

## OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

*General information:* Optional Practical Training (OPT) enables international students to gain valuable work experience related to their fields of study. F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of full-time employment authorization for each HIGHER level of education completed. Applications are filed with the Office of International Student and Scholar Services, but it is the Citizenship and Immigration Services which approves the applications. While OPT is not employer specific, OPT work must be related to the field of study just completed.

*Eligibility:* International students who wish to gain OPT authorization must demonstrate that they are in valid F-1 status. They must have been enrolled full time for a full academic year prior to the OPT start date.

*Pre-completion vs. Post-completion OPT:* While students may apply for OPT prior to the completion of their programs of study, timing issues prevent this from being a realistic option for most students. OPT applications are reviewed by the CIS Service Center in Lincoln, Nebraska which can take up to 3 months to process the applications. For this reason, most students wait until their final term of study before applying for OPT. Graduate students who are engaged in thesis/dissertation-option programs are eligible to apply for OPT upon completion of their required coursework (core as well as minor and elective coursework).

*Extensions:* Some Science, Technology, Engineering and Math students may apply for a 17-month extension. See OPT Extension Instructions handout for more information.

*Application timing:* Because OPT is authorized by the CIS service in Lincoln Nebraska, students must pay careful attention to when they file. OPT applications must be *in* Lincoln, NE within 60 days of the end of your program of study, measured by Portland State as the Friday of finals week of your final term of enrollment. No later. We therefore require that students submit their OPT applications to the OISSL office at least 10 business days prior to the end of that period. Students may apply up to 90 days before their program ending date.

*Starting OPT:* Students may specify the date they wish to begin OPT. That start date must fall within the 60 days following the completion of their courses of study. For example, in a term which ends June 16, the start date of OPT may be any time between June 17 and August 15. Once students have specified a preferred start date and the application has been sent, the start date is not easily altered. Please choose carefully. You may not begin working until you have received your Employment Authorization Document.

*Travel while on OPT:* When students have been approved for OPT they are still in F1 visa status and therefore require a valid travel signature and a valid F1 visa *in addition* to their valid EAD to re-enter the United States. Because the regulatory language states that students who have been approved for OPT are only eligible to re-enter to “resume” employment, we have been told that student who travel before they have secured a job may be denied entry to the United States. We urge students to be cautious if traveling before employment has been secured. If an emergency requires you to leave the U.S. while your OPT is pending or before you’ve found a job, a status letter from our office is generally helpful.

*Unemployment during OPT period:* The April 2008 regulations prohibit students from being unemployed for more than 90 days during the initial 12-month period of OPT. Students must report (to [psuopt@pdx.edu](mailto:psuopt@pdx.edu)) when they begin working for an employer AND when they stop working for that employer to OISSL. If unemployed for more than 90 days total, a student is considered to be in violation of status.

## OPT FILING PROCEDURE

Please bring the following documents to OISSS. We will review your application and check your status maintenance then issue the I-20 on which your OPT period will be recommended. Once you sign this new I-20, we will mail your application to the CIS processing center in Lincoln NE. We require 5-7 business days to process your application, so please plan ahead!

- ❑ CIS form I-765 (attached). You may also choose to download the form from the CIS website, located at [http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765\\_form.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765_form.pdf). If you think there is any chance that you will move in the 4 months it may take the CIS to process your OPT application, please consider using our office address (we have a mailing label you can use). Your EAD is federal mail which is NOT forwarded by the post office. If you move while your OPT application is being processed, your EAD may be returned to CIS, which can significantly delay your receiving your work authorization.
- ❑ Check or money order for \$340.00 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The CIS will not accept cash. (Be sure to check the USCIS website for the most current fees: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> click on Immigration Forms and scroll to I-765)
- ❑ 2 passport photos. Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo.
- ❑ Photocopies of the following pages of your passport: Identity pages (including photo, personal information, and expiration date), and US visa.
- ❑ A photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card. (Although nothing may appear on the back of your I-94, it is important for the CIS to see that it is blank.)
- ❑ Photocopies of *all* CPT authorizations during your current degree program (including those from previous schools, if applicable).
- ❑ Advisor Verification Form (attached). This form must be signed by your academic advisor.
- ❑ Photocopies of previous Employment Authorization Documents. If you have received an EAD card in the past for any reason, please bring a photocopy of both sides of the card.
- ❑ Upon submitting all the required documentation, a new I-20 will be created, which you will need to sign before the application can be sent. You will be contacted when the new I-20 is ready to be signed.

If you have any questions about OPT, please attend one of the many OPT/CPT workshops offered by OISSS throughout the academic year. Once you've done that, feel free to contact your international student advisor either by phone (503-725-4094) or by e-mail: [lutherc@pdx.edu](mailto:lutherc@pdx.edu), [jndavis@pdx.edu](mailto:jndavis@pdx.edu) or [mclaughm@pdx.edu](mailto:mclaughm@pdx.edu).

## Advisor Verification Form - Optional Practical Training

### To: Academic Advisors or Authorized Department Personnel

The international student named below is applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is 12 months of employment authorization given by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services which allows international students to gain practical work experience in their fields of study, usually upon completion of their degree programs. An international student advisor recommends this type of work authorization but the Citizenship and Immigration Service actually authorizes it.

Before this authorization can be granted, the Office of Int'l Student Services must receive verification from you, the student's academic advisor, of the date the student is EXPECTED to complete his or her degree requirements. The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date but the date all the requirements for the degree are fulfilled. Undergraduate students must have a signature from their departmental advisor (major requirements) and from a UASC advisor (general ed requirements). In the case of graduate students, it is important for you to verify if the graduate student is engaged in thesis or dissertation research but has completed all coursework requirements.

*Please complete the form below and return it to us so that we may process this student's request. Should you have any questions, please contact Christina Luther ([luther@pdx.edu](mailto:luther@pdx.edu)), Josh Davis ([jndavis@pdx.edu](mailto:jndavis@pdx.edu)) or Megan McLaughlin ([mclaughm@pdx.edu](mailto:mclaughm@pdx.edu)) phone : 503-725-4094.*

### To: International Student and Scholar Services (OISSS),

This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_ (student's name) has completed or is expected to complete all degree requirements on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) and will receive the degree of \_\_\_\_\_ in the field or major of \_\_\_\_\_.

All coursework for the degree was/will be completed by \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

(This student will complete all required coursework by the above date but will continue to work full time on thesis/dissertation requirements : Yes\_\_\_ No \_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Advisor's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
UASC Advisor's signature  
(undergrads only – general university requirements)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number and /or E-mail Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number and /or E-mail Address

If student has coursework remaining in his/her final term of study, please tell us which classes must be completed. Please feel free share any information of which you think we should be aware.

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