# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING – OVERVIEW & APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

General Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the *option* (not mandatory) to gain practical experience in your field of study/major. You cannot apply for OPT without approval and help from the Center for International Programs. **Having a job is not a requirement to apply for OPT.** If you plan to apply for OPT, you must attend one of the mandatory OPT workshops. The first workshop is typically held in February.

- An eligible F-1 student is able to work for 12 months after graduation on OPT. Are you eligible? See:**http://www.uscis.gov/eir/visa-guide/f-1-opt-optional-practical-training/f-1-optional-practical-training-opt** and talk to your DSO.

- To be eligible for OPT, you must, among other things, have been a full-time F-1 student in good standing for at least 1 full academic year AND be currently maintaining F-1 status. Are you maintaining F-1 status? See: **http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/maintaining-your-status**. **Once you leave the US after your program end date, you are no longer in F-1 status and are ineligible to apply for OPT.**

- The Center for International Programs recommends an eligible student for OPT by generating a new OPT endorsed I-20. This new I-20, along with the application requirements listed on page 2, are then submitted to USCIS by student (United States Citizenship and Immigration Service) for authorization. The processing time to receive authorization from USCIS is 90 days.

- Important US government links to review:

  - **http://www.ice.gov/sevis/employment#tab1**

  - **https://www.uscis.gov/eir/visa-guide/f-1-opt-optional-practical-training/f-1-optional-practical-training-opt**

  - **https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-help-hub/update-records/maintain-student-records/fm-student-employment/f-1-optional-practical-training**

  - **https://www.ice.gov/sevis/practical-training**

- A student may apply as early as 90 days before their program end date and as late as 60 days after their program end date (your program end date is listed on your form I-20). Remember, it will take 90 days to receive OPT card. You cannot begin to work until you receive your OPT card.

OPT Application Timeline
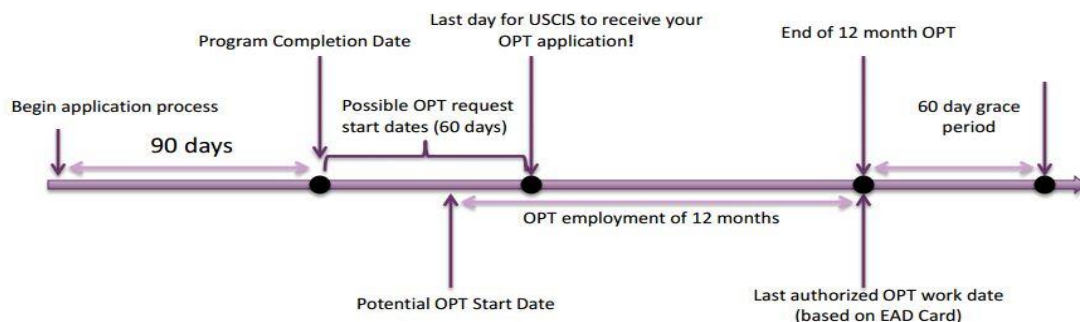
Required Documents to Apply for OPT

The following documents are required as part of the OPT / I-765 application (subject to change – please verify these instructions in the link below):

1. **Form I-765** – Type your information into the form accessed by link below and then print. Do not e-file. Please read the form I-765 instructions here: http://www.uscis.gov/i-765
    - Type or use BLACK ink
    - Check first box "permission to accept employment".
    - **Section 3 US Mailing address:** *Use a US address where you will be living 3-4 months after you mail your application. Use a friend or relative's address in the US if you don't know where you will be living. Cannot be a foreign address.*
    - **Section 14 Alien Registration Number**: use your I-94 number accessed electronically from www.cbp.gov/i94 OR on your I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport).
    - **Sections 16 & 17:** Enter date and place from your most recent I-94 record. Make sure it matches your passport stamp.
    - **Section 20**: Use eligibility code (c) (3) (B).
2. Updated I-20 with OPT recommendation from your DSO
3. Photocopy of all previous I-20s
4. Printout of I-94 - https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html
5. Photocopy of biographical page of passport
6. Photocopy of most recent visa (if applicable)
7. Two identical color official US passport photographs measuring 2" by 2". The photos should be recent, no more than 30 days old. Photo specifications:
    http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photos.html
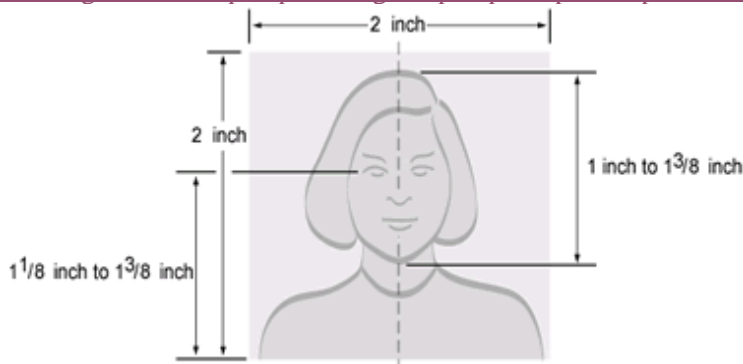
8. The signature that appears on the OPT card is scanned directly from the I-765. If any part of the signature crosses the top or lower line, the signature can be rejected.
9. A non-refundable money order in the amount of $410 (available at Siena Post Office before 11 am – cash only or at an off-campus U.S. post office using cash or credit card) payable to: *U.S. Department of Homeland Security.*
10. To receive an e-Notification when your Form I-765 has been accepted, complete Form G-1145: http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf

Once you have gathered all of the above documents (except #2), you must meet with Meg to receive your updated I-20. Your application must be received by USCIC within 30 days of your new I-20 date.

If you entered a New York address for your mailing address on your I-765, mail your application using U.S. Postal Service (NOT FedEx or DHL) to:

<div align="center">

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

</div>

After you Apply

- Be patient – the processing time is 90 days.
- Sign up via the links below for case status updates & to track your case.
  - https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/disclaimer.do
  - https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do
- Once the application has been received by USCIS, within two weeks you should receive a "Notice of Action" letter that serves only as a confirmation receipt of your application.
  This "Notice of Action" letter contains the following:
  - Your receipt number (WAC number in the upper left hand corner) which you will need if you want to check the status of your case with USCIS.
  - "Received date" – the date USCIS physically received your application.
  - "Notice date" – the date USCIS issued the receipt.
- If your OPT card application has been pending more than **75** days, you may contact the USCIS at 1-800 375-5283 and ask that an Approaching Regulatory Timeframe "service request" be created. The NCSC will route the service request to the appropriate office for review. Have your receipt number ready when contacting USCIS.

Restrictions

- Travel outside the U.S. is risky while your OPT application is pending and there is a chance of being denied re-admission to the U.S. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away, so you would want to make sure you will be able to receive and respond to the request. Also, if USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your OPT card in hand to re-enter the United States. Like a request for further information, USCIS can only send the OPT card to your U.S. address.
- We recommend traveling outside the US **only if** you have your OPT card and proof of employment.
- If employed, you may travel outside of the United States while on OPT. To re-enter you will need to show the Immigration Officer your:
  1. OPT card
  2. valid visa
  3. valid passport
  4. employment letter and
  5. I-20 signed by your DSO **within the last 6 months**.
- READ: https://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel
- The student may not work without an OPT card.
- Your employment does NOT need to be paid employment. You can volunteer and/or work part time.
- You may change jobs during your OPT period and/or have multiple jobs.
- If you are unemployed for 90 days, your OPT ends.
- You must depart the United States within 60 days of completion of OPT or if you accumulate 90 days of unemployment.

Responsibilities

- Throughout the OPT period, you are required to notify your DSO of:
  - Any name or address changes;
  - Your employer's name & address and employment start date and any change of employer.
- Once employed, students must document all periods of employment and unemployment during OPT. This documentation should include job title and description for all employment, start date of employment, change in employer, and termination of employment.
- If you decide to depart from the U.S. for the remainder of your OPT period, you must notify your DSO.

- ➢ **Questions?** Contact the Center for International Programs at Meg Verret at mverret@siena.edu