

# F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

OPT

Initial 12-month OPT  
INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS

OPT

## Definition

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an opportunity for F-1 international students to participate in professional, temporary employment that is directly related to their major area of study, but not a part of the academic curriculum.

## Eligibility

F-1 students are eligible for Optional Practical Training after they have completed two, full-time semesters (fall and spring). Time spent on an approved full-time study abroad program may be counted toward the two-semester requirement as long as the student has completed one semester in the U.S. before studying abroad.

Students are **not** eligible for OPT if they:

- are in violation of their F-1 status.
- will not have completed two full-time semesters of study by the requested employment start date.
- were previously authorized for 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training at the same degree level.
- were previously authorized for 12 months of Optional Practical Training at the same or a higher degree level.

## Maximum Time Allowed

A **maximum period of twelve months (full time) per degree level** can be granted. Students are eligible for an additional twelve months with each higher degree level. **Part-time OPT** (available for pre-completion only) is deducted from the total amount of available full-time OPT at one-half the full-time rate (e.g. four months part time = two months full time). See separate section below for details about a possible 17-month extension for students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (called STEM degrees).

## When Eligible to Work Part Time or Full Time

Optional Practical Training may be granted at four stages in a student's academic career. Timing dictates if it can be part time or full time. Full time means more than 20 hours of work per week and part time equals 20 hours or less per week. OPT may be used incrementally within or among all four potential periods of authorization, but a separate application must be submitted for each part/full time period requested and/or each Pre/Post Completion period.

### Pre-Completion

- 1) During summer or other vacation periods when school is not in session – may be either full time or part time.
- 2) During the fall and spring semesters\* – may only be part time, except as noted in #3 below.
- 3) After the completion of all course requirements for the degree, but before completion of the thesis, dissertation or equivalent\* – may be either full time or part time.

### Post-Completion

- 4) After completion of the degree – only full-time authorization will be granted, but students may work part time (at least 20 hours per week).

\**Note:* Students in situation 2 or 3 **must continue to enroll in a full course of study** while on OPT.

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## Understanding the Importance of Your I-20 Program End Date

Your I-20 will often be shortened to the earliest possible degree completion date as indicated on your advisor's recommendation form. For graduate students finishing within the first two weeks of a term, the I-20 end date will reflect the date established by Graduate Studies by which no enrollment is required that term. (i.e. 1/28/10 for spring 2010). Any OPT requested to begin prior to your I-20 end date will be considered Pre-Completion and any OPT after the I-20 end date will be Post-Completion. **NOTE: If you do not complete your degree by your new I-20 end date, in most cases you must apply for a program extension prior to the expiration of your new OPT I-20.** Failure to do this may violate your status and could invalidate your OPT authorization.

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### When To Apply *ISSS suggests submitting your application as early as possible!*

**Pre-Completion:** No sooner than March 1 or October 1 of your second semester; thereafter, you can apply up to 120 days before your requested start date.

**Post-Completion:** No sooner than 90 days before your program completion / I-20 end date (March 1 for Spring graduates; October 1 for Fall graduates; May 1 for Summer graduates) and no later than 60 days after your program completion / I-20 end date. The application must be received by USCIS prior to the 60<sup>th</sup> day after program completion. All post-completion OPT must be completed within the 14-month period immediately following the end of your academic program. Since application processing can take three months or longer, there is a risk that you will lose a portion of your period of eligibility if you apply too late.

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### Thesis and Dissertation Students (or equivalent)

Please see the Pre-Completion vs Post-Completion OPT section in this packet for details about the two options since you can apply for full time OPT once you finish your required course work. (Be aware you may need to submit two separate OPT applications). **NOTE: *If you are unable to finish your thesis/dissertation by your I-20 program end date, it is okay as long as you finish it BEFORE the end of any post-completion OPT. However, if you do not finish by the end of your OPT, an I-20 extension is NOT possible and you are not eligible for the 17-month STEM OPT extension.***

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### How To Apply:

- 1) **FULLY complete Section A of the “Academic Advisor Recommendation Form”.**  
Be as certain as possible of the dates you are requesting. Attempts to change your application once it has been submitted to USCIS will result in processing delays and potential loss of your OPT.
- 2) Your **academic advisor must FULLY complete Section B** of the “Academic Advisor Recommendation Form.” All fields are required. If any item is left blank, ISSS cannot provide a recommendation.
- 3) **Complete USCIS Form I-765 (downloadable from: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>).** The ISSS advisor does not endorse the I-765, but can review it. **The category code for line #16 on the I-765 is “(c)(3)(A)” for pre-completion or “(c)(3)(B)” for post-completion.**

**NOTE REGARDING ADDRESS:** The primary reason for failing to receive an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is due to problems with the address used on the I-765.

- Use an address where you can receive mail for the next four months: a receipt is usually sent within 2-4 weeks and the EAD can take up to four months.
- When using someone else's address-
  - make sure your name is on his/her mailbox OR
  - include the other person's name in the address (item #3) using “c/o” (in care of)
    - “c/o” is not valid with PO Boxes
    - “c/o” proper format: c/o Friend's Name, Friend's Address
- The post office is not supposed to forward EADs even if you filed a mail-forwarding request.
- If you **need to change the address written on the I-765** (where application receipt and EAD card will be sent) **while your application is pending:**
  - Notify USCIS at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/crisqwi/go?action=coa>
  - AND
  - Notify the ISSS advisor who processed your OPT.

- 4) **Make an appointment at ISSS** to meet with an international student advisor. Allow 1 hour for the appointment. Appointments are generally available Tuesday-Friday between 9:00 and 11:30am.

**CHECKLIST FOR APPOINTMENT:**

- Academic Advisor's Recommendation - *ALL fields must be completed.*
- "Reporting Responsibilities While on OPT" form – reviewed and signed
- I-765
- Previously issued I-20's for CPT or OPT received through a school other than KU
- Visa used for your most recent entry
- Passport
- I-94
- Previously issued EADs (Employment Authorization Document), if any

If you wish, you may bring the following items so that your application packet can be fully reviewed and assembled:

- \$340.00 check
- 2 passport style photographs (see item 2 in step 6 below) in a 'Ziploc' bag

- 5) **The ISSS advisor will verify your F-1 status and create a new OPT I-20** during your appointment. *Recommendations for students to engage in OPT cannot be made for those who are out of status.*

If applicable, the advisor will shorten your program end date in SEVIS. If status is okay, the advisor will electronically create a new I-20 with his/her recommendation for OPT. Sign the new I-20 in Section #11. The advisor will make a photocopy of the I-20 to send with your OPT application. Keep the original I-20 with you.

- 6) **Submit the OPT application** to the appropriate regional USCIS service center within 30 days of the ISSS advisor's recommendation and prior to the 60<sup>th</sup> day after your program completion date. Assemble and fasten the application materials together in the order listed below. ISSS recommends mailing the application in a verifiable manner (such as certified mail with proof of delivery receipt). Students using a Kansas address should send their application to:

**For US Postal Service**  
**USCIS Nebraska Service Center**  
**PO Box 87765**  
**Lincoln, NE 68501-7765**

**For non-US Postal Service (such as FedEx, UPS, etc):**  
**USCIS Nebraska Service Center**  
**850 S Street Attention Box 87765**  
**Lincoln, NE 68508**

1. **\$340.00 fee** Check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
2. **2 photographs**, passport style (guidelines on next page) with name *gently* printed on the back, without damaging the photo.
  - a. Nebraska Service Center recommends placing the photo in a clear plastic 'ziploc' sandwich bag.
  - b. do NOT put a staple through the photo or trim the size of the photo.
3. **I-765**, completed (EAD is mailed to the address used on this form and must be within service center's jurisdiction)
4. **new OPT I-20 (photocopy)**, signed by the ISSS advisor on p.1 & 3, AND signed by student on p.1
5. **screen shots from SEVIS** showing any previous CPT or OPT (ISSS will provide)
6. **I-94 (photocopy: front & back)**
7. **visa (photocopy)**, most recently used when last entering the U.S.
8. **passport page(s) (photocopy)**, showing your name, photo and date of birth
9. **copies** of all previously issued EADs, if any

It is also recommended sending copies of I-20s reflecting previous CPT authorizations and previous OPT recommendations through schools other than KU.

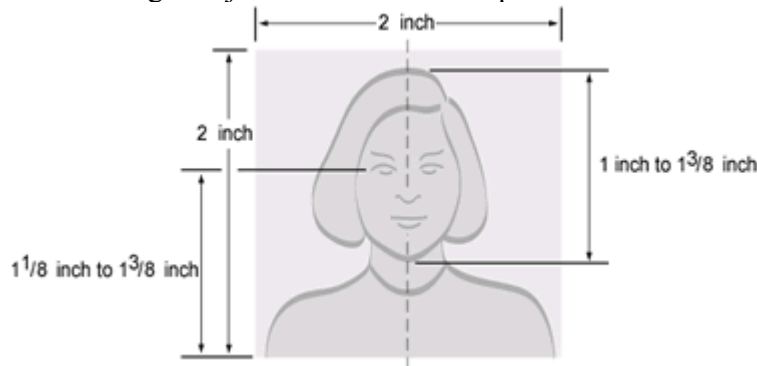
You should keep copies of all documents sent to and received from USCIS.

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## Photo Guidelines

### Seven Steps to Successful Photos

1. Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
2. Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inch (25 mm to 35mm)
3. Center head within frame (see Figure below)
4. Make sure eye level is between 1 1/8 inch to 1 3/8 inch (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
5. Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
6. Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
7. Encourage subject to have natural expression



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## Current Processing Times and Online Status Check

**Processing Times:** <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/processTimesDisplay.do> Scroll down to Instructions on Using the Table. Choose the appropriate Service Center from the drop down menu. Click “Service Center Processing Dates”. Look for “I-765 Application for Employment Authorization” “Based on a Request by a Qualified F-1 Academic Student [(c)(3)]” Current processing time frame should be listed.

**Online Status Check:** <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do> USCIS sends a receipt which may take up to 8 weeks to receive. Enter Receipt Number (LINxx-xxx-xxxxx) without hyphens to check on the status of your application. The receipt is NOT your work permit. There is also a link, “Sign Up For Case Updates” to receive any automatic email updates on the status of your application.

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## Authorization

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) has the final authority to grant Optional Practical Training. Authorization is issued in the form of a card referred to as an EAD (Employment Authorization Document). Employment may not begin until the student receives a valid EAD.

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## 17-Month STEM Extension of OPT

Some students on post-completion OPT [with category (c)(3)(B) selected on the I-765 form] and a degree in certain STEM fields of **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering or **M**athematics, may be eligible for a 17-month extension of OPT (a total of 29 months). Please read the separate handout “17-Month STEM OPT Extension” ([http://www2.ku.edu/~issfacts/PDF/f1Forms/OPT\\_Stem.pdf](http://www2.ku.edu/~issfacts/PDF/f1Forms/OPT_Stem.pdf)) for eligibility requirements and application procedures.

**Important Note:** The 17-month extension application must be received by USCIS before the expiration of the initial 12 month OPT.

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This OPT packet is also available online should you need additional blank forms:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~issfacts/PDF/f1Forms/f1-opt-instructions.pdf> .

*Reference: 8 CFR 214.2(f)(5)(vi), 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10) to(f)(13) and SEVP Policy Guidance 0801-01*

# REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON OPT

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*While engaged in a period of authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT), I acknowledge that I must comply with the following reporting requirements to maintain my F-1 status:*

**I will report to ISSS, within 10 days, of any changes to the following:**

- Legal name (as it occurs in my passport)
- Residential or mailing address\*
- Employer name and address (including the report of initial employment)
- Any loss or termination of employment

**I will report the information directly to ISSS online at: <http://www2.ku.edu/~issfacts/OPT/>.\***

*ISSS will in turn report your information to the government. For your protection, please keep a record of all reports made to ISSS.*

*\*ADDRESS CHANGES: If you still have access to Enroll & Pay, you need to report any address changes first through Enroll & Pay (<https://sa.ku.edu>) AND then through the URL above.*

**Furthermore, I understand that:**

- I must provide ISSS with a copy of the OPT approval card (EAD).
- Since F-1 status is dependent on employment, I may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT. Exception: If I end one job and begin another job within 10 days, this time will NOT be included in the calculation of time spent as unemployed.
- OPT employment does not have to be paid, but volunteer or unpaid opportunities do need to be reported in order to avoid accrual of unemployment. Unpaid internships must not violate any labor laws, must be directly related to my field of study and the work must be at least 20 hours per week.
- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (not ISSS) will be responsible for determining if my status has been violated by exceeding the permissible period of unemployment. They may deny future immigration benefits and/or they may terminate my SEVIS record if I fail to maintain the proper period of employment.
- I am allowed 60 days after the expiration of the EAD to remain in the U.S. for the purpose of preparing for departure, to change education levels at the same school, to transfer out, or apply for a change of status.
- Transferring to another school or beginning study at another education level automatically terminates any remaining portion of OPT.
- I may be eligible for a 17-month extension of OPT if my major qualifies as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) major as defined by DHS and I have a job offer from a company in the E-Verify program. The STEM OPT extension must be received by USCIS before my current OPT expires.
- My duration of status and work authorization are automatically extended if I am a beneficiary of an H-1B petition and a request for change of status providing:
  - 1) H-1B petition is timely filed (usually by April 1);
  - 2) the stated employment start date is for October 1 of the following fiscal year;
  - 3) I have not violated the terms or condition of my non-immigrant status, and
  - 4) I have obtained a new I-20 from ISSS reflecting the extension.

Note: The automatic extension of F-1 duration of status and employment are immediately terminated if the H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or revoked. See H-B Cap Gap handout for more specific details.

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I certify that I have read and understand the above stated responsibilities that are required of me while engaged in optional practical training. **I agree to provide to KU's International Student & Scholar Services Office the required information stated above and understand that failure to do so can result in a violation of F-1 status and subsequent termination of my SEVIS record.**

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

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **KUID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Important: Please retain this copy for your records, do not discard.**



## POST RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES AND TIPS

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- Do provide ISSS with a copy of the OPT application receipt (I-797C) received from USCIS. Contact ISSS if a receipt from USCIS has not been received 4 weeks after the date in which you mailed the OPT application, or if you have not received your EAD after 90 days from the 'received' date on your USCIS receipt.
- DO provide ISSS a copy of your OPT EAD (work permit card). This is very important because ISSS must continue to verify your valid F-1 status during OPT and make sure the SEVIS database reflects the OPT approval. If the OPT shows "pending" in SEVIS more than 180 days, your SEVIS record will be "completed" and you will not appear to have a legal status.

- Employment
- Do maintain evidence – for each job – that the employment is directly related to your degree. Have proof of the position held, the duration of the position, job title, contact info for the supervisor or manager and a description of the work. If it is not clear from the job description, obtain a signed letter from your employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work performed.
  - DO NOT continue working in an on-campus student position once you have completed your academic program.
  - DO NOT promise an employer you can start on a specific date or sign an employment contract with a specific start date unless you already have your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
  - DO NOT begin working before receiving your EAD or before the start date on the EAD. DO NOT continue working after the expiration date unless you have other applicable work authorization.

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- Travel out of the U.S. while *waiting for OPT approval* is not advised unless you have a job offer and you have a way of getting the EAD should the OPT be approved while you are overseas.
  - If the OPT is still pending when you re-enter the U.S. you will only need
    - ✓ OPT Receipt
    - ✓ valid passport (for at least six months from date of re-entry)
    - ✓ valid F-1 visa
    - ✓ I-20 with a recent travel signature

- Travel
- Once OPT is approved, you will need
    - ✓ OPT EAD
    - ✓ proof of employment (such as a job offer or recent paycheck stub)
    - ✓ valid passport (for at least six months from date of re-entry)
    - ✓ valid F-1 visa
    - ✓ I-20 with a travel signature within the last six months.
  - If your F-1 visa has expired you will need to apply for a new one while abroad if you plan to return to the U.S. to continue with OPT. It is sometimes more difficult to obtain an F-1 student visa while on OPT since you have already completed your degree and you are only returning to work. In addition, all new visas require a security check that could take time. Please carefully consider these risks before traveling outside the U.S.
  - If traveling to Canada, Mexico or adjacent (Caribbean) islands for less than 30-days, automatic revalidation may be a possibility and a need for a new visa may not apply (for details, please see separate handout: "Automatic Extension of VISA Validity").
  - Special Registration travel requirements, if you are subject, still apply while on OPT.

# F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

## ACADEMIC ADVISOR RECOMMENDATION FORM

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING is a type of temporary employment authorization available to international students in F-1 status that provides them an opportunity to gain practical experience in their field of study. **This form must be entirely completed** by the student and the academic advisor before International Student & Scholar Services can process the recommendation. Please read the separate OPT Instructions handout for specific eligibility details and application procedures.

### SECTION A: To be completed by Student

Name as in Passport: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Surname/Family name) (Given name)

\_\_\_\_\_ KUID (7 digit) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Non-KU Email

**Dependents:** (Spouse and/or minor children who are currently in the U.S. as your F-2 dependents):

Surname/Family name,	Given name	Surname/Family name,	Given name
1. _____	_____	3. _____	_____
2. _____	_____	4. _____	_____

### Previously Authorized Periods of Practical Training:

CPT  OPT  Full Time  Part Time Dates Authorized \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
 CPT  OPT  Full Time  Part Time Dates Authorized \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**Requested Dates of OPT:** \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
**Start** (no more than 60 days after new OPT I-20 end date\*) **End**  
Note: If requested start date is before the new I-20 end date, you must request "Pre-completion OPT"

**Requesting:**  Part-Time Pre-Completion (≤ 20 hrs/wk)  Post-Completion (full time only)  
 Full-Time Pre-Completion (>20 hrs/wk)

**Employer Info (if known):** Employer Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Desired Start date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student's Signature:** *I verify that I will look for and only accept a job directly related to my field of study.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION B: Recommendation to be completed by Academic Advisor

**Educational Level:** (choose 1 of 4 options; Master's Thesis and Doctoral have additional required field)

Bachelor  Master (course work only)  Master (thesis or equivalent)  Doctorate  
Semester all required coursework completed (or will be) exclusive of thesis, dissertation, or equivalent \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_  
(semester) (yr)

**Major:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Earliest Term ALL degree requirements anticipated to be completed;** becomes new program end date on I-20

Within first 2 weeks of  spring\_\_\_\_,  fall\_\_\_\_ or within first week of  summer 20\_\_\_\_ before enrollment is required (date varies)  
 Fall 20\_\_\_\_ (12/31)  Spring 20\_\_\_\_ (5/31)  Summer 20\_\_\_\_ (8/1)

**Academic Advisor's Signature:** *I verify the above to be true and correct.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

