OPT CHECKLIST

For Detailed OPT Information:

- ❑ **Read the general OPT handout located at www.cgu.edu/intlforms** to learn about the process and general rules.
- ❑ **Please visit the Optional Practical Training Additional Information webpage (link at http://www.cgu.edu/intlforms) for information and policies regarding the 90-day Unemployment Rule, H1-B gap provision, and 17-Month STEM Extension.**

Gather the Following Documents *before* Requesting an OPT Appointment. Remember: your application must be *received* by DHS no later than 60 days after you complete your degree requirements (this is *not* the same day as graduation)**:**

- ❑ **Two Photos** – passport style. Print your name and admission number (found on your I-94 card) lightly on the back in pencil.
- ❑ **Copy of student visa, passport photo page, & I-94 card** (both sides)**, and all previous I-20s** (1st and 3rd page)
- ❑ **Check for $380 made payable to Department of Homeland Security**
- ❑ **Have a local address that is valid for the next 3 months where you can receive your card. Use this address on your I-765 form**
- ❑ **Completed I-765 copy in blue ink** (you can download an I-765 form at http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis or stop by the international office to pick up an OPT packet)
      * Attempt to make your signature no larger than 1" wide x ½" tall and do NOT cross the lines. (fit it in the white space). If your signature is too large, USCIS will return the application to you.
- ❑ **Copies of any prior EAD cards** (if applicable)
- ❑ *Recommended:* **Documentation from academic adviser indicating current academic status and expected date of completion of studies.** A one to two sentence letter is sufficient.

Once You Have Gathered the Documents Listed Above:

- ❑ **Make an appointment to see the International Staff** to complete the application process. Please include your availability in your request and plan ahead (allow up to 3 days for an appointment).

When You Meet With the International Staff:

- ❑ **Bring the documents listed above**
- ❑ **Know the dates that you want OPT to begin and end** (you can request OPT to begin up to 60 days after your last day of classes/completion of the degree)

The International Staff will issue an OPT I-20 and make copies of all of your documents. This OPT I-20 will be the final document required to complete your application.

NEXT STEPS:

- ❑ Send your OPT application via Certified Mail at the Post Office to USCIS at P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036
- ❑ About two weeks after you mail your package, you will receive a formal receipt from USCIS with your personal WAC (application) number. **Bring a copy of this receipt to the International Staff.** You may check the status of your application on-line at anytime by visiting the website listed on the receipt: **www.uscis.gov**
- ❑ You will receive your card within 75-90 days of the date on the receipt. DO NOT start working until you receive your EAD card and the date on the card has been reached. Inform the International Staff if you do not receive your EAD card within 90 days of the date of your receipt. **Bring a copy of your EAD card to the International Staff when you receive it.**
- ❑ Please read the Travel While On OPT Handout online at **www.cgu.edu/intlforms** *prior* to making travel arrangements.
- ❑ **Very Important:** You are required to continue to report any changes in your address, phone number, or e-mail address to the International Staff while on OPT. Note: we do not recommend that you move while waiting for OPT approval.
- ❑ **Very Important:** Update the International Staff with any and all changes to your employment (including breaks in employment) using the OPT Employment Notification Sheet found online at www.cgu.edu/intlforms.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for Students in F-1 Status

Definition of "Optional Practical Training (OPT)"

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession for a maximum initial period of twelve (12) months. Its purpose is to "round off" or complement your academic work. It can be used during and/or after your program of study, however, most students use Curricular Practical Training (CPT) during their program in order to utilize their entire OPT after they graduate. Please note that if you have used 12 months of full-time CPT, you will not be eligible for OPT. Certain degrees will be eligible for a 17-month STEM Extension; please review the information found online at http://www.cgu.edu/pages/405.asp for additional information.

Eligibility Requirements

In order for you to be eligible to apply for OPT, you must have been in lawful student status for at least nine (9) months (by the time you wish to start your OPT). The work must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. OPT done before graduation may be full-time or part-time (less than 20 hours a week), and may occur anywhere in the United States. Post-completion OPT (after graduation) must be full-time (20+ hours a week). OPT may occur anywhere in the United States.

Application Deadline

To engage in Optional Practical Training (OPT) before graduation, you will contact the International Staff in order to get the application materials. Once completed, you will need to make an appointment with the International Staff in order to prepare your application as early as 90 days before your employment begins. Your application must be received no later than 60 days after the day you complete your degree requirements). Keep in mind, that your application must be *received* at the California Service Center by this date – not postmarked by this date – in order for you to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). With this in mind, it is still recommended that you apply at least 90 days before the day you complete your degree requirements. Your application must be submitted to the USCIS office having jurisdiction over the place you are living at that time.

KEEP IN MIND, ONCE YOU HAVE SUBMITTED YOUR OPT APPLICATION, YOU SHOULD NOT TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF THE U.S. UNTIL YOU RECEIVE YOUR EAD CARD. IF YOU DO TRAVEL BEFORE YOUR EAD CARD IS ISSUED, YOUR OPT APPLICATION WILL BE CANCELLED AS SOON AS YOU LEAVE THE U.S. FOR MORE INFORMATION, READ THE TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT HANDOUT FOUND AT www.cgu.edu/intlforms.

Importance of the Actual Date You Complete Your Program of Study

USCIS regulations refer to the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, not to the date you participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a certificate or diploma. The Service ignores your graduation date because it realizes that many students, especially graduate students in thesis or dissertation programs, may complete requirements for a degree any day during the year. This means that the last day of an academic term may not be the date you complete program requirements. Your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date you complete degree requirements and you are expected to leave the country by that date unless you file a timely application for Optional Practical Training (OPT) or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.

Application and Authorization Procedures

Recommendation by the International Staff. Please gather all items on the OPT Checklist found at www.cgu.edu/intlforms prior to making an appointment with the International Staff to finish preparing your OPT application. You must make an appointment for this process; the process will last 15-30 minutes. As part of the process, you will be reissued a new I-20 that will include your permission to apply for OPT.

Authorization by the Immigration Service. Your permission to begin OPT is not finalized until you have received an "Employment Authorization Document" (EAD) from the USCIS. You will find a link to the USCIS Homepage in the OPT Checklist found at www.cgu.edu/intlforms. From this page click on immigration forms and download the I-765 application form and instructions. Carefully follow the instructions to ensure you accurately fill the form. Make sure your signature on the bottom of the I-76 application form is small, and do not cross the lines, as they will scan this onto your EAD card (if it's not small enough, they will return the application to you). Ensure that the passport style photos you submit are recent and in the appropriate format. After meeting with the International Staff to complete and review your application (remember, you **must** make an OPT appointment), mail your application to: USCIS, P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036 via Certified Mail from the Post Office (as our mail room doesn't send mail via Certified Mail). Within approximately two week, you will receive a receipt from USCIS - do not throw it away. It will have a file number and phone number which you can use to track the progress of your application. Please bring a copy of this receipt to our office.

For Optional Practical Training (OPT) before graduation, work permission on the EAD will begin on the date as reflected by your International Staff's recommendation on your I-20. For Optional Practical Training (OPT) after graduation, work permission on the EAD will begin either on the date of completion of studies, as reflected by your International Staff's recommendation on your I-20, or the date the EAD is issued, whichever occurs later.   The last day your Optional Practical Training (OPT) can begin is 60 days after your last day or classes (or the last day you meet your degree requirements). Therefore, even if the EAD card is issued after this date, USCIS is still required to put the starting date as 60 days after your last day of classes (or the last day you meet your degree requirements). This is why it's very important to apply early, as it usually takes 75-90 days to get your EAD card. Inform your International Staff if you do not receive your card within 90 days. Keep in mind that you should always call or check the on-line website to make sure that your EAD card hasn't been issued. If it has, you should await your EAD card in the mail.

Photograph Specifications. The two photos must be passport style with a white background and taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to USCIS. The photos should be unmounted; printed on thin paper; glossy; and unretouched. Your head should be bare unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order. The photos should not be larger than 2" x 2", with the distance from the top of your head to just below the chin about 1¼". Lightly print your name and admission number (found at the top of your I-94 card) on the back of each photo with a pencil – it *will* be light.

Making a Decision Regarding Participation in Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Only Twelve (12) Months of Optional Practial Training (OPT) is Available During Your U.S. Studies. You are allowed to have this type of employment permission for a total of twelve (12) months during your stay in the U.S. in F-1 status at each degree level. If you use all twelve (12) months during a master's degree, for example, and plan to continue study for a doctoral program, you WILL be eligible for a second Optional Practical Training during or after completion of that next program (as long as it is a higher degree).

Authorization May Not be Rescinded. Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted, it may not be rescinded or cancelled. This means that, after OPT is authorized by the USCIS, unexpected delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job, or loss of a job may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work. Once permission to work has been given, it is gone regardless of subsequent occurrences.

Actual Date Practical Training Employment May Begin. You may not begin work until all three of the following requirements are satisfied: (1) you have obtained an EAD card from the USCIS, (2) the date of authorized employment (as noted on your EAD card) is reached and (3) you have completed all requirements for your program of study.

Change of Employer After Optional Practical Training (OPT) Has Been Authorized. You may change employers after you have begun authorized employment provided the new job is (1) directly related to your major field of study and (2) appropriate for someone having your level of education. You **must** report all changes and breaks in employment to the International Staff.

Travel Outside the U.S. Please review the Travel While On OPT Handout found at www.cgu.edu/intlforms when contemplating travel. Reentry provisions of the regulations require students in Optional Practical Training (OPT) to present (1) Form I-20, endorsed for travel by the International Staff or another Designated School Official (DSO) "within the last five months (not one year, as listed on your I-20)", (2) the "Employment Authorization Document" (EAD), and (3) a valid passport (that must be valid for at least 6 months after reentering the U.S.) with valid F-1 visa, and (4) a written job offer by an employer. Students who do not meet these requirements may not be allowed to reenter the U.S. Be sure to consult with the International Staff when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue Optional Practical Training (OPT). Keep in mind, if your visa is expired, and you no longer have any degree requirements to complete, you will not be elgible to apply for a new F-1 visa. Even though Optional Practical Training (OPT) is considered a part of your F-1 visa status, the U.S. Embassy or Consulate *may* not issue you an F-1 Student visa, since they feel you've already met your degree requirements.

Update Address/Phone Number/E-mail Address & Employer Information You must provide CGU with any and all changes in your address, phone number, and e-mail address. Keep in mind that 6 months after you graduate, you will no longer have the same CGU e-mail account that you did as a student. Even if you are provided an alumni e-mail account, please contact the International Staff to note the change, as this is not done automatically. You must also update CGU with any changes to employer information and any breaks in employment. Please fill out and return the OPT Employment Notification Sheet found online at www.cgu.edu/intlforms.

Further Information - 90-day Unemployment Provision, H1-B Cap Gap Provision, and 17-month STEM Extension. Additional information on employment, including detailed information on the 90-day Unemployment Provision, H1-B Cap Gap Provision, and 17-month STEM Extension for those who qualify can be found online at http://www.cgu.edu/pages/405.asp.

OPT FAQs

Q: When should I apply for OPT?
A: You should apply 3 months before you finish your degree. The date you finish your degree is the *last day* you submit your final paper/project/exam. It is not the day you attend the graduation ceremony.

Q: I graduated, and did not apply for OPT. Is it too late?
A: You can apply for OPT up to 60 days past the last day of your class. However, you will not be able to have the full 12 months of OPT, since you applied late.

Q: Do I need to have a job offer before applying for OPT?
A: You can apply for OPT with no job offer.

Q: I heard that I am allowed to volunteer on OPT. Is this true?
A: Yes, you can volunteer, do an internship, or have traditional paid employment on OPT. The position must be 20+ hours per week, related to your field and at your level (i.e. Masters or Ph.D.)

Q: What day will my OPT start?
A: You select the day your OPT will start. You must decide at the time you are ready to send the applications which day you will start OPT. You can start immediately upon finishing your courses, and up to 60 days later. For example, if you finish your degree on May 15th, then your OPT can start anytime between May 16th and July 15th. *You must know the day you wish to start your OPT when you meet with International Office to apply.*

Q: I am a Ph.D. student. What is considered the last day of class for me?
For doctoral students, the day you submit your dissertation to the Registrar's Office is considered your last day. Note: it is not the day you defend your dissertation or the day you finish revising your dissertation. You can check the website of the Registrar's Office for the final date to submit your dissertation. You will need to apply for OPT 3 months before you submit the dissertation. Please plan ahead.

Q: How long can I remain in the country unemployed on OPT?
A: You may be unemployed on OPT for a *cumulative total* of 90 days. For many students, this means that from the start date on your card, you have 90 days to find a job. If you cannot find employment, you must leave the United States.

Q: I am graduating in May, and my OPT starts in July. Can I go home in between this time?
A: Please see the "Travel while on OPT" handout found online at www.cgu.edu/intlforms

Q: I finished my last exam on May 10th. My OPT has not started yet. Can I work on campus until my OPT begins?
A: No, once you are done being a student, you cannot work on campus anymore. You may work on campus using OPT, if your OPT has started, you have received your card, and if your job is related to your major and level (i.e. masters or Ph.D.) and 20+ hours a week.

Q: Why do I need a local address that is good for 3 months for my I-765 (OPT) application?
A: The EAD (OPT) card will not be forwarded in the mail if you move. You need to have a local address where you can receive the card for the next 3 months. If you put down your address, and you move, you will not get your card in the mail. We recommend if you will not be at your own address for 3 months, than you should ask a trusted friend to use his or her address.

Q: What size should the photos requested for the application be?
A: The photos should be US passport photos. (Please note: your passport may have a different size than US passports.) The background should be white. The size should be 2" by 2". The head height should be 1" to 1 3/8" from the bottom of the photo.

Q: I heard that the authorized length of time for OPT was extended beyond one year. Is that true?
A: No. All OPT applications are approved for a one-year period. Some students will qualify to apply for a 17 month STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) Extension. Please see the OPT Additional Information link at www.cgu.edu/intlforms for further information.