Applying for Optional Practical Training

1. Read through the entire application packet before completing.
2. Ask your academic advisor to complete the attached “Academic Advisor’s Recommendation Form.”
3. Complete the “International Programs Information Sheet for OPT Application”
4. Complete Form I-765, found on the USCIS website (http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis). Click on “Forms” on the top left. The I-765 fillable form – complete it electronically and then print.
5. Obtain a copy of your most current grade report from the Registrar’s Office or print from the myOxy gateway.
6. Make an appointment with IPO. A DSO must recommend OPT in SEVIS and print a new I-20 to include in your application packet. Bring I-765 application materials and all supporting documents.
7. Make a photocopy or scan of all documents for your records.
8. Mail the documents on the checklist below to:

   For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:

   USCIS
   P.O. Box 21281
   Phoenix, AZ  85036

   For Express and Courier deliveries:

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

The address to mail the completed application to will be on the instruction forms for the I-765. Please be sure the address has not changed!
OPT Application Checklist

☐ Make an appointment with an advisor in IPO.

Bring with you to your appointment:
☐ Completed, unsigned, form I-765.
☐ Copies of pages 1 and 3 of ALL previous I-20s.
☐ A photocopy of identification photo page of your passport.
☐ A photocopy of the F1 visa stamp in your passport.
☐ A photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD), if applicable
☐ Two color, full frontal passport style photographs. Print your name and Alien Receipt number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo, and put the photos in an envelope and attach it to the I-765 application. Photo specifications are listed under “Required Documentation” on the Instructions for filing the I-765.
☐ $380 application fee, made payable to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” (money order or check, no cash). Attach check to the front of the I-765.
☐ Complete Form G-1145 (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) if you would like to get e-mail confirmation of receipt of application.
☐ Completed Advisors form (see below).
☐ Completed Information form (see below).

Staple all above documents together and send by certified mail with a return receipt. The application must be sent to USCIS within 30 days of DSO recommendation for OPT (on the new I-20). After mailing in the documents, you will EITHER receive a receipt notice (Form I-797) or a request for further information (RFE). The application approval takes approximately 3 months, possibly longer. If you have not received your EAD card in 90 days, you may make an appointment through “Infopass” on the USCIS website (http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis). The entire application must be received by the immigration service no later than 60 days beyond your graduation date.

Instructions for Filling out Form I-765

I am applying for: Check first box “permission to accept employment”;

Complete lines 1 through 16; DO NOT sign and date under “certification” UNTIL YOU MEET WITH IPO.

#3 Return Address: Insert the address the EAD card will be mailed to. Government mail cannot be forwarded. If you don’t know where you will be, put the International Program’s address. The return address must be in one of the following states in order to send the application to the Phoenix lockbox – Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

#10 Alien Registration Number: Use your I-94 number found on the the print-out.

#11 Previous employment authorization: You must check “yes” if you have previously applied for work authorization at this or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT. If you are applying for a 17 month extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.
#14 and #15: Insert “F-1 student”

#16 Eligibility categories:

- (c) (3) (A) – for OPT prior to graduation (pre-completion)
- (c) (3) (B) – for Post Completion OPT
- (c) (3) (C) – for 17 month extension of OPT

Remember: sign and date the I-765 at your meeting with a DSO in IPO!

**Regulations while you are on Optional Practical Training**

Immigration regulations require that you notify the IPO ([ipo@oxy.edu](mailto:ipo@oxy.edu)) of the following information within 10 days of the occurrence while on OPT:

- The address and telephone number where you reside
- Mailing address (if you cannot receive mail at your residence)
- Name of company and address of employer
- Your personal e-mail address or best way to contact you
- Copy of the back and front of your EAD card, when received.

**Regulations while on OPT:**

- You are authorized to work only in your field of study.
- You may not begin work in the U.S. until you receive the EAD.
- You must update your address and telephone with IPO each time you move.
- You must update IPO of employers name and address.
- OPT rules permit an aggregate of 90 days of unemployment only.
- If you apply to and are accepted by a graduate school after OPT, IPO will need to transfer your SEVIS record.
- Stay in touch!
ACADEMIC ADVISER’S RECOMMENDATION FORM FOR
F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

This form provides the information required by the USCIS for the granting of employment for practical training to an international student. The student’s academic adviser must complete and sign this form. Thank you for your assistance.

Student Information (to be completed by the student)

STUDENT’S NAME: ________________________________ MAJOR: __________________

ADVISER’S NAME ____________________________ TITLE ____________________________ DEPARTMENT ____________________________

EMPLOYER’S NAME ____________________________ ADDRESS ____________________________ TELEPHONE ____________________________

When do you anticipate this student completing his or her studies at Occidental College? (Please fill in date and check one of the following)

_____ / __________ / ______

DATE [ ] Graduation/Conferral of Degree date
[ ] Completion of semester/last day as registered student
[ ] Other: ____________________________ (explain)

Please note: An international student must be registered full time to maintain legal F-1 visa status.

Adviser, please describe the type of employment the student is seeking and its applicability to their major course of study. (Required by USCIS) What kind of work does this major prepare a student for?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

To the best of your knowledge, is this type of employment experience related to the student’s field of study and appropriate to the student’s educational level? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Adviser’s signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________ Phone number ____________________________ E-mail ____________________________
International Programs Information for OPT Application

We will enter the DSO advisor recommendation for your OPT in the SEVIS database and print out a new I-20 with our recommendation and your requested dates printed on page 3. In order to do so, please provide the following information:

First Name: _____________________ Last Name: _____________________

SEVIS ID# (upper right hand corner of the I-20): _____________________

OPT Start Date: ________________ OPT End Date: ________________

The start date must fall within the 60 days after graduation or the end date on item #5 on your I-20, whichever is earlier. The end date will be 12 months later within 14 months of graduation.

Dates of previous employment:

____________ to ______________

____________ to ______________

____________ to ______________

E-mail address while you are on OPT: _____________________________

Graduation Date: ____________________________ Major Field: ______________

If you are graduating with more than one major, in which field will you be seeking practical training?

Additional information required for 17 month extension):

End date of current OPT card: ________________

Your job title: _____________________________

Name of employer: ____________________________

Employer Address: ____________________________

    Employer E-Verify ID#: ____________________________

    Supervisors name: ____________________________

    Supervisor phone: ____________________________

    Date: ________________    Student Name: ____________________________
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?
Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. Optional practical training is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take up to 120 days to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status is 12 months per degree level or a 17 month extension for those who qualify. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study OR save the full twelve months to use after graduation. Post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months of graduation.

What are the Eligibility Requirements for the F-1 Optional Practical Training?
To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one academic year, (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application, and (3) intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study.

If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study at a higher level, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?
Yes. F-1 students may take 12 months of OPT (less any OPT used during the program-see below) after completion of each higher degree level. You may take 12 months of OPT after your BA and another 12 months after a Master’s degree. You may not use an additional 12 months if you get a second BA. Remember, 12 months of full-time CPT make you ineligible for OPT.

How can I use optional practical training before I complete my academic program?
Students meeting the eligibility requirements listed above may apply for OPT (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you completed all course requirements for the program. Any periods of OPT used before the completion of your studies will be deducted from the 12 month allotment after graduation. Or, at half the rate for part time OPT – for instance, four months of part-time practical training will result in two months deducted from your 12 months total. See IPO for other options.

How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?
Authorization for optional practical training is granted by USCIS and can take up to three months to process. Therefore, it’s important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to commence employment (but not more than 120 days prior to your work start date). The application must be received by USCIS no later than 60 days after the program end date listed on your I-20.

Do I need to have a job to apply for optional practical training?
No. You do not need to have a job offer before applying for OPT. However, if you are applying for OPT during your course of study or vacation periods, you will want to either have a job offer or a firm job prospect because periods of OPT cannot be rescinded once the period requested has been authorized.

Does the job I have on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?
A student who is self-employed, interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employed.” Remember, only 90 days of unemployment are allowed. For the 17 month STEM extension, employment must be traditional paid employment. You are allowed
an aggregate of 90 days of unemployment while on OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension.

How will I know if the practical training application has been approved?
You will receive from the USCIS a small photo identification card, called an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). This card will state the type and length of the period of employment authorized. When you receive this card, check to make certain all the information is correct.

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?
No. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training?
In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than six calendar years are exempt from social security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention or your employer, as employers may not be familiar with this provision of the tax law. You will be subject to all other taxes that may apply; federal, state, and local. You should check to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the U.S. allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

Do I need to report to the IPO while I am on OPT?
Yes. You must report your contact information (address where you are living and mailing address, if different), and your e-mail account. You must report to IPO the name and address of your employer. Additionally, you must report any periods of unemployment. E-mail ipo@oxy.edu within 10 days of a change in this information.

Information on 17 month “STEM” extension

What is the 17 month STEM extension of OPT?
A new regulation allows F1 students on OPT who have received a degree in the fields listed below, referred to as “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering or mathematics), to apply for a one time 17-month extension of their regular 12 month OPT period. You will not apply for 29 months initially. The 17 month extension allows students to have continuous work authorization at least through Oct. 1 of any given following year. Students who timely file an application for the 17 month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

STEM Fields:
- Computer Science Applications. CIP Codes 11.xxxx
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences. CIP Codes 26.xxxx.
- Mathematics and Statistics. CIP Codes 27.xxxx.
- Physical Sciences. CIP Codes 40.xxxx.
- Science Technologies. CIP Codes 41.xxxx.

I think I qualify for the extension, how do I apply?
Students graduating with degrees in these fields will first apply for the regular 12 month OPT. Once you have begun your 12 month OPT, if you meet the following criteria, you can apply through the IPO for your 17 month extension.

Criteria for 17 month extension:
Your employer must be enrolled in the “E-Verify” program
You must have graduated with a major in one of the STEM fields and be working in that field.
You must have maintained status while on OPT.

I am currently on OPT and my employer has applied for an H1B visa for me. My OPT ends in May and the H visa would be valid in October. Do I need to leave the US between May and October?
Duration of status and any OPT work authorization will be automatically extended for an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. If USCIS denies a pending H1B petition, the F1 student has the standard 60 day grace period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition before they have to leave the US.

TRAVEL WHILE ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As you prepare to submit the application for Optional Practical Training (OPT), you may have questions regarding how the application affects your ability to travel outside the U.S. Below are some of the more common ones:

Now that I’ve sent in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to come?
Yes. However, your EAD card can only be sent to a US address. You should arrange to have your EAD card sent to a friend or trusted other who will send the card to you abroad.

What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?
You will need your I-20 recommending you for OPT that has been endorsed on the travel line by the IPO within the last 6 months; the EAD from the USCIS, your valid passport, a current visa stamp and a letter from your employer or proof of employment stating you will be resuming work. This letter should be on company letterhead.

What if I still have some time left on my student program? Can I travel during that time, even though my I-20 shows that I’ve been authorized for OPT?
Yes. You must be returning as a student to complete academic requirements. For example, a student who has applied for OPT in March, but who doesn’t graduate until June, may still travel as a student until the graduation date, re-entering the U.S. with a valid passport, current visa stamp, and the I-20 endorsed by the IPO.

The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?
If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for less than 30 days, you may be able to re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with a valid passport, your EAD card, a valid I- and employer letter. Check the consulate website. If you are traveling elsewhere, you will need to go to a U.S. embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp.

What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under OPT?
You need to take a valid passport, the I-20 endorsed by the IPO within the last 6 months, the EAD card, and if you have employment already, an official letter of offer of employment showing salary, location, job duties, and beginning date as well. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there.
Do I still need to get the travel line on my I-20 signed by the IPO during the year of OPT?
Yes. During the OPT year, if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every six months. If you are not located in Los Angeles, mail the original I-20 to the IPO for endorsement, leaving plenty of time for mailing delays both ways.

I want to leave the U.S. for a little while during the time my OPT application is in process, but I need to return long before the card will have arrived. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD card, then start work with the card once I get it?
If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B visa, you will have an entry records that shows that you have been admitted under B status, and you will have lost your F-1 status. Hence, your OPT application and card will be invalid.