OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING: ONLINE WORKSHOP

Estimated time to complete workshop: 30-40 minutes
OPT Online Workshop

• Unless specified otherwise, all information in this presentation refers to post-completion OPT.

• After viewing this presentation, please visit istart.uga.edu to request the OPT recommendation I-20s.

• Immigration Services recommends that you complete this online workshop at the beginning of your last semester of your academic program.
OPT Application Process

• **STEP 1**: View this online workshop.
• **STEP 2**: Complete the [Online OPT Request Form](#) and [Form I-765](#).
• **STEP 3**: Pick up your new OPT I-20s from OIE.
• **STEP 4**: Prepare your documents and mail them to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If you need help assembling your application, please email immigration@uga.edu.
I’m not sure if I should apply for OPT or CPT, what is the difference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When can I use CPT and OPT?</th>
<th>Curricular Practical Training (CPT)</th>
<th>Optional Practical Training (OPT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPT can only be authorized during your academic program. CPT cannot be authorized after the end of your academic program.</td>
<td>OPT is usually used after the completion of your program. (Pre-completion OPT is authorized prior to completion.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I have to have a job offer?</td>
<td>Yes, approval is given for a specific employer during a specific time.</td>
<td>No, you do not need a job before applying for OPT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I work at any kind of job?</td>
<td>No, the job must be considered an integral part of your academic program.</td>
<td>No, it is your responsibility to find employment in your field of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who gives the authorization?</td>
<td>Immigration Services can give CPT authorization. Processing time is approximately 2 weeks.</td>
<td>Immigration Services can only recommend OPT; you must apply with USCIS for authorization. Processing time is up to 90 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long can I use CPT or OPT?</td>
<td>There is no limit to the amount of CPT you can use. If you use full-time CPT for more than 12 months/365 days, you will lose OPT eligibility.</td>
<td>Post-Completion OPT is authorized for 12 months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Immigration Documents

• To begin, have the following documents in front of you:
  • I-765
  • I-20
  • Passport
  • I-94 document
  • Change of Status Approval Notice if applicable (if you changed F-1 Status in the U.S., your I-94 document will be attached to your I-797 Approval Notice)
Optional Practical Training

- OPT=Optional Practical Training
- OPT is off-campus work authorization that allows a student to work off campus in their major field of study for a maximum of 12 months
- Students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) majors may also be eligible for an additional 24-month extension for OPT.
- Work authorization for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document or EAD card, issued by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- If you complete a degree at a higher educational level, you may be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT.
  - Example:
    - If you are applying for OPT now on the basis of your Bachelor’s degree, and if you later obtain a Master’s degree, you will be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT on the basis of the Master’s degree. You only get 12 months of OPT per degree level.
Eligibility

• To be eligible for OPT, you must:

• Be in valid F-1 status at the time of application, in good academic standing, and have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two full academic semesters/9 months)

• Be in the final semester of your academic program (unless applying for pre-completion OPT)

• Have not been approved for OPT for the same or higher education level
REMINDER:
A job offer is not required to apply for OPT
Who is NOT Eligible?

• You are NOT eligible to apply for OPT if...
  
  • You used 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
  
  • You have NOT been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two academic semester/9 months)
  
  • You are ‘out of status’ (violated your immigration status)
    • Common reasons for students to become “out of status”:
      • Failure to pursue a full course of study (i.e. 12 credits for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduates) without an authorized reduced course load
      • Failure to follow immigration transfer procedures when changing schools
      • Working without proper authorization
3 TYPES OF OPT

Pre-Completion OPT
Post-Completion OPT
24-Month OPT Extension
Pre- Completion OPT

- Pre-completion OPT is authorized for work before the student’s program completion date. Both undergraduates and graduates are eligible for pre-completion.

- Immigration Services does not recommend Pre-completion OPT except in very limited circumstances. Please see an advisor if you have more questions. If you want to work prior to completion of your studies, Immigration Services recommends you pursue Curricular Practical Training or on-campus work.

- Note: If you pursue Pre-completion OPT and you want your employment to continue after program completion, a separate I-765 application must be filed for Post-completion OPT. You will have to pay a $410 application fee again and wait to receive a new EAD card before working.

- Pre-completion OPT takes time away from Post-completion OPT. (Example: if you do 3 months of Pre-completion OPT, you will only have 9 months of Post-completion OPT eligibility after completion of studies).
Post-Completion OPT

• Post-completion OPT is appropriate for students who want work authorization after completion of their academic program.

• Definition of completion of studies:

  For undergraduate and graduate non-thesis students: Your Completion Date is the last day of final exams of the semester in which all your degree requirements are completed.

  All other graduate students (thesis/dissertation students): You can choose between two dates for the Completion Date:

  • The date that you are admitted to candidacy/thesis-only
  • The last day of final exams of the semester in which all your degree requirements are completed.
Post Completion OPT (continued)

• When applying for Post-Completion OPT, Immigration Services will shorten your I-20 expiration date to reflect your Completion Date

• Because your I-20 end date may be shortened, before you apply for OPT you should be 100% certain you will complete your studies!

• If you fail to complete your last degree requirements after filing an OPT I-765 Employment application, you may fall out of legal status and be ineligible for OPT.
24-Month OPT Extension

- The 24-month extension of post-completion OPT allows students in STEM fields work authorization for a total of 36 months

\[(12 \text{ months Post-OPT} + 24 \text{ months of OPT extension} = 36 \text{ months})\]

- For more information, visit http://tinyurl.com/UGASTEMOPT

The remainder of this presentation will focus only on Post-completion OPT.
APPLICATION TIMELINES
When to Apply?

- Applications may be submitted 90 days (3 months) prior to completion of your studies.

- The deadline to apply is 60 days after your completion date!

  Please note that USCIS must send a receipt of your application prior to the 60th day of your grace period.

- On average, USCIS requires up to 90 days to process and issue an EAD card from the mailing date.

- Your best option—apply early! Remember, you don’t need a job to apply!
Application Timelines

• Post-Completion: May apply up to 90 days before and within 60 days of program completion

• Pre-Completion: May apply up to 90 days prior to anticipated employment start date or prior to completion of a full academic year

• OPT 24-month extension: May apply up to 90 days prior to the end of post-completion OPT

• Applying too early may result in application denial and fee payment for new application
CHOOSING A START DATE
Choosing a Start Date

• You have a 60-day grace period from your completion date to begin OPT.

Example:
Josh’s program completion date: May 10, 2016
Josh may choose a start date between May 11 and July 9
Choosing a Start Date - Tips

• It is better to use an “early” start date if you:
  • Have an employment offer that starts soon
  • Would like to be available for employment right after program completion

• It is better to use a “later” start date if you:
  • Do not have any employment offers at the time of OPT application
  • Do not expect that you will be able to secure employment soon after program completion
  • Submitted your application “late” (e.g. during the 60-day window after program completion)

Choose a realistic start date while keeping in mind current USCIS processing times. There is no “right” or “wrong” start date; simply choose one during your grace period. The date you choose depends on your personal and employment situation.
Employment Start Dates

• You can only begin paid or unpaid employment if you have met the following requirements:
  
  • You have received your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) and
  • The date of your authorized employment period has begun (refer to dates on your EAD card).

  **There are no exceptions to the above.**
Employment Start Dates (Continued)

• Students who receive their EAD before their OPT start date need to wait for their EAD start date before they begin employment.

• Example:
  • Josh’s EAD start date: June 15, 2016
  • Josh receives EAD card May 15, 2016 - BEFORE START DATE
  • Employment can only begin on EAD card start date (in this example - on 6/15/2016)
ISTART REQUEST FORM
Online OPT Request Form

• Visit this link for instructions about accessing the form:
  [http://issis.uga.edu/docs/Student_Section/F1_OPT_application_process.pdf](http://issis.uga.edu/docs/Student_Section/F1_OPT_application_process.pdf)

• Complete all items of this online form. The information will be collected by your international advisor and a new OPT I-20 will be produced.

• Be prepared to upload copies of your current immigration documents.
COMPLETING THE FORMS

You should have Form I-765 in front of you for the next few slides.

Form I-765 is on the USCIS website: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

Immigration Services encourages you to fill your form out while reviewing these next few slides. Completing this form is the applicant’s responsibility. Immigration Services cannot offer legal advice regarding USCIS applications.
#1- Full Name: Write your name exactly as it is written on your passport biographical page.

**NOTE: The name on your I-20 should also be the same as the name written on the passport biographical page. If your name is different, inform an advisor at time of application.**
I-765: Mailing Address

#3- Mailing Address: We recommend that you use our office address.

1324 S. Lumpkin Street Athens, GA 30602
Form I-765

#10- I-94 Number: Visit cbp.gov/i94 to access your I-94 record. Enter the Admission Record Number on your I-765.

*If you changed your status in the U.S., your I-94 card is at the bottom of your I-797 approval notice.*
Form I-765

#11: Check “no” unless you have applied for Economic Hardship, Off-Campus Special Student Relief, a previous OPT or J-2 work permission. You must provide copy of old EAD card with application.

#12-#15: Information to complete these items is located on your I-94 or your visa entry stamp
Form I-765

#16: Pre- Completion OPT- (c)(3)(A)
Post- Completion OPT- (c)(3)(B)
STEM Extension OPT- (c)(3)(C)

#17: Only complete #17 if you are applying for the STEM OPT extension.
Form I-765

• Certification: Please include your Applicant’s Signature, Date of Signature, and Telephone Number.

Failure to sign the form could cause your application to be rejected.
OPT APPLICATION MATERIALS
OPT Application Materials

• Once you have completed the OPT Request Form and the I-765, you are almost ready to submit the application to the USCIS.

• Make sure to have the documents below ready to mail while you wait for your I-20.
  - [G-1145 Electronic Notification Form](#)
  - Completed and signed [Form I-765](#)
  - Personal Check or Money Order for $410 (NEW) made out to “Department of Homeland Security”
  - Two identical passport-style color photos of yourself taken within 30 days of filing application
  - Photocopy of passport biographical information page (showing passport expiration date & photo)
  - Photocopy of your visa
  - Print-out of your I-94 record from cpb.gov/i94 OR photocopy of I-94 card—front and back (dark enough to show the red stamp on the front of it)
  - Photocopy of I-797 Approval Notice if you changed status in the U.S. (if applicable)
  - Photocopies of all old I-20s for Full-Time CPT (if applicable)
  - Photocopy of all previous EAD cards (if applicable)
OPT I-20

• Your International Student Advisor will email you when your new I-20 is ready at the front desk.

• You will receive two copies (one for your record; one for mailing with your application). Your new I-20 will show the OPT recommendation on page 2.

• Review all information on your I-20 to be sure it is correct.

In the next few slides you will learn more about the application process.
Preparing Your OPT Application

• When you pick up your new I-20 you will need to pay the 1 year ISCF fee online:
  www.tinyurl.com/isclfonline

• This fee covers the continued advising you will receive from Immigration Services during
  the OPT period.

• After you have picked up your new I-20 with the OPT recommendation:
  • Sign BOTH your new I-20s at the bottom
  • Review all information on I-20s for accuracy
  • Copy all the pages of your new I-20
  • Copy both sides of your I-94
  • Copy all Full Time CPT I-20’s (if applicable)
  • Copy your passport biographical page (with photo and expiration date)
  • Copy any previous EAD cards
USCIS Check or Money Order

• Your name should be printed, not handwritten. DO NOT USE “starter checks”.

• The check does not have to be your own personal check, i.e. can be your friend's, relative’s, etc. The address does not have to be your address.

• For current I-765 application and fee visit: www.uscis.gov
NOTE: Remember to make copies of your entire application packet before mailing to USCIS!!!!

Review application materials before mailing out and make a copy for your reference.
MAILING INSTRUCTIONS
OPT Mailing Instructions

• Mail all documents to USCIS using the address below:

  U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
  P.O. Box 660867
  Dallas, TX 75266

• USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the issue date on your I-20, AND within 60 days of your Completion Date. Do not wait to mail it!
EXPEDITED OPT

Your application cannot be expedited. We strongly encourage you to apply for OPT in a timely manner (90 days prior to completion of studies date).

Remember... you do not have to have a job to apply!
WHAT NEXT?

After mailing your application, please remember the following information
Notice of Action (I-797) Receipt

• **Notice of Action (Form I-797C)**
  - You will receive a Notice of Action (Form I-797) Receipt about 2-4 weeks after you mail the application. Please allow 4 weeks for arrival before inquiring to Immigration Services about your receipt.

• **SRC number:** Your receipt has a reference number or SRC number, which can be used to track the status of your application online at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do)

• Immigration Services will notify you via email when your receipt arrives. You will need to visit the Immigration Services office to pick up the receipt and to confirm the accuracy of your name, address, and Date of Birth (DOB). If incorrect, contact your International Student Advisor immediately.

• Dates: “Received date” refers to the date USCIS may begin processing your application, and “Notice of Action date” refers to the date the notice was created.

• Receipt Notice Date: The date USCIS received your application and your 90 days of processing time begins.
Request for Further Evidence (RFE)

• **USCIS Request for Evidence (RFE) –**

  • If there is a problem with your application, USCIS will send a notice to the address listed on the Form I-765 by mail called a “Request for Evidence (RFE).” If Immigration Services receives an RFE, you will be contacted immediately about its content and an advisor will assist you in responding to the RFE.

  • Please note that an RFE is **not a rejection notice**. You just need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued.

  • Please note the deadline to respond to the RFE. If you fail to meet this deadline, your application will be automatically canceled and you will have to file a new application with a new fee.

  • Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT. For this reason, it is important to make sure that you have completed the I-765 correctly and sent the proper documents to USCIS.
EAD Card

• Once you are approved for OPT, USCIS will mail the EAD card to the address that you listed on your I-765.

• You are required to obtain your EAD before beginning employment, paid or unpaid.

• Immigration Services will make a copy of your EAD for our records & notify you of its arrival for pick up.

• You are required to report your employment and residential address information in iStart.uga.edu. Reporting Instructions
OPT Reporting Requirements

• During OPT, you are required to:
  • Keep your address updated in iStart
  • Get your I-20 signed for travel, if necessary
  • Report your employer’s information in iStart

• Remember, there is no limit on:
  • How much money you can make
  • How many jobs you can have
  • The maximum hours you can work (you must work a minimum of 20 hours per week on OPT)
OPT Reporting Requirements

• Failure to report your employment results in you violating your status and the 90 days of unemployment limit.

• Your SEVIS record may be automatically terminated once 90 days of unemployment has accrued.

• Please wait to report your employment until you receive your EAD card. Visit iStart to report employment or address changes.
Unemployment Limit

• OPT is an employment benefit of the F-1 status, and you must maintain eligible employment on OPT

• Employment must be
  • Minimum 20 hours per week (average out to 20 hours/week in a month in the case of variable appointments)
  • At the appropriate degree level in your field of study (as noted on I-20)

• Unemployment is limited to 90 calendar days during the initial 12 months of post-completion OPT (Weekends and Holidays are counted)

• Internships, unpaid positions, and part-time work are all considered employment

• Exceeding this limit could negatively impact your future immigration benefits
Unemployment on OPT

- Unemployment is counted from your approved OPT start date (refer to dates on EAD card) EVEN if you have not received your EAD Card.

- You are considered unemployed if you do not have eligible OPT employment OR if you have not reported your employment to our office

- Maximum unemployment is 90 calendar days (includes weekends, 7 days a week)

- No 60-day grace period if 90 days of unemployment is reached; you must leave the U.S. immediately
Unemployment Suggestions

• Keep track of your unemployment days!
• Remember to report employment changes within 10 days in iStart.
• Always request an employment verification letter from your employer, even if the position is unpaid. Your letter should include the following information:
  • Position title and description
  • Dates of employment
  • Number of hours per week employed
  • Supervisor’s name and contact information
International Travel on OPT

• After you have completed your studies, you will need the following documents for travel on OPT:
  
  • Original I-20 signed for travel by an International Student Advisor within the last six months and
  • An Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and
  • A valid F-1 visa (unless you are eligible for automatic revalidation of an expired visa) and
  • A valid passport (valid for six months at the time of re-entry to the U.S.) and
  • Employment verification (an offer/employment verification letter from your prospective/current employer with dates of employment, position title, dates of authorized leave for vacation or business).

• We do not recommend travelling outside the U.S. if your OPT application is pending. USCIS may cancel your application if you leave the country.

• Students who do not meet these requirements may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S.
F-1 Visa Renewal on OPT

• While on OPT, your immigration status is still F-1.

• It is possible to renew your F-1 visa based on participation in OPT.

• Immigration Services does not recommend visa renewals on OPT towards the end of your OPT period, because the non-immigrant intent could be difficult to prove at that point.
AFTER OPT
After OPT...

- When your OPT period ends, you have a 60 day grace period to remain inside the United States.
- Your three options after OPT are:
  - Leave the U.S.
  - Enroll in another program of study as an F-1 student and receive an I-20 for that university within your 60 day grace period
  - Change your visa status
Employment Visa Options

• The H-1B visa is the most common employment option & is sponsored by employers.
• There are two types of H-1B Visas: (1) Cap-Subject and (2) Cap-exempt
  
  (1) Cap-subject employers: These employers are typically in the private sector.
  • Only 85,000 application spots per fiscal year or as mandated by Congress
  • April 1st is the first day employers can apply for OPT for the fiscal year
  • Once all 85,000 H-1Bs have been granted, no more can be issued.
  • All Cap-Subject H-1Bs begin on October 1.

  (2) Cap-exempt employers: These employers are typically in the public sector (universities, not-for-profit organizations, government entities, etc.).
  • There is no limit on how many H-1Bs can be granted
  • No set start time (Employer requests a start date).

• For more detailed information on H-1B Visas, please see www.uscis.gov
CAP-GAP EXTENSION
Cap-Gap Extension Example

• EXAMPLE:
  Jose’s OPT (EAD) end date: June 30

  Jose’s Cap-Subject company files an timely H-1B application for him on April 1 that is receipted by USCIS prior to June 30.

  USCIS extends F-1 Employment until October 1 via “Cap-Gap Extension” and you can stay and work until H-1B is effective.

  After H-1B has been approved or receipted, student can request new I-20 showing Cap-Gap extension
FINDING EMPLOYMENT
Visit the UGA Career Services website at career.uga.edu for important resources about job searching!
• MEET WITH YOUR CAREER CONSULTANT: Explore your job/internship options and develop a plan to help you reach your career objectives.

• CAREER ASSESSMENTS: Utilize these tools to learn how your personality, interests, values, and skills play an important role in identifying a fulfilling career.

• CAREER CENTER LIBRARY: We have books and resources relevant to choosing majors, researching careers, searching for jobs, resume writing, interviewing, and applying to graduate school.

• STUDENT EMPLOYMENT OFFICE: Assists students with information in obtaining on-campus and off-campus part-time employment. Attend the annual student part-time and summer job fairs.
Congratulations! You are now ready to apply for OPT! Please click on the link below to submit proof of your completion of the online workshop. Failure to submit your information via the link below will result in denial or delay of your application:

http://tinyurl.com/UGAOPTWorkshop