

F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS
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WHAT IS OPT?

Optional Practical Training is defined as authorization for “temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study.” OPT employment authorization is granted for 12 months typically after completion of degree requirements.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- Students who are in F-1 visa status and have been enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one academic year; **and**
- Who will be completing degree requirements this semester; **and**
- Whose proposed OPT employment will be **directly related** to their course of study.

WHEN TO APPLY FOR OPT?

A student can apply for OPT up to 90 days prior to the program end date and up to 60 days after the program end date.

Though it is possible to file the I-765 form (OPT) after graduation, we do not recommend doing so as the USCIS processing times vary and you may lose some of your 12-month employment authorization.

NOTE: If you plan to spend one of your last two semester(s) outside of the U.S., you may not be eligible for OPT. Please consult with an OISS advisor.

WHEN DOES OPT START?

Students have a choice of when they want their OPT to start. The earliest a student can start employment is the day after completing degree requirements. The latest date OPT can start is 60 days after the degree completion date.

EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS TO MAINTAIN STATUS WHILE ON OPT:

- During post-completion OPT; F-1 visa status is dependent upon employment. Students must not accrue a total of 90 days or more of unemployment during post-completion OPT. The 90 days of unemployment begins accruing on the start date of the Employment Authorization Document/card (EAD). For more details, please consult an OISS advisor.
- Employment **MUST** be related to the field of study.
- The employment does **NOT** have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is engaged in “free-lance” employment (including performance majors with regular “gigs”), interning, or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employed” for the purposes of OPT employment.
- Even if the internship is unpaid, one must work a minimum of 20 hours a week in one’s field of study and obtain proof of employment such as a letter from one’s employer.
- Employment authorization will begin on the date requested or the date the employment authorization is adjudicated (approved), whichever is later.
- Students must comply with the employment reporting requirements.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS WHILE ON OPT:

All students on OPT are **required** to report the following to the OISS via email oiss@msu.edu:

- The name and address of employer, and start date of employment.
- Any change of employment (Loss of employment, change of employer, etc.)
- You **MUST** submit a photocopy of your Employment Authorization Document/card (EAD) to OISS. If you do not use the OISS address on your I-765 form, it is your responsibility to submit a copy of your EAD card to OISS for your student file.
- Any change of your name or address.*

*Any name or address change should be reported through MSU Registrar’s office: <http://www.reg.msu.edu> Click on “Address Changes” and use “local address” to report your address change.

17-Month Extension:

Students who graduate from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields and whose employer is enrolled in the E-Verify program may qualify for an additional 17-month OPT extension. Students with an approved 17-month OPT extension have additional reporting requirements. Please refer to the OPT extension application for further information.

GRACE PERIOD FOLLOWING OPT:

Students who successfully complete OPT will receive a 60-day grace period starting on the day after OPT expires. Before the 60-day grace period is over, you must have either departed the U.S., applied to change your visa status from F-1 to another status, or have received a new I-20 to pursue a new academic program. **Note:** Only those who complete OPT receive the grace period – those who exceed the 90-day unemployment limit during OPT receive no grace period.

H-1B CAP-GAP EXTENSION:

If an employer files an H-1B petition on behalf of an F-1 student while that student has valid OPT employment authorization or is in the 60-day grace period following OPT, that student is eligible for a “Cap-Gap” extension.

If your employer files an H-1B petition on your behalf while you still have valid OPT employment authorization, then your employment authorization will be extended starting on the day after your original OPT expires and ending on September 30th. The Cap-Gap extension ends immediately if the H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or withdrawn.

If your employer files an H-1B petition on your behalf *after* your OPT work authorization expires but *before* the end of your 60-day grace period, your status will be extended but your work authorization will not be extended. In other words, you will be allowed to remain inside the U.S. but you will not be allowed to work.

NOTE: International travel is *not* allowed during the OPT Cap-Gap extension.

While proof of an H-1B petition is all that is needed to prove an OPT Cap-Gap extension, students may request that OISS print a new I-20 which shows dates of continued F-1 visa status and employment authorization.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

- You **must** have your **Employment Authorization Document/card (EAD)** in-hand **and** the start date must be valid in order to begin employment.
- The EAD card will be mailed to the address that you put on the I-765 form. The Post Office **will NOT forward** mail from USCIS if you change your address after you apply. **USCIS will NOT mail your EAD card to a P.O. Box or international address.**
- For your convenience, you may use the OISS address, 103 International Center, East Lansing, MI 48824. OISS will email your MSU email account when we receive mail on your behalf. Please pick up your mail in person immediately or reply to the email promptly and request that we send it to your new address. You must provide your credit card information and pay for shipping if you want us to FedEx your documents.
- USCIS will request more information or will issue an EAD card **approximately 90 days** after receipt of your application unless you are found ineligible.
- If you change your status prior to the OPT expiration date, please inform OISS and send a copy of your change of status approval to the office.

REMINDERS DURING OPT:

- If you plan on changing your status, we recommend that you begin this process before your OPT expires.
- If you are transferring to another institution, make sure to contact OISS so that your SEVIS record may be electronically transferred **BEFORE** the end of your authorized stay.
- If you are subject to Special Registration, make sure to use official ports of departure to exit the U.S. and allow time at airports and land crossings to complete exit interview (even if traveling to Mexico and Canada).
- Check the OISS website (<http://oiss.msu.edu>) and your MSU email account for immigration updates.

COLOR PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATIONS:

All photos must be of the applicant only and must be identical. All photos must meet the specifications for full frontal/passport photos and **must be no more than 30 days old** when an application is filed. (See figure and specifications below)

WHERE TO GET PHOTOS:

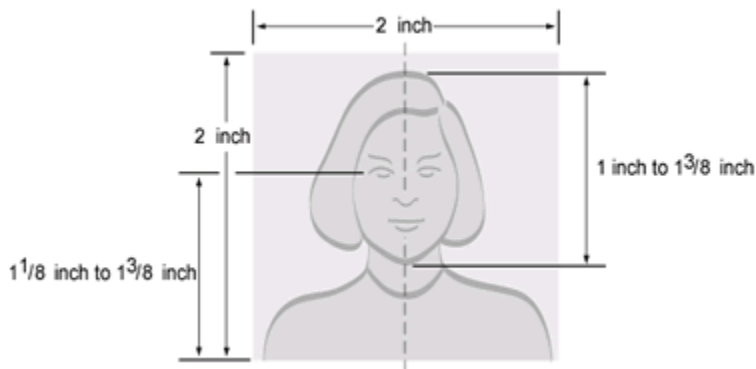
A few possible options:

On Campus: Contact University Relations, 311 Olds Hall, at 517-355-7505 or email photos@ur.msu.edu to set up an appointment. Hours of availability are 8am-5pm.

Off Campus: U.S. Post Office, 1140 Abbot Rd., East Lansing or
FedEx Office, 626 Michigan Ave., East Lansing

PASSPORT PHOTO SPECIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:

- Photos must be 2 inches in height by 2 inches in width (see figure below).
- The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background.
- Head height should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches from top to bottom of chin.
- Eye height is between 1 1/8 inch to 1 3/8 inches from bottom of photo (see figure below).
- Head must be bare unless a headdress is required by religious order of which you are a member.



APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

1. We recommend attending an OPT workshop. Dates are listed at: <http://www.oiss.msu.edu/calendar.php>.
2. Meet with your academic advisor to complete the “Student Status Form.”
3. Assemble the following documents and meet with an OISS advisor during walk-in hours M-F from 1-3 p.m. or set up an appointment by calling OISS at 517-353-1720. Bring the following completed materials:
 - Completed **I-765 form** (attached; download fillable form at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf>)

Instructions for completing the I-765 for regular OPT:

- #1 Family/Last Name in All CAPS, then First Name (example: DOE John)
 - #3 Address in U.S.: write your address if you will NOT be moving in the next 3-4 months. If you will move, then we recommend writing the OISS address: 103 International Center, East Lansing, MI 48824
 - #10 Your I-94 card number is on the top of your white I-94 card (usually stapled to your passport)
 - #11 Only check “Yes” if you have had applied for OPT before (check “No” if you have only worked on campus or with CPT)
 - * Leave the next two questions blank, if you answered “No” to #11
 - #12 and #13 can be found on your I-94 card (example: DMA means Detroit)
 - #14 and #15 Write “**F-1 student**” for both
 - #16 Write (c) (3) (B)
 - #17 Leave blank
-
- **G-1145 form**, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance. (attached; download fillable form at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf>)
 - Completed **Student Status Form** signed by your academic advisor/major professor. (attached)
 - Photocopy of both sides of your **I-94** card.
 - Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your **passport**.
 - Photocopy of your **U.S. Visa page**.
 - Photocopies of all I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** Authorization(s).
 - **2** passport **photos** (See example). Gently print your name and SEVIS number (your SEVIS number is located on the top right of your I-20 and starts with N) on the back of each photo.
 - **\$340.00** check or money order made payable to: **Department of Homeland Security** (do not abbreviate). If the address on your check is not current, please cross out the old address and write your present address.
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4. OISS will prepare a new I-20 for you and provide you with an envelope or courier address for mailing out your application. In most cases your I-20 will be ready for pick-up in 2-3 business days. **USCIS must receive your completed OPT application within 30 days of I-20 issuance.**

For more information, see the “You Have Been Recommended for OPT...Now What?” **handout.**

YOU HAVE BEEN RECOMMENDED FOR OPT...NOW WHAT?

NEW I-20:

In approximately 2-3 business days, you will receive an email from OISS notifying you that your new OPT recommendation I-20 is ready for pick up.

FINAL PREPARATIONS:

Pick up your new I-20 as soon as possible during OISS business hours (8am-5pm, M-F) and do the following:

- Sign the I-20 at the bottom of page 1.
- Photocopy pages 1 and 3 of the new, signed I-20.
- Add your photocopied I-20 (not the original!) to your application packet.
- Mail your OPT application to USCIS. *Note: your OPT application **must** be received by USCIS within 30 days of the date the OPT recommendation I-20 was created.*

CHECKLIST FOR MAILING OUT YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS:

USCIS **must** receive your completed OPT application within 30 days of I-20 issuance.

- PHOTOCOPY of all pages of your **new I-20 endorsed for OPT**. (Do not send the original). Make sure to sign your new I-20 before you make the photocopy.
- Completed **I-765 form**.
- Completed **G-1145 form**.
- Photocopy of both sides of your **I-94 card**.
- Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your **passport**.
- Photocopy of your **U.S. Visa page**.
- Photocopies of all I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** Authorization(s).
- 2** full frontal/passport **photos** (See example on page 2). Gently print your name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.
- \$340.00** check or money order made payable to: **Department of Homeland Security** (do not abbreviate).

HOW TO MAIL:

We recommend using either USPS Certified Mail (OISS will provide a pre-addressed envelope) or a courier service (FedEx, DHL, UPS etc) to mail your OPT application to USCIS. Certified mail is cheaper but slower, courier service is faster, but more expensive. Courier service will only speed up your application process by a few days.

RECEIPT NOTICE:

If you include Form G-1145, USCIS will notify you within 48 hours of accepting your immigration form(s) via email and/or cell phone number. The message will provide a receipt number as information but will not constitute official notice of acceptance. The email notice will also provide a brief statement on how to get additional information about the status of your case. The email or text message does not grant any immigration status or benefit. You may not present a copy of the email or text message as evidence that USCIS has granted you any immigration status or benefit. Approximately 6 weeks after your application is mailed, you will receive a paper copy Receipt Notice from USCIS. This is your proof of application. It will state when your application was received and give you an application number. You can use the application number to check your application status at www.uscis.gov. **NOTE: If you receive OISS email for document pick up, please come in or call immediately. USCIS requests can be time sensitive.**

OPT APPROVAL:

Approximately 90 days after your application is received, you will receive your EAD card (Employment Authorization Document), also called an OPT card. This is your approval. Once you have your EAD card and the start date has been reached, you may begin employment. **NOTE: If you do not use the OISS address as your OPT mailing address, you must provide OISS with a photocopy of your EAD card immediately after you receive it.**

UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITATIONS:

You will have 90 days from the start date of your EAD card to begin employment. The minimum threshold for "employment" during regular OPT is work related to your field of study that engages you for a minimum of 20 hours per week. The work may be paid or unpaid.

EMPLOYMENT REPORTING:

Once you find employment, you **must** send the following information to oiss@msu.edu:

- Name of company/employer
- Complete mailing address of employer
- Start date of employment

If there is ever a **change or interruption** in your employment status, you **must** notify OISS immediately.

PERSONAL REPORTING:

While on OPT, you **must** continue to update MSU regarding your residential address. Your address **must** describe where you live. It **cannot** be a P.O. Box or an office address. Visit <http://www.reg.msu.edu>, click on “Address Changes” and use “local address” to report the change.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE:

Many times students on OPT do not go directly into a job where insurance coverage is provided. If you do not have access to other health insurance options during this interim period, you may extend your MSU student coverage by purchasing additional months. Contact the MSU Benefits Office for more information: 140 Nisbet Building, 517-353-4434.

TRAVEL:

If you leave the U.S. and wish to return after the program completion date given by your academic advisor during the OPT application process (which then becomes the program end date on your I-20), you must show special documentation in order to return.

- **If your OPT is pending (not yet approved), you will need the following upon reentry to the U.S.:**
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa stamp
 - I-20 with OPT recommendation and recent travel signature (within past 6 months)
 - OPT Receipt Notice (proof of application)
- **If your OPT is approved, you will need the following upon reentry to the U.S.:**
 - Valid passport
 - Valid F-1 visa stamp
 - I-20 with OPT recommendation and recent travel signature (within past 6 months)
 - Unexpired EAD card
 - Proof of employment (offer letter or employment confirmation letter from employer)

If you have an expired F-1 visa stamp and you plan to make a short trip to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent (Caribbean) islands, consult an OISS advisor or visit our page on Automatic Revalidation:

http://www.oiss.msu.edu/students_travel_autorevalid.php.

If you are subject to Special Registration, you must use official ports of departure to exit the U.S. and allow time at airports and land crossings to complete exit interview (even if traveling to Mexico and Canada).

AFTER OPT:

Once your EAD card is expired, you will have a 60-day grace period. Before the end of the grace period you **must** do one of the following:

- Depart the U.S.
- Apply for a different visa status
- Transfer to a new academic program

NOTE: Only those who complete OPT receive the grace period – those who exceed the 90-day unemployment limit during OPT receive no grace period.

TRANSITION TO H-1B:

Some students find employers who wish to employ them longer than the OPT period. In these situations, employers will typically sponsor an H-1B employment visa. H-1B visas for private sector employers typically take effect on October 1st of each year. If an employer sponsors you for an H-1B visa and your OPT expires prior to October 1st, contact OISS to see if you are eligible for a “Cap-Gap” extension of your OPT work authorization and F-1 status.

17-MONTH EXTENSION:

Students who receive a degree in a “STEM” field (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) may be eligible for an additional 17-month extension of OPT. Please consult our 17-month extension application packet for more information: http://www.oiss.msu.edu/documents/students/opt_17.pdf

F-1 OPT STUDENT STATUS FORM

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS
Phone: 517.353.1720 | Fax: 517.355.4657
E-mail: oiss@msu.edu | Web: www.oiss.msu.edu

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT:

Last Name:	First Name:
Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy): ____/____/____	PID #: A _____ SEVIS ID #: N _____
OPT Start Date: ____/____/____	OPT End Date: ____/____/____

***NOTE:** The beginning date is the earliest possible date up to 60 days after program end date that student can begin employment. The accumulation of 90 days of unemployment will begin accruing on this date. You **MUST** stop working on campus upon your completion/graduation date, unless you have received your Employment Authorization Document/card in-hand with valid start date and employment is directly related to your course of study.*

I attest that I have not engaged in unauthorized employment off-campus.

Signature of Student: _____ Date: ____/____/____

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY ACADEMIC/GRADUATE ADVISOR/MAJOR PROFESSOR:

Student's Major (Field of Study):
Program Level: <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors <input type="checkbox"/> Masters <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
Expected Completion Date of Degree Requirements (mm/dd/yyyy): ____/____/____

Expected completion date of degree requirements will vary according to degree level and/or program track. Please refer to the academic calendar for current information: <http://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/Academic.asp>

Undergraduate	Master's – Thesis	Master's – Comprehensive Exam	Master's - Other	Doctoral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last day of final exams in graduating semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis defense date * or, • Thesis submission date* or, • Last day of final exams in graduating semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive exam date or, • Last day of final exams in graduating semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last day of final exams in graduating semester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissertation defense date* or, • Dissertation submission date* or, • Last day of final exams in graduating semester

***NOTE:** In order to maintain regular F-1 student status, you must continue to register as a full-time student. In case of graduate students who have completed the thesis/dissertation defense and need to continue thesis/dissertation revisions more than 30 days into the following semester (including summer), registration in at least 1 credit will be required in order to maintain status. Master's students who wish to do this must be eligible for a reduced course load. If you have concerns about this requirement, please discuss your situation with an OISS advisor.

Academic Advisor or Major Professor (printed name):	
Department:	Title:
Phone:	E-mail:
Signature:	Date: ____/____/____