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## **F-1 Optional Practical Training Information**

**FIRST:**

- Read this application packet including the “Frequently Asked Questions” (on page 3).
- Have your academic advisor complete the advisor’s section of the "OPT Recommendation Form."
- Follow instructions on how to complete the form I-765 on page 2 (download form at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)).

**SECOND:**

- Register for an OPT session by calling OIE (412-268-5231).
- Submit your completed OPT Recommendation Form at your OPT session or anytime afterwards at the OIE front desk.
- OIE will issue a new I-20 for you in 5 business days which will include our recommendation for your OPT on page 3. You will send a photocopy of this new I-20 with your application to USCIS.

**THIRD:**

- Be sure to keep copies of everything you mail for your own records!
- Prepare all applications materials listed below and send by express mail (so that you have a tracking number and delivery signature).
- Mail the materials listed below to USCIS (one of the addresses in the box). You will receive a notice (Form I-797) from USCIS with a tracking number (located in the upper-left hand corner of the receipt) that can be used to follow the progress of your case at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). Your case will stay in “Initial Review” status until it is approved.
- USCIS must receive your application no more than 90 days before AND no more than 60 days beyond your program completion date as noted on your I-20 (item 5). You MUST send your application within 30 days of the issue date of the new OPT I-20 from OIE (item 10 on the I-20).

<p><b>For Express Mail and Courier Deliveries:</b>          USCIS          Attn: AOS          2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business, Suite 400          Lewisville, TX 75067</p>	<p><b>For US Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:</b>          USCIS          PO Box 660867          Dallas, TX 75266</p>
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**APPLICATION MATERIALS (submitted in this order):**

- Fee of \$380. Make check payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security.” You may send a money order or personal check drawn on a US bank, NO CASH.
- G-1145. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application. Find the form at: [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).
- Two “passport” photos ([http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq\\_5333.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html)). In pencil, print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo. You may put the photos and check in an envelope and staple carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).  
 Passport photos can be obtained at:
 

FedEx/Kinkos	Rite Aid	US Post Office
University Center, Lower Level	1700 Murray Avenue	1800 Murray Ave., Sq. Hill
412-268-3737	412-521-3900	412-421-1388
- Original I-765 form (follow instructions on how to complete form on page 2).
- Cover letter/checklist explaining that you are applying for OPT and listing the contents of the mailing.
- A copy (NOT original) of page 1 and 3 of the new I-20 from OIE with the recommendation for OPT on page 3. Sign the new I-20 in item 11.
- A copy of ALL previously issued I-20 documents dating back to beginning of F-1 status (signed in item 11).
- A copy of both sides of your I-94 card (front and back – even if the back is blank).
- A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
- A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).
- A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) OPT card if you have had one.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING FORM I-765

- Download the form I-765 from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and complete it as a form-fillable pdf.** Do NOT complete the form by hand. The form is read by a machine-readable scanner. Handwritten forms can generate errors.
- Check first box: “I am applying for: permission to accept employment.”**
- Complete lines 1 through 16:**
  - #1 Name:** Type your family/last name in all capital letters and your first name in sentence case.
  - #3 Return Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 90 days. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the EAD is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your EAD will be returned to the immigration service. If you want to use a friend’s address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. You may use OIE to collect your mail – but we are unable to track the progress of your case. If you choose to use OIE as your mailing address, put the address as:  

**5000 Forbes Ave, Int’l Education, Pittsburgh, PA 15213**

*NOTE: If you use the OIE address and want OIE to mail the EAD to you later, you must pay for EAD shipping by check, payable to Carnegie Mellon University, in advance. OIE uses UPS for express service. We will not use prepaid shipping envelopes from other delivery companies.*
  - #3 Return Address:** Note: If the mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Pennsylvania, refer to the I-765 instructions ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)) or OIE for the proper mailing address for your application.
  - #10 Alien Registration Number:** Use your I-94 number found on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport). It is usually an 11 digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.
  - #11 Previous Employment Authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an EAD (OPT card) at this or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT or an H-1B visa.
  - #16 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 OPT, fill out as follows:
    - For summer or part-time OPT PRIOR to graduating:** ( c ) ( 3 ) ( A )
    - For POST-Completion (after graduating) OPT:** ( c ) ( 3 ) ( B )
    - For the 17-month extension of OPT (see FAQ #10 below):** ( c ) ( 3 ) ( C )
  - Certification:** Remember to sign and date the I-765 in **BLUE INK**. Keep signature WITHIN the 2 lines.

### REMINDERS: REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON OPT

- REQUIRED UPDATES (ADDRESS AND EMPLOYMENT).** You are required to report address or name changes, and any interruption in employment, within 10 days so that we can update SEVIS. Email OIE at: [oiie@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:oiie@andrew.cmu.edu). OIE does not receive information from SIO after you graduate.

#### TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON PRACTICAL TRAINING:

- In order to re-enter the US while on OPT, you must have:

Valid passport	EAD (OPT work card)
Valid F-1 visa stamp/sticker in your passport	Offer letter of employment from your employer**
OPT I-20 signed within the last six months	

\*\*F regulations allow for travel and reentry in order to “resume employment.” While a job offer letter is not required to obtain OPT, it is recommended that students who travel have a job offer letter with them when they are entering the US.) Note that the EAD says “Not Valid for Travel” on the face of the EAD meaning it cannot be used alone to re-enter the US.

- Dependent Travel:** An F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 (endorsed within 6 months of re-entry to the US on page 3).
- NEVER ENTER the US in any VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1** while on OPT (it will invalidate OPT!)

## CHOOSING YOUR START DATE

You are eligible to pick an OPT start date any time within the 60 days following your program completion date as noted on the OPT Recommendation Form. If you are a PhD student or a Master's student with a thesis option, you may have more leeway as to when your OPT can start. Factors to consider when choosing your start date are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you CANNOT begin to work BEFORE the start date on the EAD).** If you choose a start date farther into the future and then receive an earlier offer, you will not be able to change the date. If you plan to work or are working at CMU after program completion, you **MUST** have OPT work authorization after your program completion. **All of your work authorization ends (even on-campus work) after your program completion.** Be sure to take this into account!
2. **If you want the latest possible day to start your work authorization,** the latest day you may choose as your start date for the EAD is 60 days after your program completion date. Remember that some months have 31 days and USCIS counts each day!

**You may not change your OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!**

## OPT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?

Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work. The work must be related to your level and field of studies. OPT is recommended by OIE and authorized by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level plus a possible H-1B cap gap extension OR a 17-month STEM extension for those who qualify (see info on page 4). You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete. You may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before your completion date and **the immigration service MUST RECEIVE your application NO LATER THAN 60 days beyond your completion date.** You **MUST** send your application within 30 days of getting the new OPT I-20 from OIE.

### 2. What are the Eligibility Requirements to apply for F-1 Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full-time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

### 3. If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?

Yes, you are eligible to apply for another 12 month period of Optional Practical Training after changing to a **higher degree level.** This does not apply to a second degree at the same level (i.e., a second master's degree).

### 4. If I don't use OPT at the bachelor's level can I get two 12 month periods of OPT?

No. OPT for each level cannot be combined but must be used during/immediately after each level. Authorized OPT cannot be "saved" for use in the future.

### 5. I applied for 12 months of OPT based on another degree I already completed, but then my employer changed my status to H-1B after 4 months. So I have 8 months of OPT remaining, right?

No. Immigration does not "refund" time after a change to a different immigration status. The amount of time you applied for (as appears on the EAD card) is the amount of time USCIS considers you to have used at that educational level.

### 6. How can I use OPT while I am still in my program?

You may use OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you have completed all course requirements for the degree and have a thesis requirement remaining. These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

### 7. How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?

Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS. Their standard processing time is 60-90 days. Therefore it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working. You may apply up to 90 days before your

completion date and **NO LATER THAN** 60 days beyond your completion date. You **MUST** send your application within 30 days of getting the new I-20 from OIE.

**8. Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?**

You do **NOT need to have a job offer** before applying for optional practical training.

**9. Do I need to have a job/job offer while I am on OPT?**

Yes. F-1 regulations require that you do have employment while in your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17-month extension. While on POST-graduation OPT, you are required to update OIE with any address changes ([ois@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:ois@andrew.cmu.edu)).

**10. Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?**

For the first 12 month period of post-completion OPT, the employment does **NOT** have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed (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. For more information, see the immigration OPT policy guidance: [http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt\\_policy\\_guidance\\_042010.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf) (page 17). **For the 17-month STEM extension, employment must be paid employment.**

**11. Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?**

No. You may **NOT** begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the US.

**12. May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?**

No. USCIS allows students to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the program end date. You should apply early.

**13. Do I have to do anything with OIE while I am on OPT?**

Yes! Immigration regulations **REQUIRE** that while you are on POST-graduation OPT, you **MUST** report your address information OIE. You must email address changes within 10 days of the move to [ois@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:ois@andrew.cmu.edu).

**14. Can I extend my OPT after the 12 months?**

There are two types of extensions available: 1) a 17-month extension for those in certain fields (see below) and 2) an “H-1B Cap Gap Extension.” The cap gap extends your work authorization through to the start of your “cap-subject” H-1B visa if your OPT ends after your “cap subject” company has applied for an H-1B for you but before the H-1B starts on the following October 1st. This cap gap extension is available to all F-1 students using OPT in any field, as long as you have a pending or approved “cap subject” H-1B application and the employer applied for the H-1B with a request for change of status as part of the application. The extension is automatic - you do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. “Cap Subject” refers to any H-1B application that must be counted against the quota on H-1B applications.

**15. I will live in Pennsylvania while on OPT. Can I get a new/extended PA driver’s license/state ID?**

Yes. You will need an immigration status verification letter to renew or obtain a new license/state id. Request the letter from the front desk of OIE or email [ois@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:ois@andrew.cmu.edu). Please note that some DMV offices will require that you show your EAD work card in order to extend your PA license. You may speak with a supervisor to ask for an exception to this rule.

**16. I went to PA DMV to get a new/renewed license and they told me my information wasn’t in SEVIS or there was an error with my information. What should I do?**

The PA DMV has to confirm information from various databases that link to SEVIS. Students on OPT should present the required documentation and make sure to show the EAD and point out the A# located on the card. This gives DMV the number they need to find your data in their system.

**17. I will live in another state while on OPT. Do I need a letter from OIE?**

No. You will want to look at the requirements for a driver’s license in the state to which you will move.

## INFORMATION ON THE 17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

### 18. What is the 17- month STEM extension of OPT?

The 17-month extension allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in the fields listed below, referred to as “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), to apply for a one time 17-month extension of their regular 12 month OPT period. **You will NOT apply for 29 months up front.** Students who timely file an application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

### 19. I think I qualify, how do I apply for the 17-month extension?

**FIRST: Students completing with degrees in these fields will apply for the regular 12 month period of OPT.**

**THEN, WITHIN 3 months of the end of your first 12 months of OPT:** If you meet the following criteria, you can apply through OIE for your 17-month extension I-20. Instructions can be found on the OIE website at:

<http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/forstu/pdf/opt-stem.pdf>. NOTE: Your application must arrive at USCIS before your 12 month period of OPT ends or else the 17-month extension benefit will be forfeited.

### CRITERIA FOR THE 17 MONTH EXTENSION:

- Your employer must be enrolled in the “E-Verify” program (see information below, #20).
- You must have graduated and be working in one of the fields listed below referred to as STEM fields.
- You must have maintained status while on OPT and be within 3 months of your end date.

### 19. What are the STEM fields?

Actuarial Science, Computer Science Applications, Engineering, Engineering Technologies, Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Military Technologies, Physical Sciences, Science Technologies, Medical Scientist (MS, PhD). For more info see our website at: <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/newsandevents/news/07-08/june/cipcode.html>

### 20. What is “E-Verify”?

E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The E-Verify program is currently free to employers and is available in all 50 states. E-Verify provides an automated link to federal databases to help employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers. More information is available at: [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). There is no comprehensive list of companies enrolled in E-verify. Do not assume, ask your company’s Human Resources department if they participate in this program.

### 21. Are there any other requirements while I am on the 17-month extension?

You are obligated to update your address and employer information *every six months* while on the 17-month extension (even if the information has not changed). We will send out email reminders. You will report this information to OIE by emailing [oie@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:oie@andrew.cmu.edu).

## TRAVEL and OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

### 22. Now that I’ve turned in my application, can I travel outside the US while I wait for the EAD to arrive?

**After you complete your program**, in order to re-enter the US, you must have the following: EAD, your valid passport, a current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, AND your job offer letter or proof of employment. **Before you graduate**, you should be able to return to the US without the EAD as long as it is still long enough in advance of your graduation. If you have to travel, talk to an OIE advisor before you leave.

### 23. I want to leave the US for a short time while my OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the EAD will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the US on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD then start work with the card once I get it?

NO!! If you intend to continue working on your OPT, **NEVER** enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the US and re-enter in B status - you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be **invalid!**

### 24. What documents do I need to re-enter the US while on OPT?

You will need your OPT I-20 that has been endorsed on page three by an OIE advisor within the last 6 months; the EAD from USCIS, your valid passport, a **current F-1 visa stamp, AND your job offer letter or proof of employment.**

**25. What if I have applied for the 17-month extension but I have not yet received the EAD, can I travel out of the US?**

No, the immigration service advises that while you are waiting for the approval of the 17-month extension, you should NOT try to re-enter the country until you RECEIVE the new EAD.

**26. The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the US while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for fewer than 30 days, you could re-enter the US on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with your I-94 card, a valid passport, your EAD, an I-20 that has been signed by an OIE advisor within the last 6 months, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment** as long as: 1) you do not apply for a visa while in Canada and 2) you are NOT a national of Iran, Syria, Sudan, or Cuba. **If you are traveling elsewhere**, you will need to go to a US embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp. **Contact OIE** to discuss your visa application should you have questions.

**27. In what way is my application to the embassy for a new visa stamp affected by being on OPT?**

The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for F-1 status while on OPT is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. It is possible and many students on OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent. Please see an OIE advisor to discuss in more detail.

**28. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new F-1 visa stamp while I am on OPT?**

You need to take a valid passport, the EAD, your OPT I-20, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment**. The official job offer letter should sound temporary and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you will apply your OPT work experience there.

**29. Do I still need to get a travel signature on my I-20 from OIE while on OPT?**

Yes, while you are in F-1 status on OPT, if you travel outside the US, you need to have the travel line signed every 6 months. If you are not located in Pittsburgh, mail the original I-20 to OIE for endorsement along with the OIE Request for Services form ([http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/req\\_services.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/req_services.pdf)), leaving plenty of time for mailing delays..

## Employment Related Information

### **Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9)**

When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (IRS Form I-9) which verifies your eligibility to work in the US. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. This form requires you to document your identity and work authorization. For F-1 students, the most typical combination of documentation is: your passport, I-94 Departure Record, I-20, and EAD.

### **Social Security Number (SSN)**

For payroll purposes, you will also need to provide your SSN. If you do not already have an SSN or if you have lost your card, take your passport, I-94 card, OPT I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Administration and apply for an SSN card. Note that your number will remain the same if you already had one.

### **Social Security Withholding and Other Taxes**

In general, F-1 students who have been in the US fewer than five years are “non-residents for tax purposes” and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. If you are a non-resident for tax purposes and your employer does withhold FICA, speak to your payroll office. You and your employer can refer to Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens” for additional information. Your earnings **are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes**. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. The results of the filing will determine if any of the withheld income taxes can be refunded to you.

