OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
Information and Instructions for Application

INTRODUCTION:
As an international student in F1 status, it is your responsibility to read, understand, and comply with the US laws and regulations that govern your F-1 visa. Although you no longer attend classes during Optional Practical Training, you are still considered by the US government to be in F-1 student visa status under the authority of Baylor University until whichever of the following occurs first:
1. your practical training employment period ends, or
2. you change to another immigration status, or
3. you leave the country, or
4. you enroll in a new educational program.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined in the USCIS regulations as authorization for temporary employment (for up to 12 months) available to students in F-1 visa status for practical training (employment) which is directly related to the student’s area of study. There are 12 months of OPT available at each educational level. OPT can be authorized as pre-completion or post-completion of studies.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT

NOTE: Pre-completion OPT is subtracted from the 12 months available to you.
- Full Time: When school is not in session and student intends to register for the next class session.
- Part Time: While school is in session not to exceed 20 hours per week. (OPT done part-time is subtracted from the 12 months at a rate of 50%). Student must maintain a full course of study during the period of part-time OPT employment.

POST COMPLETION OPT

Granted for Full-time use only
- Degree candidates who have completed all course requirements for the degree except for thesis or dissertation can apply for full-time Optional Practical Training to be used while they continue to make normal progress towards completing the thesis/dissertation requirement.

WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO APPLY BEFORE GRADUATION!

It is best to submit your application early enough to be post-marked BEFORE the program completion date on your I-20 (Item 5) AND in enough time to be receipted and filed by the Service Center BEFORE your program completion date. Your application, however, will be accepted up to 60 days after your completion date, BUT you must request your authorization to work within the same 60 day period!!!

NOTE: OPT is automatically terminated when a student begins a new program of study or when there is a change in level of study.

Cumulative maximum of 12 months per educational level:
Optional Practical Training can be authorized for a maximum period of 12 months per educational level. OPT done after completion of the course of study must be completed within a 14-month period
immediately following the completion of study. It is possible for you to indicate a start date for your OPT that is up to 59 days after the completion date on your I-20. Remember: **You cannot begin work until the beginning date on your EAD card.**

**Dividing OPT between Pre-Completion and Post-Completion:**
A student can use a chosen amount of OPT before graduation (for example, during the summer break) and the remainder after graduation, as long as the total amount of OPT does not exceed 12 months per education level. If you use your OPT authorization in this manner, you will have to submit another OPT application (including application fee) when you apply for the remainder of your OPT, even though you are at the same program level. If you plan to start another program at the same educational level, you might want to consider “splitting” your OPT, so that you can do OPT at the end of both programs. Again, you may not have more than 12 months total at each level of study.

**Visa Status:**
Students on OPT continue to be in F-1 student visa status and (except for class enrollment) are subject to the same requirements as F-1 students who are enrolled in a program of study:

1. Valid passport (make sure your passport is valid for at least six months)
2. Notification of address change to our office within 10 days
3. Notification of status change
4. Page 3 of your I-20 must be endorsed for travel. For OPT purposes the DSO's signature on page 3 must not be older than **6 months** when you travel. If your I-20 needs to be signed, please notify ISSS and mail or express courier the I-20.
5. Valid F-1 visa when re-entering the country. If your visa has expired and you travel, you must apply for a new F-1 visa. You will need your I-20, passport, EAD, and a letter from your employer verifying your employment.

**Eligibility Requirements for OPT:**
1. Full enrollment during the academic year (9 months) immediately preceding OPT
2. Passport valid for at least six months
3. Lawful F1 status
4. Making normal progress toward the completion of a degree
5. In good academic standing

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Prior use of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for one year or more eliminates your eligibility for OPT.

**OPT EMPLOYMENT**
- No offer of employment is required, but the student is expected to work or to be actively seeking employment.
- OPT is not employer-specific and students may work for more than one employer during their OPT authorization.
- OPT employment must be directly related to, and commensurate with the student’s major and educational level.
- We strongly recommend that you keep employment confirmation on hand (a letter from your company verifying your employment, a copy of your employment agreement/contract, or any other document that verifies you are employed).

**REPORTING REQUIREMENTS DURING OPT:**
All students on OPT must report the following to their DSO:
1. Any change of address (residential or mailing) within 10 days (this has always been required),
2. The name and address of the current employer every 60 days,
3. Changes in employment status (interruptions in employment, changes in employer, and termination of employment),
4. Any change in the student’s legal name.

While it is not necessary for students to have a job offer to apply for OPT, students are required to report employment status to the ISSS office.

A student is allowed up to 90 days (cumulative) of unemployment during the initial post-completion 12 month OPT period before being considered out of status.

Failure to meet reporting requirements can result in the student’s SEVIS record being auto-terminated, which means the student is "out-of-status".

**TRAVEL & OPT**

Travel while your OPT application is pending is not recommended as this may be considered abandonment of your OPT. Re-entry into the US at the port of entry may be denied. The exception to this is travel during Spring break (or before the current semester is complete). We recommend always having as much documentation with you as possible in order to assure your re-entry.

An F-1 student on Pre-completion OPT follows the same procedure for traveling abroad and re-entry to the US as all other F-1 students.

An F-1 student on Post-completion OPT who travels outside the US temporarily (less than five months) can re-enter the US to resume his/her employment for the remainder of the period authorized on the Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The student will need to present the following documents at the port of entry:

1. I-20 with OPT designation and current endorsement from DSO on page 3 (signature less than 6 months old).
2. Valid EAD
3. Valid passport (must be valid for at least 6 months).
4. Valid F-1 visa
5. Letter from employer verifying employment

**F2 Dependents**

If you have a spouse and/or children in F-2 dependent status, make sure that they carry with them when traveling copies of all your documents (above), plus their own properly endorsed I-20’s. They will also need valid visas to re-enter the US.

**NOTE:** If your visa (or your dependent’s visa) has expired and you travel outside the US, you must apply for an F-1 or F-2 visa to re-enter the US. You can apply for the visa either in your home country or the country to which you have traveled. If, however, you were granted F-1 status while in the U.S. and you do not have an F-1 stamp in your passport, you will need to travel to your home country to obtain a new entry visa. Since visa appointments vary by country, make your appointment with the American Embassy or consulate well ahead of your travel plans. You will need a new I-20 from ISSS designated for new entry visa, passport, EAD, and a letter from your employer verifying your employment. The same applies for your F2 dependents; they will also need current F-2 visas to re-enter the US.
The regulations now state that if you leave the US after your OPT has been approved, but do not have a job, your OPT ends and you will not be permitted to re-enter. Be sure that you have a letter from your employer verifying your employment, including the dates of your employment. In all cases of travel, be sure you have your passport, current visa, properly endorsed I-20, and EAD.

**OPT APPROVAL PROCESS**

Upon approval of your OPT application, you will receive your EAD, often referred to as “the OPT card.” The EAD looks like a credit card. It has your picture and signature on it, along with the Start and End dates of your work authorization. Remember, you cannot start work until you receive the card and until the beginning date indicated on the card and you cannot work past the ending date on the card.

**Check the authorization dates on your EAD when you receive it.**

It is not possible to extend OPT after your application has been submitted, therefore, if you request less than 12 months, you cannot extend your OPT.

Once you have been authorized for OPT, it is not possible to cancel it. Therefore, make very sure that you will be able to work during the period you’ve requested (in other words, make sure you’re going to graduate if you are applying for OPT to begin after your graduation).

**PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING FOR OPT**

- **Email** [ISSS_Support@baylor.edu](mailto:ISSS_Support@baylor.edu) with the following:
  - The date you want to start your OPT, and if applying for less than 12 months, the ending date. *Note:* The start date of your OPT should be within 60 days of your program completion.
  - Confirm your major and program completion date in this email. After verifying that you are eligible to apply for OPT, a DSO will process an I-20 for your OPT within 3 business days of receipt of your email and will prepare a cover letter to be included with your application.
  - Your permanent email address so that the ISSS office can keep in touch with you after you graduate.

- When notified that your I-20 and cover letter are ready for you to sign and pick up from the ISSS office, please bring the items listed on the OPT Checklist with you so your entire application can be reviewed prior to mailing.

- When you pick up your I-20, check your major, your program completion date, and your OPT dates (page 3). **Notify the ISSS office immediately if there is a mistake.**

- **The DSO will prepare your I-765 application form for you to ensure accuracy.**

- To submit your application, assemble the items required in the order listed in the checklist. A DSO will be happy to review your application before you mail it.

- Mail application within 30 days of date DSO signed OPT I-20. If you wait longer, your application will be denied.
NEW SERVICE: You may choose to be electronically notified of receipt of your application by US CIS by attaching form G-1145 to your application. Forms are available at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) as well as detailed instructions on mailing applications and who is eligible for electronic filing for OPT. You could file electronically and if you wish to do so, please read the instructions carefully.

- Keep a copy of your OPT application for your records.

**OPT CHECKLIST**

- 2 Passport photos.* (WRITE YOUR NAME AND I-94 NUMBER ON THE BACK OF THE PHOTOS IN PEN)
- Check or money order for **$380 (payable to USCIS)**. Write I-94 number in "Memo" section
- Cover letter signed by DSO
- Form I-765 (**DSO will prepare**) properly completed and signed
- Copy (**not the original**) of current I-20 with OPT designation on page 3. (**Make sure your major, program completion date, and OPT dates are correct**).
- Copies of ALL previous I-20’s (pages 1 and 3 only)
- Copy of identification (biographical) page of passport (and renewal page, if applicable).
- Copy of most recent F-1 visa and entry stamp in passport
- Copy of front and back of I-94
- Copies of any previous EAD’s

* Walgreen's or Kinko's can process your photos while you wait. The cost is about $10.

**NOTE:** The Service Center will send a Notice of Action (NOA) receipt after they have received the application. Both the NOA and your EAD will be sent to the ISSS office. This will ensure delivery of your EAD if you move. We will notify you via email when we receive your mail. If you move from the Waco area, we will send or courier your EAD to you (you will be required to pay the cost for the courier fee through eShipGlobal).

**Miscellaneous Information**

Your EAD is an important document so safeguard it. Replacement of the EAD is a long and expensive process; you must completely re-submit an application for replacement. **Do not** discard any of your I-20s or other immigration documents. You will need them if you apply for another visa status or permanent residency. When you have completed your OPT employment, you are required to depart the US within 60 days of your OPT ending date.

**Resources:**

- Passport renewal: [http://www.embassy.org/embassies](http://www.embassy.org/embassies)
- Baylor University Career Services Center [http://www.baylor.edu/careerservices/](http://www.baylor.edu/careerservices/)
- [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (for forms, information, and instructions)
- [www.ice.gov/sevis/employment](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/employment)

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