Pre/Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshop

I. BEFORE YOU APPLY

OPT Overview & Eligibility
What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?
- Temporary employment authorization for F-1 students to gain experience in jobs directly related to major area of study. Total of 12 months of OPT available per education level (e.g. Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctorate)

Quick Overview
- You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT
- You may not pursue a new course of study (degree program) while on OPT.
- The application is approved by United States Customs & Immigration Service (USCIS), not OIA. USCIS processing time is on average three months.
- Unemployment: During the 12-month period of post-completion OPT, you can have up to 90 days of unemployment. The STEM OPT extension allows 120 days of unemployment (during the 29 months)

Types of Employment
- **Multiple employers**: You may work for more than one employer, but all jobs must be related to your field.
- **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists)**: You’re allowed to have multiple short term jobs or gigs (e.g. music performances). Keep a list of all gigs, the employer, and duration of each for your records.
- **Work for hire**: Commonly referred to as 1099 or Independent Contractor Employment; keep evidence of the duration of contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner**: You can start a business or be self-employed while on OPT. You should be able to prove that you have the proper business licenses and that it is related to your degree program.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm is also allowed.
- **Unpaid Employment**: You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any labor laws.

II. APPLICATION

Application Timeline: When should you apply?
Pre-Completion OPT: Apply 90 days before your requested job start date

Post-Completion OPT Timing Chart

90 Days before end date  
My I-20 End date is__________________

I-20 End Date

60 Days after end-date:

OPT Start Date can be between _____________ and ____________.

USCIS will accept Post-Completion OPT applications between _____________ and ____________
**STEP 1: OIA Recommendation**
Submit the following three documents to OIA. Allow one week for processing; no appointment needed.

A. OIA Request Form
B. Verification of Completion Form (for post-completion OPT applications only)
C. Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization”.

**NOTE:** All forms and detailed instructions are available on the website: [http://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/opt](http://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/opt)

**STEP 2: USCIS Application Procedures**
Mail the following documents to USCIS:

1. **Form I-765** with fee and photographs stapled to it (see items #2 and #3 below).
2. **Two new color passport style photos**. Available at the ID & Privileges Office in Regenstein. Write your name with a pencil on the back of the photos and put them in a small plastic bag or envelope and staple it to the top of Form I-765. Your photos must be recent and must not have been used in any previous application.
3. **Payment**: A check or money order for the filing fee of $380 payable to "Department of Homeland Security."
4. **Copy of I-20** (the one with the OPT recommendation on it), all pages. **DO NOT SEND ORIGINAL!** The OIA signature must be fewer than 30 days old at the time the application is received by USCIS.
5. **Copy of I-94** Departure Record Card, front and back or the electronic I-94 receipt ([http://www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94))
6. **Screen shots** from SEVIS of OPT and CPT use (you will get this from OIA with your new I-20).
7. **Copies** (front and back) of **all previous EAD(s)** issued to you for OPT.
8. **Copies** (front and back) of all I-20s from any previous U.S. institution before the University of Chicago.
9. **Copy of the identity page(s)** of your **passport**. This includes the page that has your photograph and biographical information.
10. **Form G-1145**, "E-Notification of Application/Acceptance," if you want to be notified electronically when your application is received. See [http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) for form and filing instructions.

***Make a copy of your entire application before mailing it; keep it with your mailing receipt.***

**STEP 3: Mail Your Application to USCIS**
Mail complete application using secure mail with delivery confirmation/tracking, such as U.S. Postal Service Certified mail. If your Form I-765 has an Illinois address, mail to:

USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036

If your mailing address on the Form I-765 is outside of Illinois, consult the OIA OPT website (link above).

**III. AFTER YOU APPLY**

**Tracking Your Application**
- If you filed Form G-1145, you will receive an email or text from USCIS with confirmation that your application was received and a receipt number.
- If you paid the $380 fee with a personal check, monitor your bank account to see when check has been cashed.
- Within a month of mailing your application you will receive a **Receipt Notice (I-797)** from USCIS. Using your Receipt Number (upper left-hand side) you can check the status of your application on the USCIS Case Status Search Page: [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do)
USCIS will issue an EAD when your application has been approved. The card will state the specific start date and end date for your OPT. **You cannot legally begin working until you have the physical card and the start date has been reached!**

Contact OIA if
1) You need to **cancel** your OPT application
2) You **don’t graduate** as planned
3) You need to update your mailing **address**
   - Contact OIA immediately. **DO NOT TRY TO UPDATE THE ADDRESS YOURSELF**

**OPT Reporting Requirements**
All F-1 students on **post-completion** OPT are **required** to report any change in the following information within **10 days** through the OPT Update Form on the OIA website: Name, address, employer name/address, any interruption of employment or starting a new academic program, and change of status.

Use the **OPT Update Form** on our website and see reporting information at: [https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/opt#reporting](https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/opt#reporting)

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**IV. POST-COMPLETION OPT TRAVEL**

**While OPT is PENDING**
**Before Program End Date:**
You can travel normally as an F-1 student. **NOTE:** **Contact employer if applying for H-1B.**
**After Program End Date:**
- It is not advisable to travel outside the U.S. prior to receiving your EAD card and securing employment.
- EAD cards will **NOT** be sent overseas, and an EAD card is required for re-entry.
  
  **Travel through Chicago airports whenever possible!**
  
  - You can remain in the U.S. if your F-1 visa has expired. If you will travel in and out of the US while on OPT, you must have a valid F-1 visa.
  - If your F-1 visa will expire before you re-enter, you **must** apply for a new visa at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy abroad PRIOR to your return.
  - After your program end date, you will need proof of employment to show you are returning to the U.S. to resume employment appropriate for OPT.

**Once OPT is APPROVED (You Have the EAD)**
In addition to your regular travel documents (valid passport, valid F-1 visa, I-20 with OPT recommendation and travel signature less than **6 months** old), you will also need:
- Valid EAD Card (your card will say “**not valid for travel**,” meaning it cannot replace a valid visa)
- Job offer letter or letter of employment verification from your current employer

**NOTE:** **Without your EAD and proof of employment/job offer, you assume a risk in re-entering the U.S. while on OPT.**

**F-2 Dependents - Travel Outside the U.S.**
In addition to their own Form I-20 – with updated travel signature, passport and valid F-2 visa, F-2 dependents should keep **copies** of the F-1 documents listed above.
V: STEM Extension

- The Stem Extension is a one-time, 17-month extension that students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics are eligible to apply for (see eligible programs on link below).
- STEM must occur after regular post-completion OPT; application must be filed before OPT expires.
- Employers must be E-Verify.

More information & Application Instructions for the STEM Extension:
https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/stem

VI. OPT and H-1B

H-1B Cap

- H-1B Cap (for ‘new’ H-1Bs): There are a limited number of new H-1B statuses available each year.
  - 65,000 H-1Bs for people with B.A.; an additional 20,000 H-1Bs for people with M.A. or above
  - Submit petition on April 1 for an October 1 start date
- The limited number does not apply to universities or non-profit research organizations. These entities can submit H-1B petitions anytime of the year for any start date without limit.
- Other work visa options include: E-3 (Australia), TN (Canada & Mexico), & H-1B1 (Chile & Singapore)

H-1B “Cap Gap”
If you are on OPT with a pending H-1B Change of Status petition with a company that is subject to the H-1B cap, your OPT will be automatically extended to either the H-1B employment start date (October 1), or the H-1B petition denial date, whichever comes first.

- Students must contact OIA to receive a new I-20 that confirms Cap Gap employment authorization
- If your H-1B petition is denied, your OPT work extension will immediately be terminated. You will have 60 days (from notification of denial) to depart the U.S.

H-1B CAP GAP

June 20: OPT Ends
CAP GAP EXTENSION

April 1: Employer files H-1B

October 1: H-1B Status Begins