OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)
ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION

OVERVIEW

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity to **apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work in your field of study**.

OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

WHAT IS MY STATUS WHILE ON OPT?

OPT is not a different immigration status. OPT is a benefit available to students with F-1 status and you will remain in F-1 status during OPT.

EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

WHAT ARE MY EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS WHILE ON OPT?

- ☐ Any employment you engage in while on OPT **must be directly related to your major**. OISS advisors are unable to determine your degree relevancy or confirm that your job is directly related; determining the relevancy is up to you.
- ☐ Employment must be a **minimum of 20 hours per week**. There is no defined maximum number of hours one may work while on Post-Completion OPT.
- ☐ Employment can be **paid or unpaid** as long as unpaid work does not violate labor laws.
- ☐ You may work for **multiple employers** as long as all employment is directly related to your major.
- ☐ **Most types of employment are allowed**, including, but not limited to: regular paid employment; short term employers/gigs; postdoc positions; work for hire/1099 employment; self-employment.

ELIGIBILITY

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT?

- ☐ Currently maintaining F-1 status
- ☐ Enrolled full-time for one academic year (two semesters)
- ☐ Enrolled full-time in final semester (even if Summer) *OR* have approved Reduced Course Load (RCL)
- ☐ Have not accrued 12+ months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- ☐ In the U.S. at time of submitting application

✳ **You do not need a job offer** to apply for Post-Completion OPT.

DETERMINE YOUR OPT TIMELINE

WHAT ARE CURRENT PROCESSING TIMES?

OISS requires 8-10 business days to review and process your OPT I-20 request and issue your OPT I-20.

USCIS processing times can vary. You can check the USCIS Case Processing Times site to find out how long I-765 applications are currently taking. Please note that your actual processing time could be longer or shorter.

OISS recommends using a mailing address on your application where you will be able to receive mail for 4-5 months in the future.

WHEN AM I ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR OPT?

You may apply up to **90 days before** your program end date and up to **60 days after** your program end date.



Utilize the Date Calculator to help determine when you are eligible to apply for OPT. OISS encourages all students to apply as soon as they are eligible.

WHAT IS MY PROGRAM END DATE?

Your program end date **depends on your degree level and academic plan**:

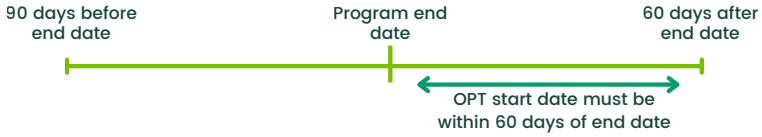
Undergraduate	Last day of final exams in final semester			
Masters	Last day of final exams in final semester	Comprehensive exam date	Thesis defense date	Last day of Graduate Assistantship in final semester
Doctoral	Last day of final exams in final semester	Dissertation defense date	Dissertation submission date	Last day of Graduate Assistantship in final semester
Medical	Last day of classes in final semester			
Law	Last day of final exams in final semester			

You must consult with your academic or graduate advisor to confirm your program end date.

OISS will update (shorten) the program end date on your I-20 based on this information. Students with Graduate Assistantships and on-campus employment are ineligible for employment after their new program end date without a valid EAD.

HOW DO I CHOOSE MY OPT START DATE?

Your start date must be **between the day after your program end date** and **up to 60 days after your program end date** (within your 60-day grace period).



You should have a clear start date in mind before submitting your OPT I-20 Request. Once your OPT application has been submitted, your start date cannot be changed.

If you have questions or would like to discuss possible start date scenarios, you should schedule an appointment or email your assigned OISS advisor before submitting your OPT I-20 Request.

There is no "best" start date. It depends on your personal situation:

- **Have a job offer?** Choose your job start date.
- **Want to begin working immediately after graduation?** Choose a date just after your program end date.
- **Need more time to find a job?** Choose a start date later within your 60-day grace period.

APPLICATION PROCESS

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- You do not need a job offer to apply.
- You must be physically present in the U.S. to apply.
- If you depart the U.S. during your 60 day grace period, you lose eligibility to apply for OPT.
- Do not submit your application to USCIS without receiving your new OPT I-20 from OISS.
- USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
- USCIS must receive your application before the end of your 60-day grace period.

1 STEP 1: COMPLETE OPT D2L COURSE

All students applying for OPT must complete the D2L course "Optional Practical Training OISS".

You must enroll in the course using the link below. You will not be able to enroll through the D2L Self Registration page.

OISS: OPT Course Self Enrollment Page

You will be required to upload your certificate of completion with the OPT I-20 request.

To download your certificate in D2L:

- [ ] Go to Assessments
- [ ] Select Awards
- [ ] Choose OISS OPT Course Completion
- [ ] Scroll down in the window and select Generate Certificate

A PDF certificate will download. This is the document you must upload with your OPT I-20 request.

2 STEP 2: GATHER AND PREPARE APPLICATION MATERIALS

- [ ] Create USCIS online account
- [ ] Select "File a Form Online" and select "I-765 Application for Employment Authorization"
- [ ] Generate I-765 "draft snapshot". In the "Review and Submit" section, click "Application Summary" and select "View Draft Snapshot". Download and save the PDF. You will upload this to your MyOISS OPT I-20 request eForm.

  IMPORTANT: Do not pay or submit to USCIS until you have received your NEW OPT I-20 from OISS - See step 3! If you apply without your OPT I-20 it is likely your application will be rejected or denied!
- [ ] I-94 Record (not travel history): Obtain your most recent I-94
- [ ] Passport: Photocopy of the picture page of your passport
- [ ] Passport Photo: Digital photo meeting Department of State's passport photo requirements. You may use the Department of State's Photo Tool to upload and crop your photo to the correct size.
- [ ] If applicable: Photocopies of previous EAD (front and back)
- [ ] If applicable: Photocopies of all I-20s showing previous Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorizations, at all degree levels. If you are missing any CPT I-20s, OISS recommends writing a letter of explanation including start and end dates, degree levels, etc.

APPLICATION PROCESS CONT.

3 STEP 3: REQUEST AND RECEIVE OPT I-20 FROM OISS

- [ ] Login to myoiss.msu.edu and click on F-1 Optional Practical Training
- [ ] Submit OPT I-20 Request eForm
- [ ] Academic Advisor ("approver") completes their section of the eForm
- [ ] OISS Advisor reviews your request and creates the OPT I-20

OISS requires 8–10 business days to review and process your OPT I-20 request.

If your request is complete and accurate, OISS will recommend you for OPT in SEVIS and issue your OPT I-20, which will list your OPT recommendation and requested start and end dates on page 2.

If corrections are needed, your OISS advisor will contact you via your MSU email.

Once you receive your OPT I-20, review it carefully, confirm the OPT recommendation on page 2, then print and sign it before submitting your application to USCIS.

USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the OPT recommendation in SEVIS.

4 STEP 4: PAY AND FINISH SUBMITTING APPLICATION TO USCIS

- [ ] Log in to your USCIS online account
- [ ] Navigate to the "Evidence" section of the I-765 and upload OPT I-20 under the "Form I-20" section
- [ ] Confirm all fields in your I-765 are complete and all required evidence is uploaded
- [ ] Provide payment with a US Debit or Credit Card
- [ ] Submit your application

5 STEP 5: BIOMETRICS SUBMISSION AT AN APPLICATION SUPPORT CENTER

USCIS requires OPT applicants to complete a biometrics appointment with USCIS before applications are processed.

The process is as follows:

- [ ] **Receive Your ASC Appointment Notice:** Within approximately 30 days after you submit your OPT application, you will receive an Application Support Center (ASC) Appointment Notice from USCIS.
- [ ] **Review the Appointment Details:** The notice will include the date, time, and location of your biometrics appointment. Read this information carefully and check for any errors.
- [ ] **Prepare for Your Appointment:** Bring the following items to your appointment:
  - ✳ Your ASC Appointment Notice (Form I-797C)
  - ✳ Your OPT or STEM OPT receipt notice
  - ✳ Your passport
  - ✳ A copy of your I-94 Form
- [ ] **Attend the Appointment:** You must attend your scheduled appointment as instructed. Missing it without notifying USCIS may lead to delays or denial of your OPT application.
- [ ] **After the Appointment:** Once your biometrics are collected, USCIS will continue processing your OPT application. No further action is needed unless USCIS contacts you for additional information.

PREMIUM PROCESSING

WHAT IS PREMIUM PROCESSING SERVICE?

The USCIS offers an optional premium processing service to provide expedited processing to certain USCIS forms.

Students submitting the form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization for OPT or STEM OPT extensions are eligible to request premium processing by submitting the form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service, and paying the premium processing fee.

HOW FAST IS PREMIUM PROCESSING?

Premium processing guarantees USCIS will make an adjudicative action (approval, denial, request for evidence, notice of intent to deny) within 30 business days of receiving the premium processing request.

If the application requires a student to submit additional evidence or documentation due to the issuance of a request of evidence or notice of intent to deny, the premium processing period will **stop and reset**. A new premium processing time period will begin when the response is received by USCIS.

HOW MUCH IS THE PREMIUM PROCESSING FEE?

The premium processing service fee is an additional fee. Please check the USCIS website for up-to-date fee rates.

HOW DO I REQUEST PREMIUM PROCESSING?

Students can submit the form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service, through their USCIS online account along with the form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.

Remember, students MUST receive the OPT or STEM OPT recommending form I-20 before they can submit the form I-765 and form I-907.

CAN I REQUEST PREMIUM PROCESSING LATER?

Students can file a form I-907, Premium Processing Service after they have submitted the form I-765, as long as USCIS has not made a final decision on the request. However, the 30 business day window does not begin until the date of the filing.

WHO CAN I TALK TO IF I HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

Students should consider the current estimated times for USCIS adjudication before making a decision. Students can contact their OISS advisor if they have further questions regarding premium processing.

TRAVEL

There are risks involved and travel while OPT is pending should be undertaken with caution.

OISS can NEVER guarantee re-entry to the United States (U.S). Admission to the U.S. is up to the discretion of the Customs & Border Protection (CBP) officer at the port of entry.

TRAVEL WHILE OPT IS PENDING BEFORE YOUR PROGRAM END DATE

Before your program end date on your I-20, you are still considered a student. We recommend traveling with:

- ☐ Valid passport (valid at least 6 months into the future from date of re-entry)
- ☐ Valid F-1 visa
- ☐ Most recent I-20 with valid travel signature (less than 12 months old at time of re-entry)

TRAVEL WHILE OPT IS PENDING AFTER YOUR PROGRAM END DATE

After your program end date, we recommend traveling with:

- ☐ Valid passport (valid at least 6 months into the future from date of re-entry)
- ☐ Valid F-1 visa
- ☐ Most recent OPT I-20 with valid travel signature (less than 6 months old at time of re-entry)
- ☐ I-797 Receipt Notice

Other things to keep in mind while traveling with a pending application:

- ☐ You will need to have someone closely monitor your mail
- ☐ If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE) from USCIS, those typically require immediate attention and it may be difficult for you to respond from outside of the U.S.
- ☐ If your application is rejected or denied after your program end date you will not be able to reenter or reapply
- ☐ If your application is approved while outside of the US, you will need your EAD to reenter
- ☐ If your F-1 visa is expired, you will need your EAD to reapply for an F-1 visa

OPT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IF I APPLY FOR OPT BUT DO NOT GRADUATE AS ANTICIPATED?

OISS recommends waiting to apply for OPT until you are confident in your graduation plans.

Applying after your program end date is not the worst-case scenario, many students do this.

If you have already applied for OPT and realize you will not complete your coursework, contact your OISS Advisor. Depending on the timing, you may need to withdraw your OPT application or limit employment to 20 hours per week until you complete your coursework.

Graduate students working on a thesis or dissertation during OPT are permitted to work full-time, but all degree requirements must be completed before the end of OPT.

HOW MANY TIMES CAN I APPLY FOR OPT?

Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT at each higher degree level.

For example, you may receive 12 months of OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and another 12 months after completing a master's degree.

If you use OPT after completing a master's degree, you would not be eligible for an additional 12 months of OPT after completing a second master's degree.

OPT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONT...

I AM A COLLEGE OF MEDICINE STUDENT, SHOULD I APPLY FOR OPT?

OISS recommends that all students who may require employment authorization after graduation apply for OPT.

Some residency programs may require you to begin residency using J-1 status, though this is not true of all residency sites/locations. If you do not apply for OPT and then find out that your residency program cannot immediately provide J-1 documentation, or if there is a delay with a change of status to J-1, you may be left without employment authorization.

Applying for OPT provides a safety net in case there are delays or changes in your plans. If you move forward with a different status, OISS can close out your F-1 record.

MY EMPLOYER IS FILING FOR H1B, SHOULD I STILL APPLY FOR OPT? DOES HAVING TWO APPLICATIONS PENDING AT THE SAME TIME IMPACT ONE ANOTHER?

In general, you may have both a H-1B petition and OPT application pending at the same time, they do not impact one another.

OISS would recommend talking with your employer. Many employers work with lawyers for H-1B petitions and that lawyer may have a prefererence.

If you are on OPT and get approved for H-1B, you should contact your OISS advisor so we can properly close out your F-1 record.

WHAT IS THE RECEIPT NOTICE AND WHAT DO I DO WITH IT?

USCIS will provide all applicants with a I-797 Notice of Action after receiving the OPT application. The I-797C Notice of Action should be accessible within 48 hours in the USCIS online account.

Once you have received your Receipt Notice, log in to myoiss.msu.edu, select F-1 Optional Practical Training and upload a copy of your Receipt Notice to OISS.

HOW CAN I CHECK THE STATUS OF MY CASE?

You can use the Receipt Number listed on your I-797C to check the status of your application on the USCIS website.

WHAT DO I DO WHILE MY APPLICATION IS PENDING?

You are eligible to remain in the U.S. until USCIS makes a decision on your case and are considered to be maintaining status during this time.

You are not eligible to conduct any practical training or employment after your program end date, and while your OPT is pending, until you receive your EAD and your selected OPT start date has arrived. This includes attending work-related orientations or volunteering for your employer or professor.

WHAT IF MY START DATE HAS PASSED BUT I HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE EAD?

If your start date has passed and USCIS has not yet made a decision on your case, you are still eligible to continue to remain the U.S. while your application is pending.

In most cases, USCIS will adjust your start date to the date your OPT is approved. For example, if you select a start date of June 1 but USCIS does not approve your case until July 1, USCIS may adjust your start date to July 1.