F-1 Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training Information

FIRST:
- Read this application packet including the “Frequently Asked Questions” (on page 3).
- Have your academic advisor complete the advisor’s section of the "OPT Recommendation Form."
- Follow instructions on how to complete the form I-765 on page 2 (download form at www.uscis.gov).

SECOND:
- Submit your completed Pre-Completion OPT Recommendation Form at the OIE front desk.
- OIE will issue a new I-20 for you in 5 business days which will include our recommendation for your OPT on page 3. You will send a photocopy of this new I-20 with your application to USCIS.

THIRD:
- Be sure to keep copies of everything you mail for your own records!
- Prepare all applications materials listed below and send by express mail (so that you have a tracking number and delivery signature).
- Mail the materials listed below to USCIS (to the address in the box below if you use a PA return address). You will receive a notice (Form I-797) from USCIS with a receipt number (located in the upper-left hand corner of the receipt) that can be used to follow the progress of your case at www.uscis.gov. Your case will stay in “Initial Review” status until it is approved.
- USCIS must receive your application no more than 90 days before your request OPT start date. Your OPT application MUST be receipted by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20 (item 10).

APPLICATION MATERIALS (submitted in this order):
- Fee of $380. Make check payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security.” You may send a money order or personal check drawn on a US bank, NO CASH.
- G-1145. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application. Find the form at: www.uscis.gov.
- Two “passport” photos (http://travel.state.gov/passport/pp photon req/pp photon req 5333.html). Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo. Use powder to prevent glaring and be sure there are no shadows in your photos! You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!). Passport photos can be obtained at:
  - FedEx/Kinkos (412-268-3737)  
  - Rite Aid (412-521-3900)  
  - US Post Office (412-421-1388)  
  - University Center, Lower Level 1700 Murray Avenue 1800 Murray Ave., Sq. Hill
- Original I-765 form (follow instructions on how to complete form on page 2).
- Optional cover letter/checklist explaining that you are applying for OPT and listing the contents of the mailing.
- A copy (NOT original) of page 1 and 3 of the new pre-completion I-20 from OIE with the recommendation for OPT on page 3. Sign the new I-20 in item #11. This I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!
- A copy of ALL previously issued I-20 documents dating back to beginning of F-1 status (signed in item #11).
- A copy of your I-94 record.
  - Both sides of your I-94 card (front and back - even if the back is blank) OR
  - Printout of the electronic I-94 record from www.cbp.gov/i94
- A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
- A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).
- A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) OPT card, if you have had one.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING FORM I-765

- Download the form I-765 from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and complete it as a form-fillable PDF. Do NOT complete the form by hand. The form is read by a machine-readable scanner.

- Check the first box: “I am applying for: permission to accept employment.”

- Complete lines 1 through 16:
  - #1 Name: Type your family/last name in all capital letters and your first name in sentence case.
  - #3 Return Address: This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 90 days. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the EAD is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your EAD will be returned to the immigration service. If you want to use a friend’s address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. You may use OIE to collect your mail – but we are unable to track the progress of your case. If you choose to use OIE as your mailing address, put the address as:
    
    5000 Forbes Ave Intl Education Pittsburgh PA 15213

    NOTE: If you use the OIE address, you will receive an email as soon as your card arrives in the office. Do not call.

    If you want OIE to mail the EAD to you later, you must pay for EAD shipping by check, payable to Carnegie Mellon University, in advance. OIE uses UPS for express service. We will not use prepaid envelopes from other companies.

    #3 Return Address: Note: If the mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Pennsylvania, refer to the I-765 instructions ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)) or OIE for the proper mailing address for your application.

  - #10 Alien Registration Number: Use your I-94 number found either on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport) or taken from [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94). It is usually an 11 digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.

  - #11 Previous Employment Authorization: The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an EAD (OPT card) at this or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT or an H-1B visa.

  - #16 Eligibility Categories: For F-1 Pre-Completion OPT, fill out as follows:
    - For summer or part-time OPT PRIOR to graduating: (c)(3)(A)

  - Certification: Sign and date the I-765 in dark blue ink using a ballpoint pen. Sign WITHIN the 2 lines.

REMINDERS: REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON OPT

- REQUIRED UPDATES. You are required to report your updated address in SIO. Remember to update your address again when you return to start classes the next term.

TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON PRACTICAL TRAINING:

- In order to re-enter the US while on OPT, you must have:
  - Valid passport
  - Valid F-1 visa stamp/sticker in your passport
  - OPT I-20 signed within the last six months

CHOOSING YOUR START/END DATE

Your pre-completion OPT start date relates to when you are applying for the benefit:

**Full-time pre-completion OPT for summer term:**
- Start date can be after classes-finals end in spring term
- End date must be before the start of fall classes

**Part-time pre-completion OPT for the fall/spring term:**
- End date cannot go past your program completion date.

You may not change your OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!
You may not begin work until you have received the EAD card and are within the start and end date.
1. What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?
Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work. The work must be directly related to your level and field of studies. OPT is recommended by OIE and authorized by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level. 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 you complete.

2. What are the eligibility requirements to apply for 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 by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

3. When can I apply?
You may apply for pre-completion OPT up to 90 days before your requested OPT start date. Your OPT application MUST be receipted by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20 (item 10) to avoid denial.

4. How can I use OPT while I am still in my program?
You may use OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you have completed all course requirements for the degree and have a thesis requirement remaining. These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

5. What if I apply for pre-completion OPT and don’t get the EAD in time?
You cannot begin work without the EAD in hand and unless you are within the dates printed on the card. If you do not have the EAD, you would need to negotiate with your employer to defer your work start date.

6. What if I lose my offer or decide I don’t want to work using my pre-completion OPT?
It is extremely difficult cancel any type of OPT. Once the EAD has been issued, immigration considers that you are using the benefit. Consult an OIE advisor for more specific questions.

7. How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?
Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS. Their standard processing time is 60-90 days. Therefore it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working. You may apply up to 90 days before your requested pre-completion start date. Note: The OPT I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!

8. My OPT I-20 was issued almost 30 days ago and I haven’t filed yet. What do I do?
Your OPT application MUST be receipted by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20 (item 10) to avoid denial. If you delay filing the application, you must come to OIE’s front desk to request a new I-20 with a new OPT issue date. The new I-20 will take at least 5 business days to re-issue. To be safe, file at least 2 weeks before the 30-day timeout of the OPT I-20.

9. Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?
You do NOT need to have a job offer before applying for Optional Practical Training.

10. Do I need to have a job/job offer while I am on OPT?
F-1 regulations require that you do have employment in your field of study while in your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17-month extension. *Unemployed days DO NOT accrue or “count” during any periods of pre-completion OPT.*

11. Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?
F-1 students may participate in volunteer internships without work authorization if doing so won’t violate any labor laws. If you will be compensated in some way for the service you are providing, you must have employment authorization. Compensation includes money, lodging, meals, transportation, gift certificates, or other remuneration. OIE generally recommends that students obtain work permission for all unpaid/volunteer internships in case funding becomes available later, to apply for a Social Security number, or to use the experience on a resume or CV. Please consult an OIE advisor before engaging in a volunteer or unpaid internship.
12. 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 US.

13. May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?
No. USCIS allows students to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the program end date. USCIS does not honor expedite requests for OPT. Should you make a request anyway, it will be denied and will result in longer processing times. You should apply early.

14. Do I have to do anything with OIE while I am on OPT?
Yes! Immigration regulations REQUIRE that while you are on OPT, you MUST report your address information with OIE. You must email address changes within 10 days of the move in SIO.

15. Is my ability to travel while on pre-completion OPT impacted?
No, as long as you have your valid I-20, valid passport, and valid F-1 visa. The EAD is not necessary for travel while on pre-completion OPT. When you get the pre-completion OPT I-20 back from OIE, it will be automatically signed for travel (valid for 6 months). For questions about travel and visa renewal, always consult the OIE website.

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### Employment Related Information

#### Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9)
When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (IRS Form I-9) which verifies your eligibility to work in the US. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. This form requires you to document your identity and work authorization. For F-1 students, the most typical combination of documentation is: your passport, I-94 Departure Record, I-20, and EAD.

#### Social Security Number (SSN)
For payroll purposes, you will also need to provide your SSN. If you do not already have an SSN, you are required to bring your passport, I-94 record, OPT I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and apply for an SSN card. The same documents are required for a replacement card. To find the closest SSA, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/locator](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/locator).

#### Social Security Withholding and Other Taxes
In general, F-1 students who have been in the US fewer than five years are “non-residents for tax purposes” and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. If you are a non-resident for tax purposes and your employer does withhold FICA, speak to your payroll office. You and your employer can refer to Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens” for additional information. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. The results of the filing will determine if any of the withheld income taxes can be refunded to you.
Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Recommendation Form

To: Student OPT Applicant
Complete the following information. The OIE advisor will use the information you provide to recommend your OPT.

Name: ____________________________________________________________ Date of birth (mm/dd/yyyy): __________________
(Family) (First)

Andrew ID: __________________________ Non-Andrew e-mail: __________________________

Address*: ____________________________________________________________
(Street) (City) (State & Zip Code)
*Address must also be updated in SIO!

☐ Check here if you have a secondary MAJOR or are in a dual degree program.

OPT Start Date: ________________ OPT End Date: ________________

Full-time or Part-time: ____________________ Passport Expiration (mm/dd/yyyy): ________________

Check one: The work ☐ WILL ☐ WILL NOT directly relate to my field of study/degree program.

Have you applied for OPT before?: ☐ No ☐ Yes If yes, Educational Level (circle) Bachelor’s Master’s PhD

☐ I understand that all periods of pre-completion OPT are deducted from the available period of post-completion OPT.

To: Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel
The above-named student is applying for permission to engage in employment for OPT as provided in the immigration regulations for F-1 students. OPT is employment in a job related to the student’s field of study and is intended to enhance and supplement the formal, classroom education. US Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) will authorize OPT.

• OIE must have a statement from the student’s academic advisor indicating the date the student is expected to complete all degree requirements or the expected date of completion. The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date, but the date all requirements for the degree are fulfilled.
• This date must accurately reflect the actual completion date of his/her program. Students may not continue working on campus after the end date that you confirm below until they have OPT from USCIS.
• PhD students are eligible to start OPT once they have passed qualifying exams. Completion date may be in the future.

Please complete the information below and return it to the student so we may process the student’s request. Should you have any questions, call OIE at 412-268-5231.

THIS INFORMATION MUST BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED BY THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR, NOT BY THE STUDENT.

This is to certify that ___________________________ is expected to complete all requirements for the degree on ___________________________.

(Student’s name) (Date: mm/dd/yyyy)*actual completion-not end of month

and will receive the degree of ___________________________ in the field or major of ___________________________.

(Level) (Field of Study)

(Name of Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel—Please Print) (Signature of Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel)

(Telephone Number and/or email address) (Date)