Optional Practical Training (OPT)
If you would like to get work experience in your major field of study during the summer or after you complete your studies, you should apply for Optional Practical Training employment authorization from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) early! Please keep this entire packet while on OPT, if provides information you will need while on and once you complete your OPT. If you are a STEM student and need to apply for STEM OPT, your procedures are listed as well. **YOU DO NOT NEED A JOB OFFER TO APPLY FOR OPT!**

Summer Optional Practical Training
*We strongly suggest that you apply at least three months before you expect to start your job.* Immigration can take two to three months to process OPT applications! Since you are not permitted to work until your OPT is authorized by USCIS, application process delays may cause you to lose your employment opportunity.

**WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE I APPLY FOR OPT?**

You must attend an OPT Workshop
Workshops are offered 2 to 3 times a semester, you will receive notice from your DSO.

What is Optional Practical Training?
OPT is off campus employment that is related to your major field of study.

Who is eligible for OPT?
Students who are in F-1 status and have been enrolled full-time for at least one full academic year are eligible for Optional Practical Training:

1. After completion of a course of study
2. Before completion of studies if engaged in thesis or dissertation research
3. During the summer or over winter break
4. During the regular academic year (on a part-time basis, deducted from the 12- month maximum at a proportional rate)

When can I apply?
The OISS suggest applying for OPT approximately 3 months (90 days) before you expect to begin your OPT employment however, **USCIS MUST RECEIVE** your application **BEFORE** you graduate or no later than 60 days after you complete your program.

Do I need a job offer in order to apply?
No.

Can I go in person to an USCIS office to apply for OPT?
No. OPT applications must be submitted to our office (OIA), once reviewed we mail the application packet to USCIS by certified mail, as the instructions in this packet indicate. (The OIA recommends OPT permission, the USCIS must approves it.)

When Can I start to work under OPT?
You must only begin employment when you have received the EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card. The “begin” date of employment authorization is shown on the EAD.

Does OPT employment need to be full time?
Yes if you have completed your studies and No if you are using it for summer employment. However; please discuss this with your DSO when applying for OPT.
What’s the difference between OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT)? If I had CPT, can I still have OPT?

CPT permits employment before completion of required semester hours only. CPT requires the offer of a specific job. You are still eligible for OPT as long as you did not have full-time CPT for a total of 12 months.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPT?

1. **Attend an OPT workshop** given by the OISS! (Each Fall and Spring Semesters)

2. **Complete the most current Form I-765 and the Student Request for OPT Form in black ink or type.**

3. **For the I-765 Form:**
   - **Item #3:** Address. Enter a mailing address where you want the EAD Card to arrive and where someone checks the mail daily. YOU MUST BE SURE THAT YOU CAN RECEIVE THE CARD AT THIS ADDRESS, if you do not receive the card and USCIS states they mailed it to the address you provided, THEY WILL NOT RE-SEND ANOTHER CARD, YOU WILL HAVE TO RE-APPLY AND PAY AN ADDITIONAL $410.00!!!!!! You can download the I-765 form from USCIS.gov, click on forms, scroll down to find form I-765. You must use the most up to date form, old forms will cause your entire application packet to be returned and delay your application process. Also, FOLLOW instructions and complete the form in INK NOT pencil!!!!!!!!! The form is self-explanatory however; below are items that may need an explanation. Answer all questions accurately and fully. Use “N/A” if you answer a question with “non-applicable.” If the answer is none, write NONE. Submit all 7 pages of the form.

   - **Check Permission to accept employment**
     - **Item #8:** – A Number or I-94 Number: Put your I-94 number unless USCIS has previously assigned you an alien registration number. ([https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov))
     - **Item #12:** – If you have ever applied for hardship or optional practical training employment before, answer yes, where and when you applied, whether it was granted or denied and attach a photocopy of any EAD card issued for it.
     - **Item #27:** For Post OPT (you want to work after you have graduated and receive your degree.) write C 3 B; For Pre OPT (applying before you have graduated, using OPT for internship, etc) write C 3 A
     - If you are filing for STEM Extension write C 3 C.

4. **Submit the below COMPLETED items to the International Affairs office M-F 9:00am-4:00pm.**
   - Your new I-20 will be ready within 5 business days and you will be notified by email.
   - **Two passport type photographs (2x2 on white background, write your name in pencil or felt pen on the back of your photos).**
   - **Completed and SIGNED Form I-765 (complete the form in BLACK ink ONLY and DO NOT SIGN IT ELECTRONICALLY!!)**
   - **OPT Request Form (form is in this packet of information)**
   - **Forms I-20** (Photocopies of all previous Forms I-20 issued by us and other schools you have attended).
   - **Photocopy of any previous EAD Card(s) (front and back) if applicable**
   - **Form I-94** ([https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov))
   - **Official transcript** (if graduating) if not, unofficial transcript is acceptable
   - **Photocopies of your passport and visa identification page**
   - **You are encouraged to complete form G-1145**, you will receive an email and/or text confirmation when USCIS has received your OPT application.
   - **$410 Fee** in the form of a check or money order. Money order is best. **Make check or money order payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.** If you are using a personal check, it must have your current name and address on it.

5. **Submit your COMPLETED forms to the OISS, Mrs. Alphonso-Moore will contact you when your new OPT I-20 is ready for pick up, your new I-20 will be ready within 5 business days.**
6. When you receive your OPT I-20 be sure to thoroughly review it for the projected OPT dates and the correct major. **Failure to check such information could cause your application to be disapproved.**

**Changing OPT starting and ending dates:** When you meet with the OISS advisor, he/she will enter into SEVIS the OPT starting and ending dates you request. If you decide to change the dates **BEFORE** mailing your application to USCIS, the OISS can help you do so. However, once we mail the application, the OISS cannot change the dates and instead must follow a lengthy procedure with the Vermont Service Center, which could significantly delay your OPT authorization or even cause you to lose your OPT eligibility. So before we mail your application you should be very certain that you have the starting/ending dates you want.

**MAILING YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS**
After you have signed your new I-20, we will send your application package to USCIS by certified mail, return receipt requested. USCIS can take about 2-3 months to process your application.

*Note: USCIS must receive your OPT Application within 30 days of the date the new OPT I-20 issued. In the event there is a delay in the processing of your application, the OISS will have a photocopy of your application and the U.S. Postal Service certified mail return receipt.*

**WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I MAIL MY OPT APPLICATION?**

**OPT-20**
You must use your OPT I-20 from this point onward, keep your other I-20s for future reference. NEVER DISPOSE OF YOUR I-20s!!!

**Processing Information:**
About 3-4 weeks after you mail your application, you should get a special receipt letter from USCIS called a *Notice of Action.* This letter will actually be mailed to you and we expect you to send our office a copy via email or fax. Remember to keep this letter, since it will contain a special number beginning with the letters “LIN…” that refers to your specific application. If you do not receive the Notice of Action after 5 weeks, please notify the OISS.

The Notice of Action also has a phone number that you can call to **check on the status of your application.** This number is generally busy during the day, so you may have more success getting through late at night. You also have the option of checking online at [http://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp](http://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp). To do so you must have the LIN number from your Notice of Action.

**Decision on your Application:**
If your application is approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card will be mailed to you. In the unlikely event that your application cannot be granted, you will receive an explanation for denial. Likewise, if USCIS wants you to send additional or supporting documentation before they will proceed with your application, they will send a letter to you.

**What happens once I receive my EAD Card?**
Upon receipt of your EAD Card, submit a copy to the OIA immediately via email (cmoore@desu.edu) or fax 302-857-6567. You have 90 days of unemployment from the begin date on the EAD Card. Once your 90 days are up and if you still do not have a job, you can volunteer. Keep track of all of your volunteer hours.

**What if I never receive my EAD Card but USCIS shows it was delivered?**
Please check with your local post office. If you feel comfortable, check with your neighbors to see if it was mistakenly put in their box. If the card is lost, stolen or destroyed, you will need a new I-20 showing your OPT has been approved then apply for a replacement of EAD by submitting an inquiry on non-delivery of a card (egov.uscis.gov).

**Can I travel outside the USA if I have OPT or have applied for OPT?**
It is not encouraged to travel while your OPT application is pending however; if you decide to travel once your
application is approved, make sure your I-20 is signed by the OISS advisor, your F-1 visa is valid, your passport is valid, you have your employment offer letter and your EAD card.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement has also indicated the following:

- If your OPT is approved and you are employed or have been offered employment, you should be able to re-enter the U.S. with the documents mentioned above,
- If you insist on traveling while your OPT application is still Pending, when you wish to re-enter the U.S., you may be allowed to re-enter to look for employment (in case your OPT is approved while you are outside the U.S., OISS strongly recommends that ON THE DAY YOU ARE TO LEAVE THE U.S. you go to the website http://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp where you can enter the LIN number from your Notice of Action and print a statement showing the OPT application is still pending as of that date, and have this with you when you come through the Port of Entry).
- If your OPT application has been approved and you leave the U.S. before finding a job (as evidence by a job offer letter, which you should be prepared to show the Port of Entry Officer), your OPT may be considered canceled and you may NOT be allowed to re-enter the U.S.

Is OPT a different visa?
No. A person with OPT authorization is still in F-1 status, holding an EAD for OPT. you still need an OISS adviser signature and it should be no more than six months old at the time you re-enter.

WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD I KNOW?

Will I Still Be Covered By My Insurance?
No. Although for immigration purposes you will continue to be in F-1 status while engaging in OPT, your status as an actual DSU student will end with graduation. This means that your University Insurance coverage will end with the last day of the month in which you graduate. If you cannot use the coverage by your OPT employer’s insurance program right away, you are strongly advised to consider an alternate means of providing some degree of medical coverage during the interim between the month of graduation and the start of coverage at your new OPT job. Visit ISO.ORG for OPT insurance.

What if I cannot find a job?
This is not necessarily a problem. You are expected to be “actively searching” for OPT employment. Document that you have continually and actively been looking for full-time employment in your area of study, keep records of resumes and applications sent out, job interviews held, rejection letters received, etc. New Regulations state that you must not be unemployed longer than 90 days. You may volunteer if you do not find a job within 90 days and be sure to keep record of all volunteer work and hours.

Can I take classes if I have OPT?
Perhaps. If you have graduated and have OPT, regulations allow you to take classes informally (no credit), as long as you maintain your OPT employment, however, if you begin a new course of study (i.e. a new degree program), this will automatically cancel your OPT authorization. Also, the OISS does not recommend taking a class that may later be used to satisfy new degree program requirements.

Can I change employers if I have OPT?
Yes. There is no immigration-related procedure required for doing so. As long as the employment is related to your field of study, you can work for any employer or even multiple employers at once.

How long can I stay in the United States after my OPT expires?
Sixty days and return to your home country or apply to the new school and be accepted to the new school BEFORE the end of the 60 days end date on your EAD Card.
Can I return to school after completing OPT?
Yes. You need to obtain an I-20 for the new program of studies. If you resume studies, at DSU you must submit current proof of funding and a DSU acceptance letter. If you plan to attend another school you must complete a Transfer Out Form. Please note that if you transfer to a new school you are only allowed to remain in the U.S. for up to 5 months between the time your OPT ends and the new program of studies to begin; if the time period is greater than 5 months, you will be required to leave the U.S. and can only re-enter within 30 days of the start of your new program of study.

What if I want to return to my home country?
Please visit with your International Advisor if you plan to depart the US for any reason before/after applying for OPT.

If I have OPT for a year and return to school for another degree, can I have another year of OPT?
You will be eligible for another year of OPT if your new degree will be at a HIGHER level of study. For instance, if you obtain a Master’s degree, did 12 months of OPT, then enter a PhD program, you will be eligible for another 12 months of OPT following the PhD program.

If I apply for OPT and then decide not to use it, can I get my OPT time back?
If the USCIS has not yet issued your EAD at the time you decide you do not want OPT, you may request to withdraw your application. This is not always successful, so please talk to an OISS adviser or make an appointment by telephoning 857-6474. But if the EAD card has been issued, it is not possible to cancel and the USCIS will consider you to have used up your OPT even if you really did not work. Hence decisions to cancel MUST be made early before the EAD has been issued.

Social Security Number (SSN):
If you have not previously applied for and received the Social Security Card (Form SS-5) you must apply for one. Please visit the Social Security website at www.ssa.gov, click on numbers and cards, click on social security numbers & cards, click on international students. If student has a SSN/Card; proceed with your employment processing with your new employer.

STEM Students Applying for the 24-month extension:
Stem students must apply for the 24-month extension and THE STUDENT submits the below documents to USCIS no more than 90 days prior to the expiration date on the current EAD Card. Before submitting the STEM application students must
1. Submit the I-983 to cmoore@desu.edu or fax 302-857-6567.
2. Once the new OPT STEM I-20 is ready, (within 5 business days) it’s mailed to the student.
3. Upon receipt of the OPT STEM I-20, student signs both copies and the student keeps 1 copy and mails the 2nd copy with the below documents to USCIS, PO Box 660867, Dallas, TX  75266 .

- Two passport type photographs (2x2 on white background, write your name in pencil or felt pen on the back of your photos).
- Completed and SIGNED Form I-765 (do not sign electronically, complete form in black ink pen)
- Completed and signed Form I-983
- New STEM OPT I-20 and (Photocopies of all previous Forms I-20 issued by us and other schools you have attended).
- Photocopy of all EAD Card(s) (front and back) if applicable
- Photocopy of Form I-94 (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov)
- Copy of your degree
- Photocopies of your passport and visa identification page
- $410 Fee in the form of a check or money order. Money order is best. Make check or money order payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. If you are using a personal check, it must have your current name and address on it.

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Please keep in mind that it will take 5 to 10 business days of processing from the date we receive your I-983 form and issuing your new STEM OPT I-20, therefore, please allow enough time for this entire process.

**STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES ONCE HE/SHE RECEIVES EMPLOYMENT**

It is the responsibility of the student to insure that the job he/she takes on practical training is related to the degree he/she is seeking or has completed at DSU. Upon receipt of your EAD Card, please email a copy to the International Affairs Office at cmoore@desu.edu. The student is also responsible for maintaining contact with DSU, as the institution is still responsible for the student’s legal status in the U.S. Under federal immigration law, students have 10 days to report a change of name or address to the OISS while on STEM-OPT. **It is also the student’s responsibility to complete the OPT Employment Form within 5 business days of starting his/her position.** The form is on the OIA website: [https://www.desu.edu/academics/international-programs/resources-forms](https://www.desu.edu/academics/international-programs/resources-forms). The form can be emailed to cmoore@desu.edu and type OPT Employment in the subject line. If Student is on STEM-OPT he/she must submit an annual Form I-983 and a final Form I-983 when his/her job is completed (EAD Card Expires).

**Below are a few excellent web resources available on the OPT rule:**

- Department of Immigration & Citizenship Enforcement (2/19/2009)
  [http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/release_6_0_training_slides_f_m_users.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/release_6_0_training_slides_f_m_users.pdf)

- US Citizenship and Immigration Services Q and A

- NAFSA: Association of International Educators Resource on the Interim Final Rule
  [http://nafsa.org/regulatory_information/sec/29_month_opt_rule_updates](http://nafsa.org/regulatory_information/sec/29_month_opt_rule_updates)

- Text of Interim Final Rule
Optional Practical Training Request Form  
(Please complete and turn in with your OPT package)
You are eligible to apply for OPT 90 days prior to OR 60 days after your completion of program date listed on your I-20.

1. Personal and Program Information:

Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Last           First

Local address: ____________________________

D ___________ Phone: _______________ SEVIS ID# ________________

E-mail ___________ @students.desu.edu   Personal E-mail: ________________________

Completion of Program Date listed on your I-20: ________________________

Degree Program □ Bachelors □ Masters □ PhD   Major __________________________

2. What Kind of OPT Are You Applying For?

□ Before Completion of Program: (available only during vacations periods)

□ Full-time.

Starting on _______________ and ending ________________________ .

□ Part-time. (Less than 20 hours a week)

Starting on _______________ and ending ________________________ .

□ After Completion of Program:

Starting on _______________ Your start date could be as early as the completion of program date or any other date within the 60-day period following it.

Ending _______________ You must apply for all of the 12-month benefit you have remaining for this program of study.

3. How much of your 12-month OPT benefit for this program have you used, if any? _______________ (IF NONE WRITE “NONE”)

4. DESCRIBE YOUR PROPOSED EMPLOYMENT AND EXPLAIN HOW IT RELATES TO YOUR MAJOR.

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