

# F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS  
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## WHAT IS OPT?

Optional Practical Training is defined as authorization for “temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study.” OPT employment authorization is granted for 12 months typically after completion of degree requirements.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- Students who are maintaining current F-1 visa status and continue maintaining F-1 visa status; **and**
- Students who have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year before OPT application; **and**
- Who will be completing degree requirements within 90 days; **and**
- Employment is not required to apply, but proposed OPT employment must be **directly related** to the course of study.

**NOTE: If you plan to spend one or more semesters outside the U.S. before your OPT application, then please consult with an OISS advisor for OPT eligibility.**

## WHEN TO APPLY FOR OPT?

- A student can apply for OPT up to 90 days before the program end date and up to 60 days after the program end date.
- Though it is possible to file the I-765 form (OPT) after graduation, OISS do not recommend doing so as the USCIS processing times vary and you may lose some of your 12-month employment authorization.

## WHEN DOES OPT START?

Students have a choice of when they want the OPT to start. The earliest a student can start employment is the day after completing degree requirements. The latest date OPT can start is 60 days after the degree completion date.

## EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS TO MAINTAIN STATUS WHILE ON OPT

- During post-completion OPT; maintaining F-1 visa status is dependent upon employment. Students must not accrue a total of 90 days or more of unemployment during post-completion OPT. The 90 days of unemployment begins accruing on the start date of the Employment Authorization Document/card (EAD). For more details, please consult an OISS advisor.
- Employment **MUST** be related to the field of study and one must work a minimum of 20 hours a week in one’s field of study and obtain proof of employment such as a letter from one’s employer.
- The employment does **NOT** have to be paid employment.
- Employment authorization will begin on the date listed on the employment authorization document.

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS WHILE ON OPT

All students on OPT are **required** to report the following to the OISS:

- Once you find employment, you **must** report the name, and address of employer, and start date of employment using the SEVP Student Portal at [http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download\\_file/view/899/273/](http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download_file/view/899/273/). If there is ever a **change or interruption** in your employment status, you **must** notify OISS immediately.
- You **must** submit a photocopy of your Employment Authorization Document/card (EAD) to OISS. If you do not use the OISS address on your I-765 form, it is your responsibility to submit a copy of your EAD card to OISS for your student file.
- While on OPT, you **must** continue to update your residential address via SEVP Student Portal. Your address **must** describe where you live. It **cannot** be a P.O. Box or an office address. Visit <http://www.reg.msu.edu>, click on “Address Changes” and use “local address” to report the change.

## GRACE PERIOD FOLLOWING OPT

Students who successfully complete OPT will receive a 60-day grace period starting on the day after OPT expires. Before the 60-day grace period is over, you must have either departed the U.S., applied to change your visa status from F-1 to another status, or have received a new I-20 to pursue a new academic program.

**NOTE: Only those who complete OPT and do not exceed the 90-day unemployment limit receive the 60-day grace period. Those who exceed the 90-day unemployment limit during OPT receive no grace period and are considered out of F-1 status.**

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- You **must** have your **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** in your possession **and** the start date must have arrived in order to begin employment.
- The EAD will be mailed to the address that you put on the I-765 form. The Post Office **will NOT forward** mail from USCIS if you change your address after you apply. **USCIS will NOT mail your EAD to a P.O. Box or international address.**
- For your convenience, you may use the OISS address: 427 N. Shaw Lane, Room 105, East Lansing, MI 48824.
- OISS will email your MSU email account when we receive mail on your behalf. If you use OISS address, then
- OISS will open your mail to make copies of your relevant documents.
- Please pick up your mail in person immediately or follow the mailing instructions in the email to have it couriered to your U.S. address. USCIS will request more information or will issue an EAD **approximately 90 days** after receipt of your application, unless you are found ineligible.
- If you change your status prior to the OPT expiration date, please inform OISS and send a copy of your change of status approval to the office.

## REMINDERS DURING OPT

- If you plan on changing your status, we recommend that you begin this process before your OPT expires.
- If you are transferring to another institution, make sure to contact OISS, so that your SEVIS record may be electronically transferred **BEFORE** the end of your authorized stay.
- Check the OISS website (<http://oiss.msu.edu>) and your MSU email account for immigration updates.

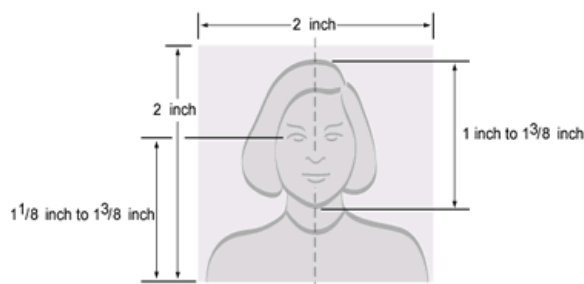
# APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- All F-1 students applying for OPT **must** complete the D2L online course “OISS - Optional Practical Training (OPT)” during the final semester. To register for the OISS - Optional Practical Training Course:
  - Log into D2L (<https://d2l.msu.edu/>)
  - Click on “Select Self Registration”
  - Click on the course named “OISS - Optional Practical Training (OPT)”
  - Register for the course
  - Print and bring the required “**OPT Certificate of Completion**” after successfully completing the course
- Follow the instruction on D2L course for completion of the following items:
  - Student Status form:** Completed by you and your academic advisor. (Attached)
  - G-1145 form:** (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf>)
  - I-765 form:** (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)
  - I-94:** Printout of the electronic I-94 screen at from CBP website ([www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94)) or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.
  - Passport:** Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your passport.
  - U.S. Visa:** Photocopy of your most recent U.S. Visa page.
  - Two Passport Photos** (see example): Photos must be taken within 30 days of OPT application. Gently print your full name and SEVIS number (SEVIS number is located on top left of the I-20 and starts with N) on the back of each photo.
  - Check or Money Order for \$410.00** made payable to: **US Department of Homeland Security**. If the address on your check is not current, please cross out the old address and write your present address. The check **must** have your name preprinted.
  - If applicable:** Photocopies of all I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** authorization(s).
  - If applicable:** Photocopies of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front and back).
- Provide all the above documents including OPT Certificate of Completion and meet with an OISS advisor.
- OISS will prepare a required OPT I-20, minimum 2 business days.
- OISS will provide address for USPS Certified Mail or courier address for mailing your OPT application.
- USCIS must receive your completed OPT application within 30 days of OPT I-20 creation.**

## PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPH REQUIREMENTS

- Photos must be less than 30 days old from OPT I-20 processing.
- Photos must be 2 inches in height by 2 inches in width (see figure below).
- The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background.
- Head height should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches from top to bottom of chin.
- Eye height is between 1 1/8 inch to 1 3/8 inch from bottom of photo (see figure below).
- Head must be bare unless a headdress is required by religious order of which you are a member.
- **DO NOT USE OLD PHOTOS OR THE SAME PHOTOS YOU USED FOR YOUR VISA STAMP OR PASSPORT.**

Image not to scale



# YOU HAVE BEEN RECOMMENDED FOR OPT...NOW WHAT?

## OPT I-20:

In approximately 2-3 business days, you will receive an email from OISS notifying you that your new OPT I-20 is ready for pick up. This OPT I-20 is required as part of your OPT packet.

## FINAL PREPARATIONS

Pick up your new I-20 as soon as you receive an email from OISS and do the following:

- Sign and date the OPT I-20
- Photocopy all pages of the signed OPT I-20.
- Add your photocopied OPT I-20 (not the original!) to your application packet.
- Mail your OPT application to USCIS.

**NOTE: Your OPT application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the date the OPT I-20 was created.**

## CHECKLIST FOR MAILING OUT YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS

**USCIS must receive your completed OPT application within 30 days of I-20 creation.**

- OPT I-20:** Photocopy all pages
- G-1145 form**
- I-765 form**
- I-94:** Printout of the newest electronic I-94 or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.
- Passport:** Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your passport.
- U.S. Visa:** Photocopy of your most recent U.S. Visa page.
- Two Passport Photos** (see example): Photos must be taken within 30 days of OPT application. Gently print your full name and SEVIS number (your SEVIS number is located on the I-20 and starts with N) on the back of each photo.
- Check or Money Order for \$410.00** made payable to: **US Department of Homeland Security**. If the address on your check is not current, please cross out the old address and write your present address.
- If applicable:** Photocopies of all I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** authorization(s).
- If applicable:** Photocopies of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front and back).

## HOW TO MAIL

We recommend using either USPS Certified Mail or a courier service (FedEx, DHL, UPS etc.) to mail your OPT application to USCIS. These options have different mailing addresses.

## RECEIPT NOTICE

With submission of G-1145 form, USCIS will email/text you a receipt number for your OPT application. The message will provide a receipt number as information, but will not constitute official notice of acceptance. The email notice will also provide a brief statement on how to get additional information about the status of your case. USCIS will also mail you a paper copy Receipt Notice. This is your proof of application. It will state when your application was received and give you an application number. You can use the application number to check your application status at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

**NOTE: If you receive OISS email for document pick-up, please come to OISS. USCIS requests are time sensitive.**

## OPT APPROVAL

Approximately 90 days after your application is received, you will receive your EAD. This is your approval. Once you have your EAD and the start date has arrived, you may begin employment.

**NOTE: You must provide OISS with a photocopy of your EAD.**

## OPT REQUIREMENTS

- You must be employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week
- All employment must be in your field of study
- Employment can be paid or unpaid
- You must not exceed a total of 90 days of unemployment time for the entire OPT period

## EMPLOYMENT REPORTING

It is **MANDATORY** for all students on OPT to report their employment information to SEVP Student Portal. **Students who fail to report their employment information in a timely fashion will be auto-terminated by**

SEVIS. Report any changes to your employment via SEVP Student Portal:  
[http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download\\_file/view/899/273/](http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download_file/view/899/273/)

## ADDRESS REPORTING

You must report address changes of your local residence within 10 days of moving to a new address. The address cannot be a P.O. Box or an office address. Report any address changes to SEVP Student Portal.

## TRAVELING OUTSIDE THE U.S.

If you leave the U.S. after applying for OPT, then you must show the following documents when reentering the U.S.:

- **If your OPT is not yet approved, you will need the following:**
  - Unexpired passport
  - Unexpired F-1 visa stamp
  - OPT I-20 with recent travel signature (within past 6 months)
  - OPT Receipt Notice (proof of application)
- **If your OPT is approved, you will need the following:**
  - Unexpired passport
  - Unexpired F-1 visa stamp
  - OPT I-20 with recent travel signature (within past 6 months)
  - Unexpired EAD
  - Proof of employment (offer letter or employment confirmation letter from employer)

If you have an expired F-1 visa stamp and you plan to make a short trip (less than 30 days) to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent (Caribbean Sea) islands, consult an OISS advisor or visit OISS website for Automatic Revalidation:

<http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/immigration1/visa-immigration/travel-visa/>

## HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

OPT students may be able to get health insurance:

- **Through an employer:** If you will be working at a job that offers health insurance coverage, you'll simply transition to your employer's health plan.

**NOTE:** US-based plans usually don't offer medical evacuation and repatriation (MER) coverage. An inexpensive policy for MER can be purchased at <http://www.medexassist.com/Individuals/Products/MEDEXSafeTrip.aspx>

- **Through MSU Benefits Office:** Student who are approved for either OPT or Academic Training (AT) after graduation, their dependent family members are eligible to purchase health insurance. Please contact OISS for the enrollment form and a letter to prove your OPT status, then bring both documents to the MSU Benefits Office at 1407 S. Harrison Ste.140 for special enrollment.
- **Buy a policy from private insurance company:** Learn more at <http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/health-wellness-and-safety/us-health-care-insurance/>

**NOTE:** 1) Make sure you know when your current health insurance ends! If you are currently enrolled as a student through the Blue Care Network plan, contact the MSU Benefits Office or Blue Care Network to clarify the end date of your coverage. 2) OPT students can still be seen at the Olin Health Center, but will be asked to pay co-pay and deductible.

## AFTER OPT

Once your EAD is expired, you will have a 60-day grace period. Before the end of the grace period you **must**:

- Depart the U.S.
- Apply for a different visa status
- Transfer to a new academic program

**NOTE:** Those who exceed the 90-day unemployment limit during OPT receive no grace period.

## TRANSITION TO H-1B and H-1B CAP-GAP EXTENSION

H-1B visas for private sector employers typically take effect on October 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. If an employer sponsors you for an H-1B visa and your OPT expires prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>, contact OISS to see, if you are eligible for a "Cap-Gap" extension of your OPT work authorization and F-1 status.

If an employer files an H-1B petition on behalf of an F-1 student while that student has valid OPT employment authorization or is in the 60-day grace period following OPT, that student is eligible for a "Cap-Gap" extension.

If your employer files an H-1B petition on your behalf while you still have valid OPT employment authorization, then your employment authorization will be extended starting on the day after your original OPT expires and ending on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Cap-Gap extension may end immediately, if the H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or withdrawn. Check with the person who filed your H-1B petition.

If your employer files an H-1B petition on your behalf *after* your OPT work authorization expires, but *before* the end of your 60-day grace period, your status will be extended but your work authorization will not be extended. In other words, you will be allowed to remain inside the U.S. but you will not be allowed to work. In all H-1B cases you should consult with the lawyer who filed your H-1B petition for legal advice.

**NOTE: International travel is *not* allowed during the OPT Cap-Gap extension.**

While proof of an H-1B petition is all that is needed to prove an OPT Cap-Gap extension, students may request that OISS print a new I-20 which shows dates of continued F-1 visa status and employment authorization.

# EMPLOYMENT REPORTING WHILE ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

## Types of activity that constitute employment while on OPT

Student and Exchange Visitor Program's [OPT Policy Guidance](#) [7.2.1] states that the following activities are considered allowable employment on both pre-completion and standard post-completion OPT, provided that the job is directly related to the student's program of study.

Use the SEVP Student Portal [http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download\\_file/view/899/273/](http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/index.php/download_file/view/899/273/)

### SITUATION

**REGULAR PAID EMPLOYMENT** in a position directly related to the student's program of study.

- For post-completion OPT, the work must be for at least 20 hours per week
- Students may work for multiple employers, as long as it is directly related to the student's program of study.

**PAYMENT BY MULTIPLE SHORT-TERM MULTIPLE EMPLOYERS.** SEVP says that "Students, such as musicians and other performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration."

**WORK FOR HIRE.** SEVP says, "This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students should be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company."

**SELF-EMPLOYED BUSINESS OWNER.** SEVP says, "Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student should be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program."

**EMPLOYMENT THROUGH AN AGENCY.** SEVP says, "Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency."

**VOLUNTEERS OR UNPAID INTERNS: \_ STANDARD OPT \_.** SEVP OPT Policy Guidance states that, "Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work should be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. A student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student's employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment."

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# F-1 OPT STUDENT STATUS FORM

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS  
Phone: 517.353.1720 | Fax: 517.355.4657  
E-mail: [oiiss@msu.edu](mailto:oiiss@msu.edu) | Web: [www.oiiss.msu.edu](http://www.oiiss.msu.edu)

## THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

|                              |          |                            |  |
|------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|--|
| Last Name:                   |          | First Name:                |  |
| Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy):  | PID #: A | SEVIS ID #: N              |  |
| OPT Start Date (mm/dd/yyyy): |          | OPT End Date (mm/dd/yyyy): |  |

**NOTE: The OPT Start Date must be within 60 days after completion of your Completion Date. You MUST stop working on-campus or off-campus after your completion date, unless you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD)/card with valid start date and the employment is directly related to your course of study.**

Signature of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**NOTES<sup>1</sup>:** Expected completion date of degree requirements will vary according to degree level and/or program track.

## THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED ONLY BY ACADEMIC ADVISOR

|   |
|---|
| Student's Major (Field of Study):   |
| Program Level: <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors <input type="checkbox"/> Masters <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| Expected <b>Completion Date</b> of Degree Requirements (see chart below):   |

Please refer to the academic calendar for current information: <http://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/Academic.asp> .

**Student must stop working on-campus after completion date.**

| Undergraduate   | Master's – Thesis  | Master's – Comprehensive Exam   | Master's - Other  | Doctoral  |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Last day of final exams in graduating semester <sup>2</sup></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis defense date <b>or</b>,</li> <li>Thesis submission date <b>or</b>,</li> <li>Last day of final exams in graduating semester <sup>2</sup></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive exam date <sup>2</sup><b>or</b>,</li> <li>Last day of final exams in graduating semester <sup>2</sup></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Last day of final exams in graduating semester <sup>2</sup></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dissertation defense date <b>or</b>,</li> <li>Dissertation submission date <b>or</b>,</li> <li>Last day of final exams in graduating semester <sup>2</sup><b>or</b>,</li> <li>Last day of Assistantship</li> </ul> |

**NOTE<sup>2</sup>:** Student **MUST** enroll full-time in the semester they graduate, including summer semester, or file a Reduced Course Load (RCL) Form with OISS.

|                           |         |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Name of Academic Advisor: |         |
| Department:               | Title:  |
| Phone:                    | E-mail: |
| Signature:                | Date:   |