

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment benefit available to students in valid F-1 status. OPT allows students to work in a temporary position that is directly related to their field of study, as indicated on the form I-20, for up to 12 months. Applications for OPT are reviewed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and take approximately 2-4 months to process. Students must attend an OPT informational workshop before requesting a recommendation for OPT.

Eligibility for OPT

Students in valid F-1 status are generally eligible to apply for OPT if they meet the following requirements:

1. Have been enrolled full-time in a USCIS-certified school in lawful non-immigrant status for 9 months (3 terms).
2. Are currently engaged in a degree-seeking academic program, or a structured non-degree program that is part of an established OSU curriculum.

Limitations of the OPT Authorization

Students are limited to 12 months of OPT per education level completed (undergraduate, master's, doctoral). Some students may be eligible for an additional 24 months of employment authorization (see *24-Month STEM Extension* section below). Earning another degree at a *higher* education level entitles you to apply for an additional 12 months of OPT based on that degree. Students who have been authorized for 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are **not** eligible for OPT at the same degree level.

Pre-Completion OPT (before completion of studies)

Students may choose to use some or all of their 12 months of OPT before the completion of studies. While school is in session, students are limited to part-time OPT (20 hours or less per week) and must continue to enroll full-time. During the annual vacation term and when school is not in session, students may engage in full-time OPT (more than 20 hours per week). Part-time OPT is calculated at one-half the full-time rate (2 months of part-time OPT = 1 month of full-time OPT). Students who engage in pre-completion OPT may not be eligible to apply for a 24-month STEM extension. For more information about pre-completion OPT, please make an appointment with an International Student Advisor.

Post-Completion OPT (after completion of studies)

When to Apply

Students may apply for post-completion OPT *no earlier* than 90 days (3 months) prior to the completion of studies and *no later* than the end of the 60-day grace period following the final term of registration. For students on a graduate assistantship during the final term of registration, the grace period begins the day after the assistantship employment ends. **The OPT application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the signature date on the I-20 with the OPT recommendation.**

Processing Time

USCIS takes approximately 2-4 months to process OPT applications. You may not engage in any employment after the completion of your program (or your assistantship contract) until you have received a valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD). We strongly encourage you to submit your OPT application as early as possible to ensure you receive your employment authorization before your desired employment start date. Students who meet the expedite criteria (<https://www.uscis.gov/forms/expedite-criteria>) may submit a request for expedited processing with their OPT application. See an International Student Advisor for more information.

OPT Authorization Dates

If your OPT application is approved, USCIS will authorize you for practical training during the 14-month period following the completion of studies (2 months grace period + 12 months possible OPT). You may request for your OPT to begin anytime between the completion of studies date and the end of your 60-day grace period. Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) will show either your requested start date (as recommended on your OPT I-20) or the date that your application is adjudicated, whichever is later.

Immigration Status during OPT

You may remain in the United States following the completion of your program while your OPT application is in process, provided you have filed your application with USCIS before the end of your 60-day grace period following your final term of registration. If your OPT application is approved, your F-1 status will be extended from the date your OPT application is filed to the end of the 60-day grace period following OPT.

Grace Period following OPT

You will receive a 60-day grace period following the completion of your OPT authorization period (as indicated by the end date on your EAD). During this time, you may request a change of level to begin a new program at OSU; request a SEVIS transfer to begin a new program at another school in F-1 status; secure an alternative immigration status; or prepare for your departure from the United States. You are not eligible to work during the 60-day grace period following OPT.

Travel

Students may travel outside the U.S. before the completion of their academic program and after OPT has been authorized by USCIS. It is not advisable to travel outside the U.S. after the completion of studies if your OPT application is still in process. If you must leave the country during this time, please make an appointment with an International Student Advisor before your departure. While on OPT, the travel signature on your I-20 will be valid for six months from the signature date (not one year, as before OPT). To re-enter the U.S., you will need a valid travel signature on the form I-20, a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport, and a valid EAD. Students are also encouraged to have verification of employment or search for employment with them in case they are questioned at the Port of Entry.

24-Month STEM Extension

Students who have completed a degree in certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields may be eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their OPT benefit, for a total authorization period of 36 months. To be eligible for a 24-month extension, you must have completed a degree in an eligible STEM field and have a job offer from a company that has registered with the federal E-Verify program. For more information, please refer to the *24-Month OPT STEM Extension* packet.

H-1B Cap Gap Employment Authorization

If your employer has filed an H-1B petition on your behalf, you may be issued an extension of your employment authorization to cover any gap period between the end of your OPT and the start of your H-1B status. An International Student Advisor may issue an I-20 indicating this "Cap Gap" employment authorization if your H-1B petition has been filed in a timely fashion and it is either in process or has been approved. If your H-1B petition is denied or withdrawn, any Cap Gap employment authorization issued will be rescinded. Please submit a copy of your form I-797 Notice of Action/Approval to OIS to request the employment authorization, or to notify us of an intended change of status. If you are eligible, you will be issued a new I-20 with the employment authorization indicated on page 2, which you may present to your employer as proof of continued employment eligibility.

Unemployment

Your F-1 status is dependent upon engaging in practical training (at least 20 hours per week) during post-completion OPT. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12-month OPT authorization period. Please note that after 90 days of unemployment your SEVIS record may be terminated, please see an advisor if you are approaching the end of your 90 days. Students who are authorized for a 24-month STEM extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during the entire 36-month OPT authorization period (initial post-completion period and the subsequent 24-month extension). You should plan to depart the country before you reach your unemployment limit if you are unable to find employment.

Reporting Requirements

While on OPT, you must continue to notify OIS of a change of address, legal name, or immigration status within 10 days. You must also notify our office when you begin, end, or change employment. To learn how to report this information to OIS, please visit: <http://international.oregonstate.edu/ois/opt-reporting>

APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR OPT

Step 1: Attend an OPT information session offered by the Office of International Services (OIS).

Sessions are generally offered a few times per month. To find out when the next session is scheduled and to reserve a seat, please call our office at 541-737-6310 or stop by University Plaza, Suite 130. OPT Workshops are also available on our OIS Canvas Course if you cannot attend in person.

Step 2: Request an OPT recommendation from OIS.

Submit a complete *Optional Practical Training Recommendation Request Form* (included in this packet) to our office. An advisor will review your packet and, if you are eligible, will enter a recommendation for OPT in SEVIS and issue you a new I-20. OIS only recommends students for OPT; actual authorization is given by USCIS and takes 2 to 4 months to process. Your new I-20 should be ready to pick up within 7 business days of submitting your request form.

Step 3: Prepare the following documents for submission to USCIS:

- ☐ **Form G-1145:** <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145> Include this form to get a text or email when your application is received by USCIS. **Contact an International Student Advisor if you don't receive an electronic or paper receipt notice within a month.**
- ☐ **Form I-765:** <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Type in your information instead of handwriting and then print the form. This helps with accuracy when the Lockbox scans your application. **Don't forget to sign the form!**
 - If you move while your application is in process, the Post Office will not forward documents related to the application to your new address. You may enter an alternate address in form I-765 if you anticipate moving. If you enter an address outside Oregon, refer to Step 4 to determine which USCIS lockbox should receive your application. Enter "C/O" and the full name of the recipient's address if different than your own.
 - Enter "N/A" for any questions or fields that do not apply to you. Enter all dates in the format MM/DD/YYYY.
 - For question 16, enter (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT.
- ☐ **Two (2) color passport-style photos taken within the last 30 days.** Guidelines for photos are included in this packet. Put a piece of clear tape on the back of each photo and lightly print (in pencil) your full legal name and I-94 number.
- ☐ **Check or money order.** Make it payable to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The current fee amount for the I-765 application can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/our-fees>
- ☐ **Photocopy of I-20 containing the OPT recommendation from OIS (all pages).** Make sure to sign the OPT I-20. Send a photocopy with your OPT application to USCIS. Keep the original OPT I-20 for your use.
- ☐ **Photocopy of all previously issued I-20's (all pages).**
- ☐ **Photocopy of I-94.** Find the electronic record here and print it: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94> If you last entered the U.S. when the paper I-94 cards were still in use, make a photocopy of both the front and back of the paper I-94 card.
- ☐ **Photocopy of the F-1 visa page from your passport.** If the visa in your passport does not match the immigration status you currently hold, include a copy of the approval notice from your change of status petition.
- ☐ **Photocopy of the identification page from your passport.** Include copies of your passport validity dates and any renewal or extension pages. You must have a valid, unexpired passport to be eligible for OPT.
- ☐ **Photocopy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (EAD cards).** If applicable.

Step 4: Mail all documents to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox

View this website to determine where to mail the application materials: <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/forms-information/uscis-phoenix-and-dallas-lockbox-facilities>

The mailing address you use depends on the address you put in field #3 of the I-765 form and your mailing method. The USCIS Lockbox Facility will forward your application to the correct USCIS Service Center for processing. Keep copies of all documents you send. If using the U.S. Postal Service, request mail tracking or use certified mail with a return receipt. Allow 2-4 months processing time. To check the status of your application, visit: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>

Step 5: Provide a copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to OIS and report OPT participation.

A copy of your EAD card (front and back) should be e-mailed to OIS.Student@oregonstate.edu. Read the "Reporting Requirements" section on page 2 to learn how to report your OPT participation and any changes to your name, address, and immigration status to OIS. Reporting the start date of your OPT employment to OIS will stop your unemployment days from accumulating.

PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATIONS

You are required to submit two passport-style photos to USCIS with your OPT application. Specifications for these photos are listed in the instructions for form I-765. Photos should be in color with a white background and taken no earlier than 30 days before the application is submitted to USCIS. Put a piece of clear tape on the back of each photo and lightly print (in pencil) your full legal name and I-94 number (which you can find here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94>). The photos may be placed in an envelope or small, clear bag.

Photo Composition Instructions

(taken from <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photo-composition-template.html>)

- ✓ 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.

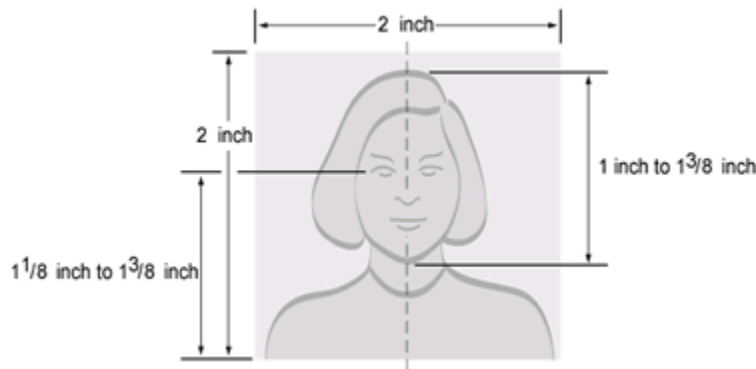


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-Composed Photos






OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM

Complete this form with your academic advisor and submit it to OIS. If approved, a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation will be issued in 7 business days. You must still submit a complete OPT application to USCIS in order to receive employment authorization.

PART I (to be completed by the student)

Last Name (Family) _____ First Name (Given) _____

Student ID _____ - _____ - _____

Current U.S. Address, Phone, and Email: Go to <https://ipconnect.oregonstate.edu>. Click on  Select 'Biographical Information' and complete Local U.S. Address and Contact Information E-Forms.

*You are required to report these updates to SEVIS to maintain your immigration status.

Primary Academic Program ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate Major _____

Estimated date of completion for primary academic program ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Secondary Academic Program ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate Major _____

Estimated date of completion for secondary academic program ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

For post-completion OPT, you may request your OPT to begin anytime between the completion of studies date and the end of your 60-day grace period (actual date is determined by USCIS). Indicate when you would like your OPT to begin below:

- ☐ The day after the completion of studies date.
- ☐ On this specific date: ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

****I understand that USCIS must receive my OPT application within 30 days of the creation of my OPT I-20 and no later than the end of my 60-day grace period: _____ (initial here)**

PART II (to be completed by the academic advisor)

The information below will be used to issue a recommendation to the student for Optional Practical Training based on completion of the primary degree program. The completion of studies date may be:

- 1) Last date of the final term of registration;
- 2) Final date of a graduate assistantship (if later than the final term of registration but prior to the next term);
- 3) Date of a grad student's submission of thesis/dissertation copies to the library (if during the final term of registration);
- 4) Date of a grad student's oral defense or final exam (if during the final term of registration).

Estimated completion of studies date ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Estimated final term of registration at OSU ☐ Fall ☐ Winter ☐ Spring ☐ Summer 20 ____

For Graduate Students Only

What type of program is the student engaged in?

☐ Thesis ☐ Non-Thesis

Will the student be on a graduate assistantship during the final term of registration?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Assistantship end date ____/____/____ (month/day/year) ☐ N/A

Estimated date of oral defense ____/____/____ (month/day/year) ☐ N/A

Estimated submission date for thesis/dissertation final copies ____/____/____ (month/day/year) ☐ N/A

AUTHORIZING SIGNATURES

Academic Advisor _____ Title _____

Department _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Academic Advisor Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

GRA/GTA Coordinator Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Office of International Services use only

OPT Recommendation: ☐ Approved ☐ Denied Advisor Initials _____ Date entered in SEVIS ____/____/____