Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Agenda

- Understanding OPT
- Planning for Post-Completion OPT
- Application Process
- Required OPT Application Documents
- Sending OPT Application to USCIS
- Reporting Requirements During OPT
- Travel
- After OPT
Understanding OPT
What is Optional Practical Training?

- Benefit of F-1 status
- Practical experience in your academic field
  - Directly related to level & major of current degree program
- Valid for 12 months (for post-completion OPT)
- You do not need a job offer letter to apply
Who is eligible for OPT?

- Maintaining legal F-1 status
- Enrolled full time for at least 1 academic year
- Additional 12 months available for each degree completed at a higher educational level
What employment qualifies as OPT?

**Types of Employment**
- Multiple employers
- Short term multiple employers (performing artists)
- Work for hire (contractual relationship)
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm
- Self employed business owner
- Paid or Unpaid
  - Unpaid positions may violate labor laws, especially at ISU
Types of OPT

- **Post-Completion: Full Time**  *Most Common*
  - After completion of degree requirements
  - After completion of coursework requirements, but excluding thesis or dissertation
  - Valid for up to 12 months
Types of OPT

- **Cap-gap:** Full Time  *Only available to some students*
  - Bridge gap between end of OPT and October 1 begin date for H-1B status
    - Must be in a valid period of OPT or the 60-day grace period following the end date on the EAD when H-1B application is received.
Types of OPT

- **STEM Extension: Full Time** *Only available to some students*
  - Eligibility requirements:
    - Currently in an approved period of post-completion OPT
    - Can apply no earlier than 90 days before end date on EAD
    - Application must be received by USCIS before end date on EAD
    - Major is on the Department of Homeland Security’s STEM Designated Degree Program list
    - Employer is enrolled in the E-Verify program
    - Can only use STEM Extension twice
Timeline for Post-Completion OPT

- Application can be received by USCIS:
  - no earlier than 90 days before your program completion date AND
  - no later than 60 days after your program completion date

- USCIS usually takes approximately 90 days to process your request
Resources
Planning for Post-Completion OPT
OPT Overview

1. Attend the OPT workshop in Cystart
2. Apply for OPT in Cystart
3. Receive email from ISSO to pick up OPT Recommendation I-20
4. Gather OPT application documents
5. OPT application review by ISSO (optional)
6. Mail OPT application to USCIS
7. Receive receipt notice
8. Wait up to 90 days for adjudication
9. Receive EAD card in the mail
10. Start employment only after receiving EAD card and reaching employment start date listed on EAD
11. Use EAD to complete I-9 with employer
12. Report employment
Program Completion Date

- Students completing bachelor’s degrees
- Students completing master’s degrees without a creative component or thesis
- **Program completion date option**: Last day of semester in which last required courses are taken

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Degree programs with *coursework only*
Program completion date options:
1. Earliest: Last day of the semester in which POS coursework is finished (excluding research credits)
2. Last day of any semester after POS completion and semester in which you take final oral defense
3. Final oral defense date
   - Must be scheduled before Cystart request
4. Latest: Last day of the semester in which you defend
   - Cannot be in interim period
Program Completion Date

Based on Completion of Degree Requirements

Your graduation date may be different than your program completion date

- Students cannot delay graduation to extend program completion date

Your I-20 completion date may need to be shortened

- Some students complete degree requirements prior to completion date listed on I-20
What is impacted by my completion date?

On-Campus Employment as an F-1 Student

- Your program completion date is the last day you may work on campus

- Letters of Intent will be shortened to new I-20 end date
  - Eligibility for resident tuition for students with graduate/research/teaching assistantships may be affected
Submitting OPT Request

ISSO preferred request date: 100 days prior to program completion date

Earliest submission: your application can reach USCIS no earlier than 90 days prior to program completion date

Program Completion Date

Absolute deadline: your application can reach USCIS no later than 60 days after program completion date

You can apply anytime during this period

By law, USCIS has 90 days from the date they receive your application to make a decision!
OPT Start Date

Program Completion Date

OPT must end within 14 months of program completion date

Preferred start date
*Any date within 60 days of the program completion date

Actual start date
*If approved before preferred start date:
  - Actual start date will be preferred start date
*If approved after preferred start date:
  - Actual start date will be USCIS decision date

Example 1
Application @ USCIS: Sept. 19, 2015
Requested start date: Feb. 16, 2016
USCIS decision date: Dec. 16, 2015
Actual start date: Feb. 16, 2016

Example 2
Application @ USCIS: Dec. 18, 2015
Requested start date: Feb. 16, 2016
USCIS decision date: Mar. 17, 2016
Actual start date: Mar. 17, 2016
OPT Start Date

Program Completion Date

Start Date:
Choose any date within 60 days after completion date

60 days

Risk: Lose job opportunity
Can the employer wait if your EAD start date is 1-3 months after the date they want you to begin?

Risk: Accumulate unemployment if not “working”
Cannot maintain valid F-1 status if accumulate 90 days of unemployment during 12 months of OPT, so what if choose an earlier date and can’t find a job?
90 Days of Unemployment

- Allowed up to 90 days of unemployment
  - Count only days between dates listed on Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
  - Count all days, including weekends and holidays
  - Count any week employed less than 20 hours
  - Cumulative over 12 months of OPT
  - Count days outside the U.S., if unemployed

- Considered a violation of status to go over 90 days of unemployment
  - Burden on student to report employment to ISSO

SEVIS will automatically terminate your F-1 status if you reach 90 days of unemployment!
We recommend you keep the following documents:

- If paid, retain pay stubs and W-2 tax forms
- If unpaid, document the number of hours worked each week
- A letter from each employer stating
  - Job title(s)
  - Duties
  - Location
  - Pay rate
  - Number of hours worked per week
Application Process
Resources for Post-Completion OPT
Submit OPT Request to ISSO Through CyStart

- To apply for OPT, first request new I-20 by logging into CyStart through the ISSO website.
Submitting OPT Request to ISSO Through CyStart
Collecting OPT I-20

- You will receive an email when your OPT recommendation I-20 is ready to be collected from ISSO. The email will include information on:
  - Document collection or document mailing
  - Application timeline guidelines
  - Review options and times
  - Form I-765 feedback
  - A list of required OPT application materials
  - Mailing your application to USCIS
Required OPT Application Documents
Required Application Materials

- Payment of $410
  - Check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or
  - Form G-1450 authorizing credit card payment
- Two U.S. passport style photographs taken within last 30 days (gently write SEVIS # on back)
- Form I-765, typed and signed in black ink
- Form G-1145, typed
- Copy of signed Post-Completion OPT Recommendation I-20
- CPT authorization page (issued by ISSO with Post-Completion OPT Recommendation I-20)
- Most recent I-94 (Locate at cbp.gov/i94)
- Copy of passport identity page (and page with expiration date, if different)
- Copy of passport page with most recent F-1 visa
- Copy of previous OPT Recommendation I-20s, if any
- Copy of previous EADs (front and back) from USCIS, if any
Payment

- Payment of $410
  - Check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or
    - Write I-765 and your SEVIS number in the Memo section
    - If the address on your check is not current, cross off and write in correct address
  - Form G-1450 authorizing credit card payment
Photos

- 2 color photos
  - Write SEVIS number lightly in black pen on the back of both pictures
- Taken within past **30 days**
- White or off-white background with no shadows
- U.S. quality passport photos
Form I-765: Sample and Template

Consider the following when completing the I-765:

- Recommended to use ISSO’s address for mailing
  - See template on ISSO website with instructions for entering the ISSO address
- Capitalize your last (family) name, but use capital and small letters for your first (given) name
New I-20 with OPT Recommendation

- Recommendation indicated on page 2 of new I-20
  - Requested begin and end date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Authorizations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST-COMPLETION OPT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
New I-20 with OPT Recommendation

Possible Updates to Page 1:

- Completion date shortened
  - You cannot work on-campus after your program completion date.

- Addition of second major or degree

- Level and major
  - Graduate students must review to ensure correct level as ISSO is not notified if changed
I-94 Record

- Paper or Electronic copy
- Retrieve from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#!/home
Passport and Visa Copies

- Biographic information
  - Photo, date of birth, country of birth

- Passport expiration date
  - Sometimes on a different page

- Most recent Visa page
Sending OPT Application to USCIS
Mailing Final Application

• If mailing the application to USCIS yourself:
  Scan application, submit scanned copy to ISSO, and keep copy for yourself. This is important in case USCIS requests additional information or makes a mistake on your application. Submit the scanned copy of your final application in 1 PDF file here:
  • Cystart > F-1 Student Services > Immigration Document Upload

• If you want ISSO to mail the application to USCIS:
  Drop off/mail application to ISSO in 3241 Memorial Union, then complete the Document Mailing and Collection e-form here:
  • Cystart > F-1 Student Services > Document Mailing and Collection > Document Mailing
Electronic Receipt Notice

- You will receive an electronic receipt notice from USCIS by email and text if you complete the G-1145 form.
  - This commonly takes to 2-3 weeks
  - You can check the status of your case with information in the e-mail
  - Sample e-mail message:

    Your case has been accepted and routed to the USCIS Potomac Service Center for processing. Within 7-10 days by standard mail you will receive your official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) with your Receipt Number YSCxxxxxxxxxx. With the official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) you may visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) where you can check the status of your case using My Case Status. We suggest you wait until you have received your Form I-797 before checking My Case Status.

    This confirmation provides notification of the date USCIS received your case. This notice does NOT grant any immigration status or benefit. You MAY NOT present this notice as evidence that you have been granted any immigration status or benefit. Further, this notice does NOT constitute evidence that your case remains pending with USCIS. The current status of your case must be verified with USCIS.

    PLEASE DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE
You will receive a paper receipt notice from USCIS

- USCIS sends a paper I-797 Receipt Notice to the mailing address listed on the Form I-765
  - May take 2 – 4 weeks to arrive
  - 90 day processing starts from I-797 received date
- ISSO will email you a copy when I-797 is received, if you list ISSO’s address on the I-765
Case Status

- Use [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (click “Check Case Status”)
  - Might stay on “Case Was Received” for 2-4 months
Pending OPT Application

- While your OPT application is pending with USCIS:
  - You remain in legal, F-1 status
  - You may no longer work on-campus if your I-20 program completion date is in the past
  - You may not begin employment through OPT until you receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS
Possible Issues with OPT Application

Contact ISSO under the following circumstances:

- If you don’t receive an e-mail from USCIS or your payment is not received within 2 weeks of sending your final OPT application to USCIS
- If your name is listed incorrectly on your I-797 Receipt Notice
- If you need to withdraw your pending OPT application
  - Contact ISSO as soon as possible to discuss options
Employment Authorization Card (EAD)

Dates of Employment
(90 days of unemployment start accruing on this date)
Receiving your EAD

- If you listed ISSO’s address on the Form I-765, your EAD will be delivered to ISSO
  - ISSO will email you when your EAD is ready to be collected from ISSO, along with options for mailing and collection
- If more than 10 days have passed since the USCIS Case Status indicates your EAD has been delivered, you may send an email to isso@iastate.edu or call 515-294-1120
Reporting Requirements During OPT
Reporting Requirements

- Must **update ISSO within Cystart or the SEVP Portal within 10 days** of a change to:
  - Living address
  - Employer
  - Employer address
  - Employer name
  - Loss of employment

- Required to complete a **validation report for ISSO every 6 months** while on OPT
  - Due within 10 business days of each reporting date
  - Complete OPT Reporting Requirements e-form through CyStart

- If you do not update ISSO, your F-1 status will be **automatically terminated** after 90 days!
Contact ISSO under the following circumstances:

- If you want to begin study at a new degree level
- If you received an I-797 Approval Notice for a change of status
- If you plan to leave the U.S. permanently in the middle of OPT
Travel
Travel Outside U.S. During OPT

More information can be found here: https://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel
Students are able to travel while OPT is pending or approved

Students should carry the following documents when traveling:
- OPT I-20
  - travel signature is only valid for 6 months during OPT
- Passport with at least 6 months of validity
- Valid F-1 visa
- OPT EAD card
  - If pending, carry original I-797 Receipt Notice
- Letter of employment/job offer letter
After OPT
Options Following OPT

- You have a 60 day grace period following the end date on your EAD.
  - You do not get a 60 day grace period if you accumulate 90 days of unemployment

- During the 60 day grace period, you may:
  - Leave the U.S.
  - Change status
  - Change level of study (new degree at ISU)
  - Transfer (new school)
Questions?

Please email ISSO at isso@iastate.edu or make an appointment with an International Student Advisor
Contact Information

International Students and Scholars Office
3241 Memorial Union
2229 Lincoln Way, Ames IA 50014
Phone: 515-294-1120
Fax: 515-294-8263
Email: isso@iastate.edu
Website: www.isso.iastate.edu
My OPT Plan Worksheet

Program Completion Date:

ISSO preferred request date:
100-120 days prior to completion date

Absolute deadline for USCIS to receive application:
60 days after completion date

Earliest deadline that application can reach USCIS:
90 days prior to completion date

Preferred start date of employment:
within 60 days of completion date

12 months from preferred start date of employment

14 month window, which defines latest possible date my OPT must end, even if less than 12 months

60 day grace period (from end date on EAD)

120 days
60 days