

Optional Practical Training General Information and Regulations

OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST. These are the documents you are going to collect for your application. If you will be doing your application via postal code, you will need 2 copies of each document. ISSS recommends doing your application via online.

- ✓ Form I-765
 - ✓ New I-20 (Recommended for OPT) (This will be processed during your scheduled appointment with an ISSS coordinator)
 - ✓ Passport
 - ✓ Visa
 - ✓ I-94
 - ✓ Copy of any I-20 that has been issued for Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
 - ✓ Copy of any previous OPT issued (EAD card or previous I-20)
 - ✓ Check or Money Order for \$410.00 (Made payable to – US Department of Homeland Security) if sending application by postal code
 - If you are submitting via online, you can pay by credit card
 - ✓ 2 passport sized photographs – 2x2 in size, white background, no glasses, or hats
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- Once you have been approved please email a scanned copy of your EAD card to iss@louisville.edu
 - Your F-1 status continues through the OPT period.
 - You will have 60 days grace period at the end of your OPT period.
 - You may begin working once you have obtained the EAD card (you may not start employment if your OPT has been approved but you have not yet received the I-797 or the EAD in the mail) and the start date on the card has been reached.
 - The EAD is not employer-specific, so you may change employers at will. However, employment must be directly related to the field of studies. Any employment outside your field of study is unauthorized and is a substantive violation of your status.
 - You cannot work at the University from the end of your degree program (End date on I-20) until your EAD has been approved and the card is in your hand. Please work with your department and the business center of your department to determine payment if you are on an assistantship or fellowship.

Social Security Number

If you do not yet have a Social Security Number (SSN), you will be required to have one for tax reporting purposes. You may apply for an SSN after you have received the EAD card and the start date on the card has been reached. Please talk with an advisor for the appropriate documentation.

OPT Regulations

- Within 10 business days of any change of employment, address, phone number, or email you will notify the ISSS office.
 - For address, phone, or email changes please update your ULink account. You will have access to ULink even upon graduation. Send an email to iss@louisville.edu to notify us of the update.

- For employment changes please notify ISSS via email at iss@louisville.edu. Please include the following items in the email:
 - Employer('s) name
 - Employer('s) address
 - Supervisor's name, email, and phone number
 - Job Title(s)
 - Company's EIN Number
 - Start and/or end dates of employment.
 - Any periods of unemployment
 - Date of exiting the U.S. (You must provide a date of exit if you decide to exit the U.S and complete your OPT status before the end date of your OPT)
 - If your visa status changes while on OPT

- Students on post-completion OPT are only allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment. This can be broken up during your one-year period, however you may need it.
 - Unemployment time is counted each day during the OPT dates indicated on the EAD.
 - Students who have OPT extended due to the cap-gap provisions continue to accrue unemployment time and are subject to the 90 days limitation on unemployment.
 - If you have a job offer that begins more than 90 days after your OPT begins, you will exceed your allowable unemployment time. Receiving a job offer within 90 days is not sufficient, you must be employed in one of the employment types listed above.
 - If you travel outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90 days limit.
 - Permanently leaving the U.S. without notifying the ISSS office results in the accidental accrual of unemployment. For this reason, you must contact the ISSS office if you decide to abandon your OPT.
 - If you travel abroad while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of your employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.
 - If you exceed the allowable period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, you are considered to have violated your status.

- All OPT employment, including post-completion OPT, must be in a job that is related to your degree program.
 - This employment may include the following (does not apply to students on STEM extension):
 - **Paid employment**
 - Students authorized for post-completion OPT must work 20 hours or above. This can be full-time with overtime, but the minimum is 20 hours.
 - **Multiple employers**
 - Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program. Employment during pre-completion OPT cannot exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.
 - **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists)**
 - Students who are musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, dates, and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs.
 - **Work for hire**

- Work for hire means that an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. It is sometimes called “1099 employment” because people who “work for hire” receive Internal Revenue Service Form 1099-MISC – which shows how much money was earned for a particular year – from the contracting company. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner**
 - Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- **Employment through an agency**
 - Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Unpaid employment**
 - Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

Note: It is recommended that you keep documentation of all your employment. In the future, you may be asked to provide proof that your employment during OPT was in your field of study.

Specifically, you should maintain evidence — for each job — of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and a description of the work.

If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, we highly recommend that you obtain a signed letter from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work you performed. Keep this for personal record.

Travel during Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Post-Completion OPT is Pending

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (this requirement does not apply to Canadian citizens)
- I-20 (with a travel signature no older than six months)
- I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797) (Although not always required, if you have not received your receipt notice, this does not usually create an issue)

Post-Completion OPT is Approved

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (this requirement does not apply to Canadian citizens)
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months)
- EAD card
- Evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer.

- If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa when your post-completion OPT application is pending, you should also be sure to have your I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797) in addition to the usual documents required for a visa application.

Important Travel Notes

If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa, then it is recommended that you not travel until you are approved for OPT. You should be sure to have your EAD card and evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer in addition to the usual documents required for a visa application. Regulations state that during post-completion OPT, the travel signature should be no older than six months if you are traveling out of the U.S. Source: 8CFR214.2(f)(13)(ii)

Students who have an EAD card for post-completion OPT and evidence of either a job or a job offer can leave and re-enter the U.S. during their OPT period. Of course, re-entry to the U.S. is never guaranteed.

Students whose EAD card has not yet been issued (OPT application has not yet been approved by USCIS) can re-enter the U.S. to resume the employment search. While your OPT application is pending, you are not required to have a job, or a job offer for re-entry to the U.S.

If a student who has an EAD card but does not have a job or a job offer leaves the US during the post-completion OPT period, OPT ends. Border officials might not allow someone in this situation to re-enter the U.S. Thus, students who do not have a U.S. job or a U.S. job offer but who plan to leave and re-enter the U.S. after their EAD card has been issued (their OPT has been approved by USCIS) are taking a risk.

For more information, see the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security FAQ for Travel](#).

If you cannot find employment or it is the end of your OPT, you may have the following options:

- Apply to UofL or another university to continue your education by a change of level or transferring to another institution.
- Depart the United States (be sure to notify the ISSS office if you abandon your OPT and leave).
- Change of status to another legal status if possible.

F-1 OPT 24-month STEM Extension.

Some students on post-completion OPT may be eligible for an extension of OPT if they received a U.S. degree in a STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Information about the STEM Extension can be found on the ISSS website.

By signing this document, you agree that you have read and understood the above regulations for OPT. Also, OPT is the responsibility of the student applying. The International Student & Scholar Services office at UofL holds no responsibility for my OPT status.

Signature: _____ Date: _____