OPT: The Overview Tutorial

International Student & Scholar Services
Your OPT Application

It is **your responsibility** to understand all the details and requirements of your immigration status.

This PowerPoint presentation is designed to give you an introduction to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) application process. Workshop II–The Process will highlight the steps for an OPT application.
Your OPT Application

Please consider the following when applying for OPT:

Any views or suggestions expressed or contained herein are not the official views of Kent State University or legal advice. This PowerPoint tutorial is an educational benefit provided to you by ISSS, but for more in-depth questions, we recommend consulting an immigration attorney.
Overview

• What is OPT
• Types of OPT
• Post-Completion OPT
• Eligibility
• Application Timeline
• Timeline by Semester
• Graduate Students
• The 2 BIG Steps
• Pick Your Start Date

• Gathering Documents
• USCIS Processing Times
• Searching for a Job
• Authorized Unemployment
• Important Considerations
  • Travelling
  • Driver’s license
• Final Considerations
• Reminders
General Information about OPT
Types of OPT

1. Pre-Completion OPT
   Takes place during your program

2. Post-Completion OPT
   Takes place after you complete your coursework

3. STEM Extension
   An extension of Post Completion OPT of 24 months is available for certain STEM majors (see STEM OPT Tutorial for more details)
What is Post-Completion OPT?

- Optional Practical Training is a benefit of F-1 status, for which international students may apply
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorizes OPT for up to 12 months of employment
- This would allow F-1 students to have the opportunity to gain practical experience directly related to a completed program of study
Post-Completion OPT

OPT permits you to engage in a practical work experience **AFTER** you complete coursework for your program.

You must work at least 20 per week.

You can apply for OPT **once** per level (Bachelors, Master’s, Doctorate).

- STEM Extensions *may* be granted for certain STEM degrees for an additional 24 months. See STEM tutorial for more information.
Eligibility

You are eligible for OPT if you have met the following conditions:

1. Maintained your F-1 status for at least 1 academic year (two academic semesters – Fall & Spring or Spring & Fall)

2. Are a degree seeking student (Not available for students in Language Training)

3. Completed **ALL** required coursework for your program

4. Completed fewer than 365 days of FULL TIME CPT

You do NOT need a job offer prior to submitting OPT application.
You have a **150 day window** to apply for OPT
As early as 90 days before your Program End Date/Graduation and up to 60 days after
Timeline for Each Semester

Your I-20 WILL be adjusted to reflect the program end date for the semester in which you graduate.

*College of Podiatric will have a different timeline
Graduate Students Only!

• You do not need to graduate in order to apply for OPT

• You can apply for OPT after completing required coursework
  • You can apply for OPT while on Dissertation/Thesis

• You should speak with an ISSS advisor for more information

• Be aware -- once your OPT is approved, you will only have until the expiration of your OPT period to remain in the United States
STEM OPT Extension
What is STEM OPT Extension?

• This is for students who studied in the Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math fields

• U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorizes STEM OPT Extension for an additional 24 months of employment
How to Determine if Your Major Is STEM

1. Find your CIP code(s) on your I-20 under Major 1 and Major 2

2. Verify if your CIP code is listed on the STEM Major List 2022

3. If your code is on the STEM Major List, you are eligible for STEM OPT Extension
OPT Application Process
OPT Application – There are 2 Big Steps

1. You must first request a new I-20 with OPT recommendation from ISSS

2. You must submit your OPT application including your new OPT I-20 to USCIS

1. Pick a Start Date
2. Collect Documents
3. Submit OPT I-20 Request
4. Review OPT I-20

1. Submit Application to USCIS
2. Wait & Wait
3. Start Work
4. OPT REPORTING

ISSS Portal to OPT I-20 Request Form
Picking Your Start Date

- You will be asked to select a start date for your OPT
- You can pick ANY date in your 60-day grace period following your Graduation/Program End Date

### Start Date Ranges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Type</th>
<th>Start Date Range</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May/Spring Graduate</td>
<td>May 21 to July 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August/Summer Graduate</td>
<td>August 21 to October 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December/Fall Graduate</td>
<td>December 21 to February 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Preparing Your Documents

In order to submit your OPT I-20 Request to ISSS you will need the following documents:

• Copy of Passport page
• Copy of most recent U.S. visa
• Copy of your most recent I-94 (NOT travel history)
• 2 passport photos taken within last 30 days
• Copy of any previous EAD cards
2 Options for Submitting Application to USCIS

**FILING ONLINE**
Review the OPT Online Application Guide prior to filing with USCIS.

*We currently recommend this option as it has proven to be faster, and you receive your receipt immediately upon applying.*

**Mail Application**
Review the OPT Mail-in Application Guide before applying to USCIS.

**YOU MUST REQUEST YOUR I-20 BEFORE YOU SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION ONLINE**

**YOU MUST REQUEST YOUR I-20 BEFORE YOU MAIL YOUR APPLICATION**
USCIS Processing Times

Once your application is submitted, USCIS could take up to **90 days** or longer to make a decision on your application.

- Therefore, it is important to plan for your OPT as early as possible
- We recommend submitting your OPT application to USCIS earlier in the application window
Finding Employment & Authorized Unemployment
Searching for a Job

You can start searching for your job prior to your OPT authorization.

Remember – you must find a job, internship, or volunteer position that is directly related to your major (not your minor)

You must be engaged in at least 20 hours a week or more in the job, internship, or volunteer position

There are many places that you can search for jobs

We recommend that you prepare with the Career Exploration and Develop Office. Look for career fairs and online tools
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

**What is it?**

You are allotted 90 days during your OPT period in which you do NOT have to be employed.

You can use these days to job search past the start date on your EAD card.

You can these days in between jobs (if you need to or want to change jobs while on OPT)

**How do I calculate it?**

Authorized Unemployment days are any days in which you are not employed.

Your OPT period starts on the day listed on your EAD card. If you are not working on that day, you have used 1 day of 90 authorized unemployment days.

Once you are hired and working somewhere, weekends and vacation time given to you by the employer are not counted.
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

What happens if I use it all?

If you use all 90 days of authorized employment, you must maintain your OPT status for the remainder of your OPT period.

If you are unable to find a job or opportunity AND have used all of your authorized unemployment days your F-1 status ends.

- There are a few exceptions, please speak with ISSS for more information

Who tracks it?

SEVP tracks your days based on the information you provide in your SEVP student portal account.

YOU should track your employment very closely.

ISSS does not track your days.
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

1. We do not recommend using all 90 days at the beginning of your OPT.
2. It is important to note the absolute latest you MUST start working after your OPT begins.

Example: OPT Start Date is 5/21/2021
- Start Date = 5/21/2021
- 90 Days Later = 8/18/2021
- Must start working by 8/18/2021
- There is no 60-day grace period beyond 8/18

Example: OPT Start Date is 7/18/2021
- Start Date = 7/18/2021
- 90 Days Later = 10/16/2021
- Must start working by 10/16/2021
- There is no 60-day grace period beyond 10/16
Important Considerations & Reminders
Important Considerations

1. Do Not Travel with Pending OPT Application

   • **BEFORE YOUR PROGRAM END DATE** – When your OPT application is pending (meaning you have mailed your application but have not received your card), you may travel outside the U.S. and you may return **BEFORE** the program end date on your I-20.
   
   • **AFTER YOUR PROGRAM END DATE** – When your OPT application is pending (meaning you have mailed your application but have not received your card), and your program end date on your I-20 has occurred, we do **NOT** recommend that you travel outside the U.S.
   
   • For more Travel Recommendations consider [Fragomen’s Tips for Students on OPT/H-1B](#)

2. Your Driver’s License

   Your license is typically tied to the end date on your I-20
   
   • You should be aware of the expiration date on your driver’s license
   
   • The BMV in Ohio may not issue or renew your license until you receive your OPT/EAD card
   
   • Another reason to submit your application as early as possible
Important Considerations

Your Application is 100% Your Responsibility

• The ISSS team is here to help you and offer recommendations based on historically successful applications. We do not provide legal counsel.
• USCIS ultimately makes the final decisions on your OPT authorization.
• ISSS recommends planning as early as possible

Plan Early
Reminders

Review the materials in either the Online or Mail-in Application Tutorial before submitting your OPT Application

DO NOT START WORKING UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR OPT AUTHORIZATION
Thank You.

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