11.5 months.
- Your transcript, current registration and account summary must be approved by an OISS immigration advisor.
- Your department must verify your intended program completion date and must recommend you for OPT (form letter provided in this packet).

### What are my OPT options?

F-1 students have four OPT options. The most common is “post-completion” OPT, which takes place:

1. Full-time (more than 20 hours per week) after completion of a degree.

Students may also participate in “pre-completion” OPT, which takes place:

2. Part-time (20 hours per week or fewer) while school is in session and student is enrolled full-time,
3. Part- or full-time after completion of all required coursework, excluding graduate credits for work on thesis, project, or dissertation, or
4. Part- or full-time during annual vacation semesters and periods when school is not in session.

OPT employment may take place anywhere in the U.S. Students seeking pre-completion OPT are advised to secure a job offer before applying for OPT so that employment time will not be lost.

### Practical Training Limits

Students are permitted to engage in a combination of the above OPT types if they choose. However, the combined total of pre-completion and post-completion OPT may never exceed 12 months.

Important note regarding Curricular Practical Training (CPT): CPT is similar to OPT in that both of these benefits permit students to obtain paid, off-campus employment. However, as a *curricular* benefit, CPT is intended to precede OPT. Therefore, **students must be aware that after engaging in OPT they will not be permitted to participate in CPT.**

## When can I apply for OPT?

When planning your OPT timeline, please plan ahead! Obtaining information, collecting documentation, and discussing your plans with the OISS take time.

Your application for post-completion OPT may be submitted up to 90 days prior to your *program end date*. Additionally, your application must be received by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) *before* your program completion date. Please note:

- Undergraduates and Plan C graduate students: Your program completion date falls on the last day of your final semester.
- Plan B graduate students: Your program completion occurs on the date that your program requirements are completed (as verified by a completion memo from your department and, if applicable, a project binding receipt from the Merrill Cazier Library). Therefore, completion will not necessarily fall on the last day of a semester. All Plan B students *must* apply for OPT *before* defending their degree project, as outlined on their program of study, but *after* scheduling a defense date with their department.
- Plan A graduate students: Your program completion occurs on the date that you submit your bound thesis or dissertation to the Merrill-Cazier Library. Therefore, completion will not necessarily fall on the last day of a semester. All Plan A students *must* apply for OPT *before* defending their thesis or dissertation but *after* scheduling a defense date with their department.

## How do I apply for OPT?

To apply for OPT, please complete the application checklist below, then schedule an appointment with an OISS advisor. All checklist items must be complete before OPT can be granted.

- Read all of the information contained in this packet.
- Complete the Departmental Recommendation for Post-completion OPT and obtain the required signature(s). Make a photocopy for your records.
- Verify that the majors listed on (1) your Departmental Recommendation form, (2) your USU student record, and (3) your most recent I-20 are the same.
- Download and complete the current I-765 form (visit <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> and click *Immigration Forms*). When filling this form:
  - Check the box indicating that you are applying for “permission to accept employment.”
  - For Item 1, write your family name in **ALL CAPS**.
  - For Item 3, use the mailing address of OISS to receive your OPT card. The mailing for OISS is as follows:

c/o Office of International Students & Scholars  
Utah State University  
TSC 313, 0140 Old Main Hill,  
Logan, UT 84322-0140
- If you have no response for a particular item, write *N/A* in the blank. If you do not know how to respond to an item, an OISS advisor can help you.
- For Item 16, enter ( c ) ( 3 ) ( b ).
- Be sure to sign the form and provide your telephone number and the date.

*Continued on the next page*

- Bring with you to your OPT appointment:
  - All I-20s ever issued to you, including those from previous schools
  - Your passport, F-1 visa, and I-94 card (I-94 is usually stapled inside your passport)
  - Any employment authorization cards you may have previously received (for OPT, economic hardship, etc.)
  - Two passport-style photographs taken no earlier than 30 days prior to submitting your application to DHS, and made according to the instructions in this packet
  - \$340 check or money order made payable to *Department of Homeland Security*. In the subject or memo line, write *I-765* (see sample in this packet)
  - Your unofficial USU transcript (printed within 24 hours of your OISS appointment)
  - Your current class registration
  - Your USU account summary

### **What happens after the OISS has processed my OPT application?**

Keep in mind that the OISS *recommends* your approval for OPT, but only the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can *approve* your application. Therefore, after an OISS advisor has processed your application, you are still responsible to send it to DHS for approval.

Once an OISS advisor has processed your application and issued you a new I-20 with your OPT recommendation on the back, you should first photocopy all of the documents you will be sending to DHS (including your check or money order and the front and back of your passport photographs). Take care to keep your documents in the same order in which the OISS compiled them. After making photocopies for your records, send your original documents to:

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
 Citizenship and Immigration Services  
 Nebraska Service Center  
 P.O. Box 87765  
 Lincoln, NE 68501-7765

Additionally, if you will be sending your application via expedited mail (overnight or 2-day delivery), you will need to include *850 S. Street* between the lines *Nebraska Service Center* and *P.O. Box 87765*. Your overall mailing address will then include six lines.

**Your application must be received by DHS within 30 days of the date on which your new I-20 was printed.** Failure to meet this deadline could result in significant delays. It is recommended that you **send your application via *Certified Mail* and request a *return receipt*.** Sending via Certified Mail will give you proof that you mailed the application on time and a return receipt will give you confirmation that DHS received it. The combined cost for both services is approximately \$5.00.

About two weeks after you mail your OPT application, you will receive a Notice of Action letter from DHS. The letter will give you a receipt number that begins with *LIN*. You may use that number to check the case status of your application at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>.

If your application is approved, DHS will send your OPT card via postal mail to the address you provided on your I-765 form. DHS is permitted to take up to 120 days to issue your card, so plan to wait up to four months for it to arrive. Wait times are generally shorter, however, and most students receive their cards within two to three months. If your OPT card takes more than 60 days to arrive, please continue to be patient. However, **if you have waited more than 90 days for your OPT card, please notify an OISS advisor for assistance.**

## What else do I need to know?

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** During the OPT application process, your department will verify your program completion date. The OISS will then shorten the expiration date on your I-20 to reflect this new date. **If you then fail to complete your program as planned, your I-20 will expire and you will fall out of status. Therefore, if you apply for OPT and later realize that you will not complete your program by the date indicated in your application, you MUST speak with an OISS advisor before your shortened expiration date.** The advisor can help you determine whether a program extension with continued enrollment is possible.
- According to immigration regulations, **OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study** and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. *You* hold sole responsibility to seek employment that meets these requirements.
- During your OPT employment, you will remain an F-1 student sponsored by USU. Therefore, **you remain obligated to inform the OISS of:**
  - any change in your address (within 10 days of the change)
  - any change in your visa status
  - any plan to add dependents to, or remove dependents from, your SEVIS record
- Your OPT employment is considered temporary and is valid *only* for the dates indicated on your OPT card. **It is *your* sole responsibility to restrict your employment to these authorized dates. Additionally, it is *your* sole responsibility to postpone your employment start date until your OPT card has been delivered to you.** Be aware that all employment you hold will be recorded on U.S. tax records and that working before or after your authorized dates is one of the most serious immigration offenses you can commit.
- Following the completion of OPT, you will have a **60-day grace period** before your lawful F-1 status expires. Within that 60-day period you must (1) be admitted to another degree program and receive an I-20, (2) apply for a change of visa status, or (3) depart the U.S. You may *not* be employed during your grace period.

## What if I want to travel outside the United States?

When traveling outside the United States, you must carry your OPT (EAD) card, a valid passport, current visa, and valid I-20 signed *for travel* no more than six months prior to your departure. You must also be employed and returning to a job in the U.S. A letter from your employer on company letterhead is required as proof of your employment.

According to immigration regulations, you must be employed or be actively seeking employment during your authorized OPT period. If you *must* travel outside the U.S. after you have submitted your OPT application to DHS but before you have received your OPT card, please consult the OISS for the most recent travel advice. Please also consult the OISS if you wish to travel and have received your OPT card, but have not obtained employment. Travel outside the U.S. under the above circumstances is very risky and your reentry into the U.S. is not guaranteed. Therefore, you are *strongly* advised to avoid such travel whenever possible.

## Additional Information about Tax Withholdings and Social Security

- On-campus Employment: Earnings of international employees working in the U.S. are subject to certain tax withholdings. Withholdings vary depending on the employee's visa type and country. Non-resident alien employees may not claim "exempt" status on the W-4 form. All international students and scholars employed by Utah State University must complete the appropriate tax forms in the Controller's Office at the onset of employment. Appointments can be made to complete these forms by contacting Pam Hill in Old Main, Room 026 (phone: 797-1049).
- Off-campus Employment: Tax treaty arrangements and tax withholdings for off-campus employment must be discussed with your employer. Your employer may determine the level of withholdings to which you will be subjected.

## Departmental Recommendation for Post-completion OPT

(For Optional Practical Training to take place *after* student's degree completion.)

**To the Recommending Department:** The information below must be provided before a student can be granted Optional Practical Training. You may use this form or provide an original letter on Department letterhead.

Office of International Student & Scholars  
Utah State University  
0140 Old Main Hill  
Logan, Utah 84322-0140  
(435) 797-1124  
(435) 797-3522 (fax)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr./Mrs./Miss \_\_\_\_\_ is a student in the department of  
(Student Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ who will complete the requirements for a  
(Department)

\_\_\_\_\_ degree on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.  
(Bachelors/Masters/Doctoral) (Date)

- This student is a Plan A or Plan B graduate student who must defend a thesis, dissertation, or special project.
- Student's defense date has been scheduled for \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.
- Plan C graduate student or undergraduate Student

We recommend that this student be permitted to seek practical training in her/his major as an extension of her/his academic program. Your approval is appreciated.

Sincerely,

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Academic Advisor (required)

Print Name

Phone

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Department Head Signature

Print Name

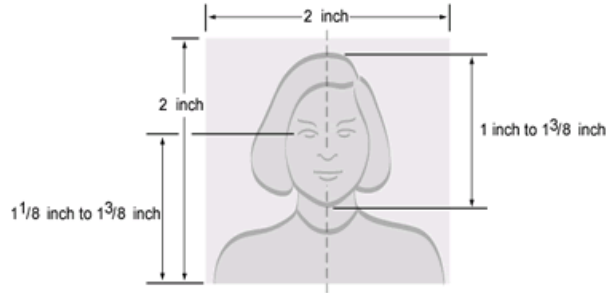
Phone

## Photo Composition Checklist

You may have your picture taken at a number of different places in Logan. Check the Yellow Pages phone book under *Passport* or *Photography* for locations. Please take these instructions with you to ensure that your picture is taken properly.

### 7 Steps to Successful Photos

- ✓ 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



## Sample Money Order

You may obtain a money order, with cash, from the Post Office, bank, grocery store, or other outlet. Payment may also be made by personal check. DHS charges are as follows:

- Optional practical training \$340
- Off-campus work (hardship) \$340
- J-2 work authorization \$340
- Reinstatement \$300
- Change of status \$300

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®		POSTAL MONEY ORDER		15-800-000
SERIAL NUMBER	YEAR, MONTH, DAY	POST OFFICE	U.S. DOLLARS AND CENTS	
04213000012				
AMOUNT				
PAY TO	Department of Homeland Security		NAME OF PERSON SENDING MONEY ORDER	
ADDRESS	(Leave blank)		ADDRESS OF PERSON SENDING MONEY ORDER	
C.O.D. NO. OR USED FOR	I-765			