Optional Practical Training (OPT): Frequently Asked Questions
Students in F-1 Status

Reminder:
Each student must attend an OPT workshop presented by the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) before ISSO will process his or her request for OPT.

What is OPT?
- Period of practical training directly related to your current level and major field of study
  - Generally for opportunities located off campus
  - Occasionally for nonstudent positions at Iowa State University

Who is eligible for OPT?
- Students completing a Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral degree program
- Students who were enrolled full time for one academic year (9 consecutive months)

Who is not eligible for OPT?
- Students who are now 60 days beyond the date on which all degree requirements were completed
- Students who used 12 months of OPT at the same educational level
- Students who used 365 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training at the same educational level
- Students in the Intensive English and Orientation Program

When can I use OPT?
- Pre-completion: Prior to completion of your degree program
  - Can only be part-time if used during the fall or spring semester
  - Can be part-time or full-time if used during the summer vacation period
- Post completion:
  - Bachelor’s degree students
    - Full time after completing all degree requirements
  - Master’s or Doctoral degree students
    - Full time after completing coursework
      - Students completing a master’s degree with a thesis or creative component
      - Students completing a doctoral degree
    - Full time after completing all degree requirements

How long can I do OPT?
- 12 months for all F-1 students
- Additional 17 months if major is on the Department of Homeland Security’s STEM Designated Degree Programs list and student’s employer is enrolled in E-Verify
  - For more information, please follow these links from the ISSO main page:
    - F-1 Student Immigration Information
    - Optional Practical Training (OPT) 17-Month Extension
Can I request more than one period of OPT?
- Yes, OPT is available after each educational level, but only if you complete your new degree at a higher educational level.

Do I need to register for courses during my OPT?
- Only if you are requesting part-time OPT during a fall or spring semester

When do I submit this request to ISSO?
- Up to 120 days prior to the date you will complete all degree requirements
- No later than 40 days following the date when you complete all degree (allows for ISSO processing)

When can my OPT application arrive at U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)?
- Up to 90 days prior to the date you will complete all degree requirements

When must my OPT application arrive at U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)?
- No later than 60 days following the date when you complete all degree

How do you define program completion for immigration purposes?
- Bachelor’s degree students:
  - All courses required for the degree program have been completed
  - Completion date is the last day of the semester in which the final courses for the degree are taken
- Master’s degree students in non-thesis programs:
  - All courses required for the degree program have been completed
  - Completion date is the last day of the semester in which the final courses for the degree are taken
  - MBA students may use the last day of semester for the MBA program
- Master’s degree students completing a creative component or thesis
  - Last day of the semester in which you take your final oral defense
- Doctoral degree students completing a dissertation
  - Last day of the semester in which you take your final oral defense
- Master’s or doctoral degree students taking final oral defense between semesters
  - First day of the next semester, whether the semester be fall, spring, or first summer session

What is the approximate timeline from submission this request to ISSO to receipt of EAD?
- 10 calendar days    ISSO processing
- 5 calendar days    Mailing time
- 90 calendar days    USCIS processing
- 30 calendar days    Issuance and mailing of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- 5 calendar days    Mailing time to you if you are no longer in Ames

Do I need to attend an OPT workshop?
- Yes, you must register for an OPT workshop by going to the Events link on the ISSO web site
How do I submit this request?
- This is an electronic process completed by logging in to Cystart using your ISU NetID and password.
- Start this process by reviewing the Optional Practical Training page found ISSO web site:
  - Home → F-1 Immigration Information → Optional Practical Training (OPT)
  - After logging into Cystart, be sure to select the appropriate tab:
    - F-1 Undergraduate Student Services – students completing a Bachelor’s degree
    - F-1 Graduate Student Services – students completing a Master’s or Doctoral degree

What is the approximate timeline for ISSO to process this request?
- 10 calendar days after there is a ✓ mark in all boxes on the Cystart Optional Practical Training page.

What documents must I submit as part of this request?
- Optional Practical Training Request e-form
- Verification of Academic Status e-form
- Mailing Authorization e-form

What more can you tell me about the required photographs?
- For more information, see http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html

How will I know if this request has been approved?
- ISSO will send an e-mail to your ISU e-mail address.
  - If you do not receive this e-mail within 10 calendar days as noted above, please send an e-mail to isso@iastate.edu to check on your request.

Do I need to meet an ISSO advisor to prepare the final OPT application for USCIS?
- No, you will meet with another staff member in ISSO.
  - Please follow the instructions provided in the e-mail sent to you by ISSO.
  - However, if you are no longer living in Ames, you can communicate by e-mail instead of coming to ISSO.

What documents must I bring to ISSO to complete my application?
- $380 personal check, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the past 30 days
- Printed copy of the completed Form I-765
- Printed copy of the completed Form G-1145
- Original and one copy of each of the following immigration documents:
  - I-94 card, front and back of original or print out of electronic I-94
  - Passport identity page
  - Passport page showing expiration date of passport
  - Passport page with most recent F-1 visa
  - I-20 forms with prior OPT endorsements on page 3, if any
  - Previous EAD from USCIS, if any

Who should I contact to ask if ISSO has mailed my application?
- ISSO Receptionist, 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu
What steps should I take if I choose to mail the final application myself?

- Wait for the new OPT I-20 to be sent to you by mail
  - When you receive the I-20, complete the information in section 11 using a blue ink pen, and be sure to print and sign above the line.
- Please put the final application together in the order listed below, ensuring the check is on top
- Proof the final application one last time to ensure dates are correct, signatures are included, etc.
- Send a scanned copy of the final application, in .pdf format, to ISSO at isso@iastate.edu
  - Include copies of all documents included in the final application as ISSO would need to reference these if the USCIS sends a Request for Evidence (RFE) to follow-up on your OPT application
- Wait for an e-mail from ISSO indicating that your application is fine or that you need to make changes
  - If changes are necessary, please make the changes and send a new, scanned copy of the final application to ISSO
- Once ISSO confirms your application is complete and accurate, you may mail it.

What documents must I submit to USCIS as part of the final application?

- $380 personal check, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the past 30 days
- Printed copy of the completed Form I-765
- Printed copy of the completed Form G-1145
- Copy of new I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 3, signed by ISSO advisor and student
- One copy of each of the following immigration documents:
  - Previous EAD from USCIS
  - I-94 card, front and back of original or print out of electronic I-94
  - Passport identity page
  - Passport page showing expiration date of passport
  - Passport page with most recent F-1 visa

How should I mail the final application if I choose to mail it myself?

- The address below is only for applications sent through services provided by the U.S. Postal Service
- For your information, ISSO uses U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail when we send the application

Where should I mail my final application if I choose to mail it myself?

USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

How will I know the USCIS has received my application?

- USCIS will send you an e-mail (see sample below) and/or text message
- USCIS will send ISSO the official I-797 Receipt Notice
  - This assumes the ISSO address was used as the mailing address on the I-765

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 LINxxxxxxxxxx. 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

When will I receive the e-mail or text message from USCIS?
- Approximately 2 – 3 weeks after your application is received by USCIS

What if I don’t get the e-mail or text message from USCIS?
- First, contact your bank to ask if your check for the OPT fee has been cashed by USCIS
- Second, if necessary, contact the ISSO at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

How do I know when my 90-day processing time begins?
- The Received Date on the I-797 Receipt Notice represents the beginning of the 90 days

How do I check the status of my application?
- Go to the Case Status box at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do
- Enter the receipt number listed in your e-mail or text message

What is the average time from when the decision is made and when the EAD arrives at ISSO?
- USCIS has indicated it can take up to 30 days before your EAD is produced and mailed
- ISSO generally receives the EAD within 7-10 days after it is mailed from the USCIS contractor

What if I notice my name is incorrect—either misspelled, portion missing, or order reversed—when I review my receipt notice?
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

What if I want to change the dates of my OPT?
- The dates of your OPT cannot be changed once the application has been mailed to USCIS
What if my OPT request is still pending and it is more than 90 days from the receipt date?
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

What if I don’t complete my program as planned?
- Students completing a bachelor’s or master’s degree without a thesis must contact an ISSO advisor immediately at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu
  - Action must be taken before the completion date on your OPT I-20

- Students completing a master’s degree with a thesis or a doctoral degree
  - Choose to proceed with OPT request, no action needed
  - If choose not to proceed with OPT request, action must be taken before the completion date on your OPT I-20

What if I want to withdraw my application?
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu
  - Request to withdraw must be made prior to the start date on the EAD
  - You will not receive a refund of the $380 application fee

How will I know my EAD has arrived at ISSO?
- ISSO will send you an e-mail message to your ISU e-mail account

Who should I contact if I don’t hear from ISSO and it has been more than 30 days since the USCIS Case Status system indicates a decision has been made on my application?
- ISSO at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

What do I need to do to pick up my EAD from ISSO?
- You may come yourself
  - Please bring a photo ID such as your passport, ISU Card, or driver’s license

- You may designate someone else to pick up your EAD
  - You must provide ISSO with a written and signed authorization that specifies a specific person to pick up your EAD. Please include the individual’s name and ISU ID number. The person picking up the EAD must have photo I.D.

What if I am no longer in Ames?
- Complete a Mailing Authorization e-form request

- Designating someone else to pick up your EAD
  - You must provide ISSO with a written and signed authorization that specifies a specific person to pick up your EAD. Please include the individuals name and ISU ID number. The person picking up the EAD must have photo I.D.

Can I take classes during OPT?
- The regulations indicate your OPT is automatically terminated when you begin study at another educational level
Is it true students only get 90 days of OPT?
- No. A student is allowed 12 months of OPT. However, during the 12 month period listed on the EAD card, the student is only allowed 90 days of unemployment.

What if a student goes over 90 days of unemployment?

What types of positions are considered employment for OPT?

What are the reporting requirements during OPT?

Disclaimer: This Frequently Asked Questions document is intended for general information and guidance. Please consult with an International Student and Scholar Advisor in the International Students and Scholars Office regarding your individual request.