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University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
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# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) APPLICATION PACKET

## What Do I Need to Know BEFORE I Apply for OPT?

### **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)

*You can apply for OPT up to 60 days after graduation.*

### **When can I apply?**

You can only apply for OPT 90 days before your program of study ends. For example, if you graduate on December 17, the first day to fill out the application and send it off would be September 17. After the 90 days begins you may apply for OPT anytime up until 60 days after your program end date.

### **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 the USCIS by mail, as the instructions in this packet indicate. (OIS *recommends* OPT permission; the USCIS must *approve* it.)

### **When can I start to work under OPT?**

You may only begin employment when you have received the EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card *and* the beginning date of employment authorization (shown on the EAD) has arrived. **BEGINNING EMPLOYMENT BEFORE CAN RESULT IN TERMINATION OF OPT STATUS AND DEPORTATION.**

### **Does OPT employment need to be full time?**

If applying for Pre-completion OPT, no. If you are applying for Post-Completion OPT, yes.

## 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*.

## Applying and Mailing your Application to USCIS

1. **Complete form I-765** (a sample form is provided for reference) and the **Student Request for OPT Application Form**.
2. When the forms are completed, **make an appointment to get an OPT I-20** by calling 683-7566.
3. **Bring the following items to the appointment**
  - Ü the completed **Student Request for OPT Application Form**, enclosed with this packet
  - Ü the completed **I-765** form
  - Ü your **passport**
  - Ü your most recent form **I-94** (the white card)
  - Ü **Application Fee** - The cost of filing the I-765 is **\$340.00**. Personal checks or money orders must be in the exact amount and payable to "**United States Department of Homeland Security**." **Personal checks are preferable to money orders**, because they can more easily be traced in case of problems.
  - Ü **Two identical "natural color" passport photos** – These are *U.S.-style* passport photos – passport photos taken in your home country will probably not be acceptable. The photo should be no larger than 2 inches x 2 inches. Lightly print your name and your SEVIS number on the back of each photograph with a pencil to prevent problems should your photographs become separated from your I-765 application.
  - Ü **Photocopies of all prior I-20's**, particularly those containing CPT authorizations
  - Ü **a job offer letter stating the specific starting date** if you already have a job lined up.
4. The OIS adviser will make sure that you have all of the required documents, and will create your new **OPT I-20** with the dates that you have requested. You will include a copy of this in your OPT application packet.

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

<b>Where to Mail :</b>	<i>U.S. Department of Homeland Security United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Texas Service Center P.O. Box 851041 Mesquite, Texas 75185- 1041</i>
The OIS strongly recommends that you make a photocopy of your entire application and that you send it by " <b>certified mail, return receipt</b> ." This will provide you with evidence that your application was received by USCIS.	

***Note: USCIS must receive your OPT application within 30 days of the date the new OPT I-20 is made and before you graduate.***  
***In the event that there is a delay in the processing of your application, the OIS will not be able to help you if you do not have a photocopy of your application and a U.S. Postal Service certified mail return receipt.***

# What Happens After I Mail My OPT Application?

## **Processing Information:**

About 3-4 weeks after you mail your application, you should get a special receipt letter from the USCIS called a **Notice of Action**. This letter will be mailed to the address that you provided on the I-765 form. Remember to keep this letter, since it will contain a special number beginning with the letters “**SRC...**” that refers to your specific application. If you do not receive the Notice of Action after 5 weeks, please notify the OIS.

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 now also have the option of checking online at <https://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp>. To do so you must have the SRC number from your Notice of Action. **We strongly encourage you to sign up for email updates for your application.**

## **Decision on Your Application:**

If your application is approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card will be mailed to the address you have provided. In the very unlikely event that your application cannot be granted, you will receive an explanation for the 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. If you receive this and are unsure of what USCIS is requesting, please contact the advisor for assistance.

## **Can I travel outside the USA if I have OPT or have applied for OPT?**

In order to re-enter the U.S. after you have applied for OPT, you must have your I-20 signed by an OIS adviser within the last six months, a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport and your EAD card. As of January 2005, 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, PLUS a letter from your employer confirming that you are or will be employed there under Optional Practical Training.
- If your OPT application is still **pending** when you wish to re-enter the U.S., you will be allowed to re-enter to look for employment (in case your OPT is approved while you are outside the U.S., OIS strongly recommends that **ON THE DAY YOU ARE TO LEAVE THE U.S.** you go to the website <https://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp> where you can enter the SRC 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 evidenced by a job offer letter, which you should be prepared to show the officer at the Port of Entry), your OPT will be considered canceled and you will 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 OIS adviser signature on your I-20 if you want to re-enter the United States during your time on OPT. The OIS adviser signature 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 International Student Health Insurance?**

No. Although for immigration purposes you will continue to be in F-1 status while engaging in OPT, your status as an actual University of Arkansas at Little Rock “student” will end with graduation. This means that your **International Student Health Insurance coverage will end with the last day of the month in which you graduate**.

If you do not find a job immediately, or cannot be covered 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:**

If you would like to continue on the University insurance until you find adequate insurance, please contact the International Student Coordinator.

### **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. This is particularly important because the OIS has learned that the Texas Service Center, which provides service to Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, has denied H-1B applications to people who can not show that they were employed during their OPT authorization period. While we believe this is not a correct interpretation of the regulations on their part, the denials have still occurred. So if you will have an employer in any of these states file an H-1B for you and you had trouble finding a job during any or all of your OPT period, you should be prepared to prove that you did try to find employment.

### **Can I take classes if I have OPT?**

Perhaps. If you have graduated and have OPT, regulations allow you to take classes informally, 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 OIS 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.

### **Can I return to school after completing OPT?**

Yes. You need to obtain an I-20 for the next program of studies, and complete the U S procedure for moving to a "new level of studies" (if you resume studies at the UI) or the procedure for school transfer (if you go to a different school). 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 is 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.

**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 obtained 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 OIS adviser or make an appointment by telephoning 683-7566. But if the EAD card has been issued, it is not possible to cancel and them.

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.

## What Do I Need To Know Once I Receive My OPT Authorization Card (the EAD Card)?

When you receive your EAD card, you will receive a pamphlet containing very important information about rules you need to follow and other important issues. Please be sure to read this pamphlet carefully, as it contains information about mandatory requirements.

Office of International Services  
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Stabler Hall 105 2801 S. University Ave  
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## Student Request for OPT

Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent email you will still use 4 months from now: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone number you will still use 4 months from now: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have family members currently in F-2 status?  Yes  No

Do you plan to travel outside the U.S.?  Yes  No

Do you have a job offer yet for which you would use OPT?  Yes  No

If yes, do you wish to learn about expedited processing?  Yes  No

Have you previously been authorized for Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?  Yes  No

Have you previously been authorized for Optional Practical Training (OPT)?  Yes  No

Major Area of Study: Degree Being Sought (BA, MA, PhD, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Date of Graduation: Have you completed all required coursework?  Yes  No

**OPT start date you are requesting:** \_\_\_\_\_ **OPT end date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SEVIS/Immigration Reporting Requirements While on OPT:**

**Report changes to your name or residing address** to the OIS within 10 days of the change. Updates should be made in ISIS as long as you have access (generally up until the next time you are asked to change your Hawk-ID password). This will then automatically update the information OIS sends to SEVIS and USCIS. If you forget your ISIS password or no longer have access, then you must send an email to OIS within 10 days of the change to [abhughes@ualr.edu](mailto:abhughes@ualr.edu).

**Report termination of OPT employment** to the OIS. This includes changing to another employment status such as H-1B, attending school on another I-20, or OPT employment that ends before the end date on the EAD card. This information should also be reported within 10 days of the change. Report these changes to [abhughes@ualr.edu](mailto:abhughes@ualr.edu).

Students who have been subject to **Special Registration** (primarily men from Middle Eastern or Islamic countries who went through special procedures at the port of entry or with the local USCIS office and who have a "Fingerprint Identification Number" (FIN) on the back of the I-94 card) must also take the additional step of **notifying USCIS within 10 days any time the employer changes** while on OPT. This must be done by using USCIS form AR-11SR (available at <http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/ar-11sr.htm>). The form should then be mailed directly to USCIS at the address provided.

*I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to report this information to the OIS and/or USCIS, and that the OIS is not responsible for attempting to collect the information if I fail to provide it within the 10-day deadline.*

*I understand that my failure to provide the required information to the OIS within the 10-day deadline could result in later problems between myself and the USCIS.*

*By signing I verify that the information provided on this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge.*

**Student Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_