Workshop Overview

- What Is OPT?
- Application Process
- Waiting on OPT Approval
- Travel
- Responsibilities While on OPT
WHAT IS OPT?

- OPT stands for Optional Practical Training
- 12 months of off-campus work authorization
- 12 months of OPT (e.g. BA, MA, PhD)
- By applying for OPT, it continues your F1 status
- No job offer needed at the time you apply
- Once OPT is approved, 90 days of unemployment
- Employment must be **directly related** to your field of study
PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS

-TIMING-

Post-Completion vs. Pre-Completion

Application timeline is based on Program Completion date.
When to Apply for Post-Completion OPT?

90 Days

90 days: the earliest date the OIA can recommend OPT.

60 Days

60 days: the latest date USCIS can receipt your OPT application. If your application is not receipted by this date, your application could be denied.
Choosing OPT Start Date?

- OPT Can begin 1 to 60 days after program completion.

- Timings:
  - After 60 Days of program completion, OPT may start at any time up to 60 days later.
  - After 90 Days of program completion, OPT may start at any time up to 30 days later.

Program End Date
PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS
-TIMING-

Choosing OPT Start Date?

- 90 Days: 12/20/2020
- 60 Days: 5/19/2021
- Program End Date: 3/20/2021

Pick an OPT Start Date between 3/21/2021 – 5/19/2021
PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS
-TIMING-

Choosing OPT Start Date?

Program End Date

6/12/2021

Pick an OPT Start Date between 6/13/2021 – 8/11/2021

60 Days

8/11/2021

90 Days

3/14/2021

6/13/2021
APPLICATION PROCESS

1. OIA Materials
2. USCIS Materials
3. Completed OPT Application Review
4. Mail OPT Application to USCIS
STEP 1: OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (OIA) MATERIALS

Verification of Completion Form

Form I-765 (USCIS Form)

Request for F-1 OPT Work Authorization Online Form

Upload Completed PDFs
Verification of Completion Form

Name of Student: ____________________________
Student ID: ________________________________
Program of Study: __________________________

[Checkboxes for College and Graduate Students]

College Students Only: I verify that the above-named student will complete his/her course requirements by the end of the ______ quarter, 201__. 

Graduate Students Only: I verify that the above-named student will complete all of his/her course requirements with the exception of his/her thesis by the end of the ______ quarter, 201__. 

Graduate Students Only: I verify that the above-named student will complete his/her degree requirements by the end of the ______ quarter, 201__. 

Signature of Adviser: ______________________ Date: ____________
Name & Title of Advisor: __________________
Department or Division: ________________

[University of Chicago logo]
Recommend TYPING the form

Reason for Applying: Post-Completion OPT--(c)(3)(B)

Please list names exactly as they appear on your Passport

Your U.S. Mailing Address: Use an address that will be valid at least 4-5 months into the future. You can use the U.S. address of a reliable friend or relative who can receive the card for you. EADs are considered government documents and cannot be forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service.

PART 6: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION Complete this section only if:
1. You have been approved for CPT at UChicago
2. You have been approved for OPT in the past (pre-post)
3. Have other SEVIS number(s)

Print all 7 pages on one side

Sign the form (“Applicant Signature”) with a black pen by hand; do not use an electronic signature
STEP 2: U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS) MATERIALS

- Two NEW Passport Photos (should meet the U.S. government photo standards)
- Copy of I-20 with OPT Recommendation (Page 2)
  
**Don’t forget to sign page 1!**

- Form I-765 (USCIS Form)
- Check or Money Order payable to “U.S Department of Homeland Security” (Application fee $410)
STEP 2: ASSEMBLING YOUR APPLICATION

- I-94 (Most Recent Entry)
- CPT Screenshot from SEVIS
- Copies (front/back) of all Previous EADs (if applicable)
- Copy of the Biographical Page of your Passport
STEP 3: OPT APPLICATION PACKET REVIEW

OPT application review is possible before mailing to USCIS.

Please contact your adviser for details.

OIA Advisor Contact Information

Melissa Chin
mjchin@uchicago.edu
Graham, Humanities, Divinity, Booth

Mischa Kasperan
mkasperan@uchicago.edu
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The College, SSA

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SSD and Pritzker
STEP 4: OPT APPLICATION PACKET
MAILING INSTRUCTIONS

Secure Mail:
- Delivery Confirmation
- Certified Mail
- Check Address if non-USPS Courier
- Must be present in the US at the time of application

WARNING:
Reach out to your adviser if, your OPT recommendation is more than 30 days old.
Mail your completed OPT application as soon as possible!
WAITING ON OPT APPROVAL

Receipt Notice

You can track your application using your receipt number.

Your application will typically be receipted within 2-4 weeks.
While waiting on OPT approval, you **cannot** do any paid or unpaid work related to your area of study.

Volunteering may be acceptable if it is recreational or avocational in nature:
- Not related to your area of study
- May also fit the Dept of Labor's definition of volunteer work

According to the Department of Labor, a volunteer is: an “individual who performs hours of service... for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered.”

- Services are performed for public service, religious or humanitarian objective.
- No expectation of compensation
- The volunteer cannot displace a genuine employee
- Services provided by the volunteer should not be the same services for which they was previously paid and/or expects to be hired and paid for in the future
OPT CARD

Unemployment time starts accruing on your OPT start date.

Card Validity Dates
(Note: you may not begin working until this start date has been reached)

Simply means this card alone cannot be used as a passport/visa stamp. Refer to Travel Considerations.
RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON OPT

- Report employment/address changes (OPT Update Form or SEVP Student Portal)

**WARNING: Unemployment Time**

- Report changes to your status (ex: F-1 to H-1B)

- Report ending OPT early
RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON OPT

SEVP Student Portal

1. **Step 1: SEVIS Sends Student Information to the Portal**
   - When the status of an OPT request or practical training request in SEVIS changes to “Approved” and the OPT authorization is active, SEVIS sends relevant data from the student’s SEVIS record to the SEVP Portal.

2. **Step 2: The Portal Sends the Account Creation Email to the Student**
   - The portal will send the account creation email after getting OPT data from SEVIS. SEVIS sends OPT information to the portal if all the following are true:

3. **Step 3: The Student Follows the Link to Create their Portal Account**
   - Students must click the link in the email to open the registration page. The initial registration page will ask for the student’s SEVIS ID number. A student must enter their correct, most recent SEVIS ID on which practical training was approved and then click **Submit**.

4. **Step 4: The Student Successfully Creates their Portal Account**
   - After the student clicks “Create Account” the portal will open the login page and display a success message. This signifies that the student has successfully created an SEVP Portal account and may now:
WHAT IS ‘EMPLOYMENT’

Work that is:

- Directly related to your area of study
- Combined for at least 20 hours/week
- Appropriate for your level of education

COVID-19 Exceptions: Remote employment, working less than 20 hours per week
You are permitted to work for multiple employers – all must be directly related to your field of study!
SELF-EMPLOYMENT

You are permitted to start a business or be self-employed while on OPT.

You are responsible for documenting your self-employment (i.e., proving you have the required business licensure).
PAID/UN-PAID INTERNSHIPS

- Students may work as paid/un-paid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws.
- Paid/Unpaid Internships have to be related to field of study.
- Benefits the intern, not necessarily the company.
- Record your participation (20 hours or more per week)
RECORD KEEPING TIPS

- Keep copies of all I-20s and EAD Cards
  - Students who apply for future immigration benefits in the US will likely be asked to provide evidence of all previous EADs and I-20s

- Keep track of OPT employment
  - OIA will continue to monitor students’ SEVIS records while on OPT, but it is the students’ responsibility to keep track of their employment records (i.e. Job offer letter, formal job description or job posting, etc.)

- Keep original EAD Card in a safe place
  - Lost or stolen EAD will need to be replaced at the student’s expense
SPECIAL ISSUES

- Travel
- Dependents
- Nearing the END of OPT
  - STEM Extension
  - H1-B Visa Status
  - Status Beyond F-1
TRAVEL WHILE OPT IS PENDING

Pre-end date: travel as you normally would
Post-end date: Will need EAD card to re-enter the U.S.
TRAVEL AFTER OPT IS APPROVED
DEPENDENTS

- F-2 status extended as long as F-1 is maintaining OPT requirements

- F-2 Dependent Travel
  - Copies of F-1 documents (I-20, F-1 visa stamp, passport ID page, I-94, EAD)
  - Valid F-2: I-20 with travel signature (TS valid for 6 months)
  - Valid Passport
  - Valid F-2 visa stamp
F1 students have a 60 day grace period after their OPT End Date to do the following:

1. Leave the U.S. (not eligible for re-entry in current F-1 status during this period)
2. Transfer SEVIS record to a new school or
3. Change education level at UChicago
STEM-EXTENSION

- STEM Qualified Majors Only
- A student can use the STEM extension based on their most recent or a previous STEM degree.
- A student may obtain up to two STEM extensions provided that the second STEM extension is for a higher qualifying degree.
- You need to apply before initial 12-months of OPT ends
- A job offer is required in order to apply
  1. It has to be directly related to your degree and field of study
  2. It has to be full time (i.e. at least 20 hours per week)
  3. It must be from an employer who participates in E-verify (http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify)
  4. It must be an eligible type of employment (unpaid or volunteer positions, positions with temp agencies and self-employment do not qualify)
- USCIS requires the employer to provide a formal Training Plan (Form I-983)
H-1B CAP-GAP

H-1B CAP-GAP Extension
CAP-Subject Employers only, Change of Status petitions only

April 1st
H-1B Applications Accepted

OPT End-Date

October 1st
H-1B status begins for approved petitions
STATUS BEYOND F-1

- Several potential statuses and solutions for full-time employment
- Not like OPT; employer must submit petition
- When conversations about sponsorship come up, work closely with your employer for creative solutions
- Learn more about potential statuses on the USCIS Website to help employers understand them
- Always work with experienced professionals for applications
- The Student Services Team at OIA is not legally eligible to advise on statuses beyond F-1/J-1 student
During the period of OPT, a student remains in F-1 status.

A job offer is not required to apply for OPT.

The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.

No special permission is needed from the USCIS or OIA to quit a job or change employers. However, you must update your SEVP Student Portal or complete the OIA OPT Update form of these changes within 10 days.

An extension of OPT is allowed for up to 24 months if at the time of the extension you have a degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) field and your employer is enrolled in E-Verify.
Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Checklist

This checklist is to be used for F-1 students applying for the initial 12 months of post-completion OPT. The application process is a two sequential steps: the first step is to submit materials to the Office of International Affairs (OIA); the second step is submitting a complete OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Step 1: Office of International Affairs (OIA) materials
- [ ] Verification of completion Form signed by academic department (for post-completion OPT applicants only)
- [ ] Form I-797 Application for Employment Authorization (refer to the OIA OPT website for specific instructions).
  - An OIA International Advisor will review this application and let you know if it needs to be made.
- [ ] Submit the Online Request/Forms for OPT-Work Authorization (attach the above; processing could take up to 5 business days).

After submitting, you will receive an email from OIA once your new I-20 with an OPT recommendation has been processed and is ready for pickup. Along with the I-20, you will also receive a printout of your Curricular Practical Training (CPT) history.

Step 2: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) materials
- [ ] $410 Application Fee Payment: personal check, money order, or cashier’s check completed as follows: Payable To: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- [ ] Two (2) new passport photos. Photos must meet U.S. photograph requirements.
  - Write your name on the back of photos.
- [ ] Reviewed and updated Form I-797 Application for Employment Authorization
  - Supporting Documents - Photocopies of the following documents (Note: Do NOT send the originals):
    - New I-20 (with OPT recommendation on the second page) that has been:
      - Signed and dated in the “Student Attestation” section (bottom of first page)
      - Issued no more than 30 days before USCIS will receive the entire OPT application
    - OPT Employment printout (received with new I-20)
    - Passport photograph and biographical information (color photocopy recommended)
    - Most recent I-54 Arrival record (print online from: www.dhs.gov/I54)
    - Previously-issued EAD cards (if applicable)
- [ ] Recommended: Form G-14 or E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
  - In order to receive electronic notification when your application is received by USCIS and other application related updates.

Step 3: OPT Application Packet Review

Once your OPT packet has been assembled, you may bring it to OIA for final review before mailing it to USCIS during OIA walk-in advising times. Walk-in advising: Monday – Thursday, from 10am-3pm and 2pm-4pm.

Step 4: OPT Application Packet Mailing Instructions

1. Make a copy of the of the entire application for your records.
2. Mail application packet to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox Facility. Address depends on the U.S. mailing address you list on the I-765 application (Part 2, Information About You, Item Numbers 5 a. – 5 e.). 
3. We recommend mailing in a way that allows tracking/confirmation of delivery (e.g. FedEx, UPS, DHL, etc.).

If the address used on the I-765 Application for Employment Authorization is in Illinois:

Mail your application to:

If mailing via the U.S. Postal Service (USPS):
  - [ ] Requesting certified mail highly recommended

If shipping via Courier Service (FedEx, UPS, DHL, etc.):
  - [ ] Tracking information highly recommended

USCIS
P.O. Box 22181
Phoenix, AZ 85036

USCIS
Attn: NRB AO5
1820 E. McDowell Road
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

If the address listed on your Form I-765 is not in the State of Illinois, you should visit the Application for Employment Authorization USCIS webpage to determine which USCIS Service Center will process your application.

TIMING

We recommend that you mail the complete OPT application to USCIS as soon as possible (within 2 weeks from the DSO signature date on the I-20 with OPT recommendation). This is because your application will be denied if USCIS does not receive it within 30 days of the DSO signature date.

TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS AFTER APPLYING FOR OPT

Traveling before program end date listed on I-20:
  - You can travel as a regular F-1 student before your I-20 end date.

Traveling after program end date listed on I-20:
  - After the program end date listed on your I-20, you will need your EAD to re-enter the country. If you leave the U.S. before you receive the card, and your OPT is approved, you would need to arrange to obtain the card for re-entry.

Traveling while on OPT:
  - OPT is a continuation of your F-1 Student status. As an F-1 Student, you can enter and exit the country as long as you have all required travel documents you must have a valid passport, valid F1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the OPT EAD card.

My F-1 student visa has expired. Can I still renew it?
  - To re-enter the U.S. from abroad, you will need a valid visa. Review the OIA Travel page for specific information regarding visa renewal.

Contact the Office of International Affairs (OIA) if:
  - [ ] You need to cancel your OPT application
  - [ ] You do not complete your program as planned
  - [ ] Your application has been pending beyond the normal processing time - 5 months

Estimated processing time range:

The estimated time range for USCIS to process OPT applications is 3-5 months from the day the application was received.

USCIS will mail an official Form I-797 Notice of Action: Receipt Notice approximately 2-4 weeks after receiving the application. This notice will confirm official receipt of the application by USCIS and indicate a case number which can be used to track the application using the USCIS Case Status website.
REVIEW THE OIA WEBSITE

internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/opt-optional-practical-training

- Instructions for completing I-765
- Access Verification of Completion Form
- Link to “Request for F-1 OPT Work Authorization” online form
OIA CONTACT INFORMATION

Email: international-affairs@uchicago.edu
Phone: +1 (773) 702-7752
Appointments: Schedule online through our Staff Directory

Location:
Press Building, 1427 East 60th Street, Second Floor, Suite 251

Hours:
Monday – Thursday: 9 AM – 4:30 PM, Friday: 10:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Walk-in Advising Hours:
Mon – Thurs: 10 AM – 1 PM and 2 PM – 4 PM
Thank you for participating in our Webinar