*Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Guidelines

The goal of Optional Practical Training (OPT) is to provide international students with practical on-the-job experience that is directly related to the student's current field of study and commensurate with the degree level.

Highlights

- F-1 international students who have been maintaining their status for at least one full academic year are eligible for OPT.
- You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT.
- 12 months of OPT for each higher degree level is available. (i.e., one year after a Bachelor's degree, another after a Master's, a third after a Ph.D.)

Things to Remember

- You are not eligible for OPT if you were authorized for 12 months or more of full time CPT at the same degree level.
- The OPT process is started by the ISO but must be authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If approved, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) will be issued to you.
- You MUST NOT begin working until you receive the EAD card.
- You may only begin working from the dates the EAD card is valid.
- It may take up to three months to receive the EAD card. (ISO processing time:10 days; USCIS processing time: 75 - 90 days)
- You may apply for the Post-Completion OPT up to 90 days before your program completion, but not later than 60 days after your program completion date.
- Employment must be related to your degree program.
- More than 90 days of unemployment during OPT is a violation of F-1 status.
- You are not allowed to pursue a degree program while you are on post-completion OPT.
- Time authorized for employment by the USCIS is considered time used, even if you did not work.
- You must report to the ISO any change in name, address, and employer information in order to keep your F-1 status.

Three-Step Employment Authorization Process

Step 1. Request OPT recommendation from the ISO. (see pages 2-5 for detailed instructions)
Step 2. Prepare and mail your application materials to the USCIS. (see pages 6-7 for detailed instructions)
Step 3. Receive the EAD card and start working (see page 8)

*If you are interested in getting information about Pre-Completion OPT, please consult with your ISO advisor.

Step 1. Request OPT recommendation from the ISO

USCIS can take several months to process your request, so please apply early! Your ISO advisor will contact you if there is a problem or question about your application. Please allow up to 10 business days processing time in ISO after your request is complete. You will be notified via email when you can pick up your application from the ISO. <u>Please note</u> that you need to send the application packet to the USCIS <u>within 30 days of I-20 issuance</u>.

Document checklist

- ☐ A cover letter written by you
  - ➢ See sample on page three

- ☐ A letter of certification from your academic advisor
  - ➢ See sample on page four

- ☐ Completed I-765 form
  - ➢ See guidelines on page five

- ☐ All previously issued I-20s from GW and prior schools, if applicable (copies)

- ☐ Your I-94 card (copy)
  - ➢ Make sure it's legible
  - ➢ Include both front and back

- ☐ Passport (copies)
  - ➢ Expiration page/Biographic page
  - ➢ F-1 visa stamp

Guidelines for your Cover Letter

F-1 students requesting Optional Practical Training are required to submit a letter to ISO as part of the application. The following information should be included in the letter:

- Current date
- Your major field of study and degree objective
- The date you expect to complete your studies (last day of your final exam in your final semester/ when all degree requirements are complete, not necessarily your graduation date)
- A description of the practical training (what type of job you will seek)
- How the practical training is related to your field of study
- The beginning and ending dates of your requested practical training
- You may ask for your work authorization to begin on the day after your program completion date, as late as 60 days after, or any date in between.
- Your ending date should be within 12 months from your beginning date.
- If you can't decide on the dates, please see your ISO advisor.
- Your name (printed), GWID number and signature

Sample Cover Letter

Your Address

Today's date

International Services Office
2033 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20052

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an F-1 student in the M.S. program in Statistics. I am currently completing my last semester of study and expect to complete my study on _____. I intend to seek a position in the area of research/statistical analysis or teaching. This training is related to my studies in Statistics because it will allow me to directly apply the concepts I have learned in the classroom to practical situations in analyzing data, developing statistical reports, and making recommendations based on my research. If I find a position teaching statistics, I will be passing on to my students the concepts I learned in my graduate program.

I am requesting that my practical training authorization begin on _____ and end on _____.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

James A. Student (GWID:)

Guidelines for the Letter of Certification from your Academic Advisor

F-1 students requesting Post-Completion Optional Practical Training are required to visit their academic advisor to discuss their program completion date. During the advising session, please ask your academic advisor to write a letter on official GW letterhead, addressed to the ISO that includes following information:

- An indication that you are making normal progress toward completion of your degree.
- Expected date of program completion:
  - By this date, you will have met all course requirements.
  - Generally, the official last day of exams for your final term.
    Please refer to GW Academic Calendar: http://www.gwu.edu/ac.cfm
  - If you are working on your thesis or dissertation, the date you plan to defend your work.

Sample Letter

<div style="border:1px solid">

Letter Head

Today's date

International Services Office
2033 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20052

After reviewing Mr. /Ms. _____'s academic progress, I certify that he/she is making normal progress toward completion of his/her degree and will be completing all his/her program requirements by_____.

Signature

Dr. George Washington

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Please note:

- This letter must be signed and dated.
- This letter must be on official GW letterhead.

Completing the I-765

- The form I-765 can be downloaded from the www.uscis.gov. Click 'Forms' in the green bar at the top of the page.
- Check the box indicating that you are requesting "Permission to accept employment."
- Item #3:   Address in the United States
  The address you put here is where the EAD will be mailed so make sure it will be valid in 3+ months.
- Item #9: Social Security Number (SSN)
  If you have never worked in the U.S., you may not yet have a SSN. If this is the case, you can leave this space blank. You will be able to apply for your SSN when you get the EAD.
- Item #10: I-94 Number
  On this item, you will use your current I-94 number. This is an 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your I-94 card. As an F-1, you will not have an Alien Registration Number.
- Item #11:   Previous Employment Authorization
  Check "yes" if you have ever received an EAD. A photocopy of that EAD must be included with your application package. (If you have lost it, write "lost EAD" in this space).
- If you have never had an EAD, check the "no" box here. If you have worked on campus or have used CPT, you will still check "no" here.
- Please note that your signature must fit between the lines on the form. If your signature is too big, your application will be returned to you and delay your work permission.

Step 2. Mail your OPT Application to USCIS

Review your new I-20

Once you have received your new Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation on page 3 from ISO, please review the following information:

- ✓ Note the OPT recommendation dates on page 3. These dates may differ from those that you requested.

- ✓ Note the program end date in item 5 on page 1. Your program end date might have been shortened to reflect the actual date when you will complete (or completed) all program requirements.

- ✓ You must cease all on-campus and/or off-campus employment the day after you complete all program requirements.

Document checklist

Your application to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must include the following documents:

☐ I-765 form (original)
- ➢ Make sure it's neat and legible
- ➢ Don't forget to sign it

☐ Your new I-20 with OPT recommendation endorsed by ISO (copy)
- ➢ Don't forget to sign it

☐ All previously issued I-20s from GW and prior schools, if applicable (copies)

☐ Your I-94 card (copy)
- ➢ Make sure it's legible
- ➢ Include both front and back

☐ Passport (copies)
- ➢ Expiration page/Biographic page
- ➢ F-1 visa stamp

☐ Two passport style photos
- ➢ Make sure you meet the specifications as described on page 7

☐ Check or money order
- ➢ Made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security"
- ➢ $380
- ➢ Never send cash

We recommend that you make copies of your entire application for your personal records before you submit it to USCIS.

Photo Requirements
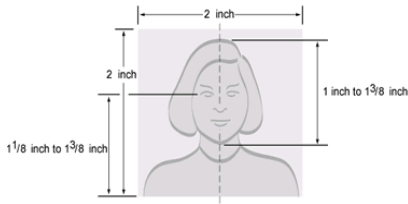
Make sure you meet the specifications of U.S. style passport photos. Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications, but please visit the following website to make sure your photos are well composed:
http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/get_874.html

When should I send my OPT application?

We recommend that you send your application as soon as possible and within 30 days of the date the OPT recommendation I-20 was issued. Keep in mind that your application must be received by USCIS:

- No earlier than 90 days before your program end date;
- No later than 60 days after your program end date; and
- Within 30 days of the OPT recommendation I-20 issuance.

Where should I mail my OPT application to?

If the address that you listed on Form I-765 is in the metropolitan DC area (DC, Virginia, or Maryland)* you should mail the application to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox to one of the following addresses.

For US postal service deliveries**: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266	For courier delivery (FedEx, etc.)**: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

*If the address you listed on Form I-765 is in other states, please contact your ISO advisor to receive information on which USCIS lockbox you should submit your documents to.
The ISO strongly recommends that you send the OPT application by traceable mail so you can track its delivery and confirm its arrival to the USCIS Service Center.

Step 3: Receiving EAD card

Your Address on I-765
USCIS will correspond with you at the address you listed on the I-765 form. Use an address that will be valid for at least the next four months (yours or a trusted friend). Please note that mail from USCIS is NOT forwarded by the Post Office.

The Notice of Action I-797
You should get a formal receipt, called an I-797 Notice of Action, within 2-3 weeks. This will have your individual receipt number in the upper left-hand corner. If you have not received this within three weeks, please contact your ISO advisor.

The "Receipt Number"
This is your case number at the USCIS. You should check the status of your case online through the USCIS website at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do.

Request of Further Evidence (RFE)
If USCIS has a question about your application, they will mail you a form letter with an explanation of what they require from you. Generally, you will have several weeks to reply, but you should respond as soon as possible. Please contact your ISO advisor if you receive this letter.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
Once USCIS approves your application they will mail an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) directly to you. The time this will take varies and can take as long as 60-90 days. The application is not considered late until 90 days have passed.

Employment Reporting Duty
Once your OPT application has been approved and you have received your EAD card, remember to submit a front/back copy of your EAD card to the ISO.

While you are on OPT, you must meet certain reporting requirements in order to maintain your F-1 status. You may find detailed information and instructions on how to meet these requirements on the ISO website at http://gwired.gwu.edu/iso/OPTReporting/.

Please follow the instructions and use the Post-Completion OPT Reporting Portal to report your employment status and employer information to the ISO to keep your SEVIS immigration record up to date.

STEM Extension
If you find your degree on this list here http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm, please contact your ISO advisor for details about extending your OPT for 17 months.

Traveling Abroad during Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Please see the table below to learn more about the different OPT travel scenarios and the risks involved. For more information, please see: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm

Scenario	Risk Level	Documents you should carry
Program of study not yet completed	low	• Valid visa (or exempt for visa) • Valid Passport • I-20 with valid travel signature • Financial Documents • Enrollment letter
Program of study completed		
✔ Submitted the OPT Application to the USCIS ✔ EAD (Employment Authorization Document) Issued ✔ Job Offer	low	• Valid visa (or exempt for visa) • Valid Passport • I-20 with valid travel signature • EAD card • A letter from your employer
✔ Submitted the OPT Application to the USCIS ✘ EAD (Employment Authorization Document) Issued ✔ Job Offer	Somewhat High	• Valid visa (or exempt for visa) • Valid Passport • I-20 with valid travel signature • Proof of OPT application (I-797 Notice of Action) • A letter from your employer
✔ Submitted the OPT Application to the USCIS ✔ EAD (Employment Authorization Document) Issued ✘ Job Offer	High	• Valid visa (or exempt for visa) • Valid Passport • I-20 with valid travel signature • EAD card • Financial Documents
✔ Submitted the OPT Application to the USCIS ✘ EAD (Employment Authorization Document) Issued ✘ Job Offer	Very High	• Valid visa (or exempt for visa) • Valid Passport • I-20 with valid travel signature • Proof of OPT application (I-797 Notice of Action) • Financial Documents