Optional Practical Training

OPT

Current as of 4/17/2018
ISSO Contact Information

issa@iastate.edu
515-294-1120
Appointments (20 minutes)
Today’s Agenda

• Understanding OPT
• Planning for OPT
• Preparing OPT Application
• Processing OPT Application
• During 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

Doctoral Degree
↑
Master’s Degree
↑
Bachelor’s Degree

Doctoral Degree
↓
Master’s Degree
↓
Bachelor’s Degree
What employment qualifies as OPT?

• Type 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
  – After completion of degree requirements
  – After completion of coursework requirements, but excluding thesis or dissertation
  – Valid for 12 months
Types of OPT

• **Cap-Gap: Full Time**

  - 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.

*Only available to some students*
Types of OPT

• STEM Extension: Full Time

*Only available to some students*

Eligibility requirements:

– Currently in an approved period of OPT
  • Can apply no earlier than 120 days before end date on EAD
  • Must be received 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

– Never used the STEM extension before
Timeline for 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
Planning for OPT

Note:
Material in remaining presentation is specific to post-completion OPT
OPT Process

1. Determine your program completion date and OPT start date
2. Complete OPT request through CyStart
3. Receive OPT I-20 and submit completed OPT application to ISSO for review
4. Mail application to USCIS
5. Receive I-797 receipt notice
6. Receive OPT EAD
7. Update ISSO with employer information
Program Completion Date

**Degree programs with coursework only**

- Students completing *bachelor’s* degrees
- Students completing *master’s* degrees *without* a creative component or thesis

**Program completion date:**
Last day of semester in which last required courses are taken

- Begin date of semester
- End date of semester
Program Completion Date

Degree programs with creative component, thesis, or dissertation
Defending during Fall, Spring, or Summer Semester

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 assistantship 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

**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

**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

**Program Completion Date**

OPT preferred start date must be within 60 days of program completion date

OPT must end within 14 months of program completion date

---

**Example 1**
Application @ USCIS: September 19, 2015
Requested start date: February 16, 2016
USCIS decision date: December 16, 2015
Actual start date: February 16, 2016

**Example 2**
Application @ USCIS: December 18, 2015
Requested start date: February 16, 2016
USCIS decision date: March 17, 2016
Actual start date: March 17, 2016
OPT Start Date

Program Completion Date

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

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 Day Unemployment Rule

• 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!
Employment History Records

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
Preparing OPT Application
Resources for OPT Requests

Welcome!

Welcome to the International Students and Scholars website. Here, you will find resources and important dates and information to assist you during your time at Iowa State University. If you have questions unanswered by this website or cannot find what you’re looking for, please visit our office in 3248 Memorial Union or submit a request via isso@iastate.edu. If your question specifically pertains to International Student Orientation, please contact isorient@iastate.edu. Due to an increase of students on campus email traffic has increased, and email responses may take up to 3 working days.

- Students needing an appointment with an advisor will need to follow this link https://appointments.issso.iastate.edu/
- F-1 students can sign-up for a CPT or OPT workshop online

Fall Break Hours

All University Offices, including ISSSO, will be closed on November 26th and 27th in observation of the Thanksgiving Holiday.

Travel Signature Week

Are you traveling outside of the United States soon? Have you gotten a travel signature on your I-20 yet? When you travel outside of the US, you need to have a valid travel signature on your I-20 to reenter. Remember...
Resources for OPT Requests

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

F-1 Student Immigration Information

- Change to Academic Program - Resources
- Change of Level - Resources
- Change of Status - Resources
- Copies of Missing Immigration Documents - Resources
- Curricular Practical Training - Resources
- Dependent I-20 (F-2 Spouse or Child) - Resources
- Mailing Authorization - Resources
- Off-Campus Work Permission - Resources

Optional Practical Training - Resources

- Frequently Asked Questions
- OPT PowerPoint Presentation
- OPT Workshop Registration
- OPT Policy Guidance

Optional Practical Training I-765 Form
Optional Practical Training I-765 (sample only)
Optional Practical Training G-1145 Form

Optional Practical Training 17-Month Extension - Resources
Permanent Departure from ISU - Resources
Program Extension - Resources
Submitting OPT Request to ISSO

Welcome!

Welcome to the International Students and Scholars website. Here, you will find resources and important dates and information to assist you during your time at Iowa State University. If you have questions unanswered by this website or cannot find what you’re looking for, please visit our office in 3249 Memorial Union or submit a request via issd@iastate.edu. If your question specifically pertains to International Student Orientation, please contact isorient@iastate.edu. Due to an increase of students on campus email traffic has increased, and email responses may take up to 3 working days.

- Students needing an appointment with an advisor will need to follow this link https://appointments.isso.iastate.edu/
- F-1 students can sign-up for a CPT or OPT workshop online

Fall Break Hours

All University Offices, including ISSO, will be closed on November 26th and 27th in observation of the Thanksgiving Holiday.

Travel Signature Week

Are you traveling outside of the United States soon? Have you gotten a travel signature on your I-20 yet? When you travel outside of the US, you need to have a valid travel signature on your I-20 to reenter. Remember...
Submitting OPT Request to ISSO

Welcome to the Cystart Services Login Page

Technology is key to our proactive approach. Our information services and experienced staff enable efficient management of student and scholar data, and our portal provides individualized, web-based services. The following are the types of online services available for international students, scholars, & staff.

**Full Client Services for Students & Scholars**

- Secure services requiring login with your institutional Network ID and password. These services include:
  1. View and update information on file
  2. Submit electronic form (e-form) requests for travel signatures, reduced course load authorization, program extensions, etc.
  3. Access alerts and notes on file that require action in order to maintain legal status

**Limited Services for Students & Scholars**

- Limited services requiring login with your University ID number and date of birth. These services include:
  1. Limited student services like registration for orientation or SEVIS transfer-in.
  2. Limited initial intake forms for J-1 scholars or H-1B employees.

These services will NOT provide all the functionality of the full client services.

The following are additional services:

- International Student & Scholar Statistical Reports
- Anonymous Feedback (surveys, evaluations, etc)
- Administrative Services for University Departments
Submitting OPT Request to ISSO

Cystart Services Home Page

Online Services for International Students, Scholars, and Staff: Update your institutional information, request signatures, work authorization, certificate of enrollments, sign-up for sessions, and more.

SEVIS Status Information

No SEVIS Information on File.

If you are an F-1 or J-1 sponsored by a different organization then you'll need to contact your sponsor for details about your SEVIS status.

Options

- View cases closed before today
- View correspondence and notes older than 60 days

The area most frequently used by international students, scholars, and their families is ISSO located in 3248 Memorial Union. The International Student Advisers working in ISSO assist international students and scholars with maintenance of their immigration status, U.S. employment regulations, and provide support with social, cultural, financial, and personal concerns.
Submitting OPT Request to ISSO

**ISSO will create your new OPT I-20 within 10 working days of receiving a response from your advisor**
Collecting OPT I-20

You will receive the following e-mail from ISSO

From: Stapes, Elizabeth M [ISS]
Subject: OPT I-20 and application

Dear OPT Applicant,

Your OPT I-20 is ready for pickup in Room 3248 Memorial Union. You must submit your OPT application at the time you pickup your OPT I-20. You may pickup your OPT I-20 and submit your completed application **Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday between 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. or 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.** You will have about a 10 – 15 minute wait while a staff member looks over your application to make sure it is complete.

YOU MUST PICK UP YOUR I-20 AND COMPLETE THE PACKET WITHIN 2 WEEKS OF THIS E-MAIL, OTHERWISE YOUR I-20 WILL EXPIRE.

Please bring the following documents with you when you come to pickup your I-20:

- $410 personal check, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the past 30 days (we recommend Walgreens)
- Printed copy of the completed **Form I-765** (must be typed)
- Printed copy of the completed **Form G-1145** (must be typed)
- Original and one copy of each of the following immigration documents:
  - I-94 record (access record at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html))
  - Passport identity page (and passport page showing expiration date, if separate)
  - Passport page with most recent F-1 visa
  - I-20 forms with prior OPT endorsements, **if any**
  - Previous EAD from USCIS, **if any**
Required OPT Application Documents
Check

- **Personal Check**

  If the address on your check is not current, cross off and write in correct address.
Photos

• 2 color photos
• Taken within past 30 days
• U.S.-quality-passport photos
• Complete specifications:

http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html
I-765: Sample and Template
The I-765 form can be found on the ISSO website. 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
- Use your I-94 card number for #14 (11 digits)
# G-1145

## e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

**Department of Homeland Security**  
**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**

### What Is the Purpose of This Form?

Use this form to request an electronic notification (e-Notification) when U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services accepts your immigration application. This service is available for applications filed at a USCIS Lockbox facility.

### General Information

Complete the information below and clip this form to the first page of your application package. You will receive one e-mail and/or text message for each form you are filing.

We will send the e-Notification within 24 hours after we accept your application. Domestic customers will receive an e-mail and/or text message; overseas customers will only receive an e-mail. Undeliverable e-Notifications cannot be resent.

The e-mail or text message will display your receipt number and tell you how to get updated case status information. It will not include any personal information. The e-Notification does not grant any type of status or benefit; rather, it is provided as a convenience to customers.

USCIS will also mail you a receipt notice (I-797C), which you will receive within 10 days after your application has been accepted. Use this notice as proof of your pending application or petition.

### USCIS Privacy Act Statement

**AUTHORITIES:** The Immigration and Nationality Act, sections 245(e), 245(a).  
**PURPOSE:** The primary purpose for collecting this information is to process and determine eligibility for the immigration benefit sought.  
**DISCLOSURE:** The information may be used to contact you in connection with your application.  
**ROUTINE USES:** The information collected is used for the purpose for which it was obtained, and may be disclosed to other agencies as permitted by the Privacy Act. The information may be disclosed to other agencies in order to enable this agency to comply with the foreign policy of the United States, to protect national security, to protect the safety of nationals of the United States, or to protect against a major disaster or other emergency conditions. The information may be disclosed to other agencies as necessary in the interest of national security.

### Complete this form and clip it on top of the first page of your immigration form(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full Last Name</th>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full First Name</th>
<th>Applicant/Petitioner Full Middle Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**E-mail Address**  
**Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)**

Optional
New I-20 with OPT Recommendation

Recommendation indicated on page 2 of new I-20

- Requested begin and end date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEVIS ID:</th>
<th>NAME:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TYPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST-COMPLETION OPT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT START DATE</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT END DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REQUESTED - FULL TIME</td>
<td>TYPE</td>
<td>19 DECEMBER 2015</td>
<td>18 DECEMBER 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER NAME</th>
<th>EMPLOYER LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student has met the 1 full academic year requirement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHANGE OF STATUS/CAP-GAP EXTENSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REQUESTED VISA TYPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT HISTORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVENT NAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER AUTHORIZATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUTHORIZATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT Recommendation for Post-Completion OPT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New I-20 with OPT Recommendation

Possible Updates to Page 1

• Completion date shortened
  – You cannot work on-campus after this 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

- Retrieve from www.cbp.gov/I94
Passport Copies

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

- Passport expiration date
  - Sometimes on a different page

- Visa page
Sending OPT Application to USCIS
Mailing Final Application

• ISSO strongly recommends that you allow us to mail your application
  – ISSO uses FedEx 2-day or overnight delivery
  – Your U-Bill will be charged the actual cost of mailing

• If you choose to mail it yourself
  – Review instructions on USCIS.gov
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 Nebraska 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 LINxxxxxxxxxxx. With the official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) you may visit 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
Paper Receipt Notice

• You will receive a paper receipt notice from USCIS.
  
  – USCIS sends a paper I-797 Receipt Notice to the mailing address listed on the I-765
    • May take 2 – 4 weeks
  
  – 90 day processing starts from I-797 received date

  – ISSO will email you a copy when I-797 is received
Case Status

• Use [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (click “Check your Case Status”)
  
  – Might stay on “Case Was Received” for 2-3 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 completion date is in the past

• You may not begin employment through OPT until you receive the 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 check is not cashed 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
Dates of Employment
(90 days of unemployment start accruing on this date.)
Receiving your EAD

• ISSO will send an e-mail to your ISU e-mail address when your card arrives to ISSO

• If more than 10 days have passed since the USCIS Case Status indicates your EAD has been delivered, you may:
  – Send an e-mail to isso@iastate.edu or call 515-294-1120

• You or another person can pick up your card in person, or ISSO can mail your card to you.
During OPT
Travel Outside U.S. During OPT

2. Reentry for F-1 Nonimmigrants Traveling Outside the United States

This section of the FAQ applies to continuing F-1 students who travel outside the United States for five months or less.

2.M. Can I reenter if my request for OPT is pending?

Yes, but traveling during this time should be undertaken with caution. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away, however, so you would want to make sure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to your DSO and on the application and would be able to send in requested documents. Also, if USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States. Like a request for further information, USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address.

2.N. Can I reenter if I left while on OPT?

If USCIS has approved your OPT you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States, in addition to your Form I-20, valid passport and visa, and a letter of employment if you have one. If you exceed the limits on unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status.

http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#_Toc81222042
Travel Documents

- You need the following documents to travel:
  - Passport valid 6 months from date of U.S. entry
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - Travel validation signature on page 2 of OPT I-20
    - Only valid for 6 months during OPT
  - EAD
    - If OPT is pending, carry original I-797 Receipt Notice
  - Job offer letter or letter from employer
Mandatory Reporting During OPT

- Submit OPT Employer Information e-form in CyStart
  - Report this immediately upon any change to employment status
  - If you do not update ISSO, your F-1 status will be automatically terminated after 90 days!

- Update living address and phone number in AccessPlus and CyStart!!!
 Updating SEVIS Status

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 period
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?
By law, USCIS has 90 days from the date they receive your application to make a decision!