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Optional Practical Training (F-1 Off-Campus Employment) Application Instructions

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Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus prior to or after graduation. Most F-1 students who have been in student status for *one full academic year* are eligible for up to 12 months of OPT. This includes time accrued while maintaining F-1 status at another institution prior to attending Pacific Oaks College, time authorized by an Designated School Official (DSO) to be registered for less than a full course of study during the first year of one's study, and under other special circumstances.

OPT is available in the following cases:

Pre-Completion:
- Part-time or full-time during the student's annual vacation and other times when school is not in session if the student intends, and is eligible to register for the next semester (graduates and undergraduates);
- Part-time while school is in session (graduates and undergraduates);
- Part-time or full-time after completion of all course requirements for the degree, excluding thesis/dissertation (graduates only);

Post-Completion:
- Full-time after the completion of *all* requirements for one's degree

Authorization for Optional Practical Training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), but requires a Designated School Official (DSO) to make a recommendation for OPT in SEVIS for a student prior to submission of their application to USCIS.

Application Timeframe

Since it can take up to 90 days to obtain OPT authorization from USCIS, it is important that you submit your application in a timely manner.   Students applying for **pre-completion OPT** may file up to 90 days before he or she has completed the full year academic year requirement, but cannot apply for OPT more than 120 days in advance of the requested start date.

If you are applying for **post-completion OPT**, the Center for Achievement, Resources and Enrichment (CARE) recommends that you submit an application for Optional Practical Training prior to your completion date. However, changes to immigration regulations now also allow you to apply for OPT within the 60 days following the completion of your studies.

- **Submission of a post-completion application prior to one's completion date**
  A student may apply up to 90 days prior to his or her program end date, but is restricted by immigration regulations from filing a request for post-completion OPT *more* than 90 days prior to his or her program end date.

- **Submission of a post-completion application following one's completion date**
  A student should ask his or her DSO to recommend post-completion OPT within 30 days of the date the student expects the application to arrive at the USCIS Service Center. If the OPT recommendation in SEVIS is dated more than 30 days prior to the receipt date, the application may be denied.

Regardless of when you choose to apply, you should keep in mind the time that both CARE and USCIS will need to process your application and the date when you wish to begin employment.   You legally cannot begin employment until you have received your EAD card and the start date on the card has been reached.

How to Get Employment Authorization for OPT:

1. Review the information contained in this document.
2. Download and complete an OPT application. Forms and information on fees available at: http://uscis.gov
3. Make an appointment to see a DSO in CARE and bring your completed OPT application with you. If you qualify, the DSO will produce an I-20 with the recommendation for OPT to accompany your application.
4. If you are approved, USCIS will send you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) listing the dates you are authorized for employment. Once you receive authorization, please provide CARE with a copy of the card for your file.
5. CARE will produce a new I-20 showing you have been approved for OPT.

The application for Optional Practical Training consists of the following items:

1. Completed Optional Practical Training Information Sheet (see last page of this document)
2. Form I-765*, completed and signed
   Note: In item #16 write (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT OR (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT
3. Personal check or money order made out to "USCIS" for the I-765 fee (verify cost on USCIS website as it is subject to change).
4. Form G-1145* (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance) completed with your email address.
5. Two color passport style photos (2 inches x 2 inches) with your name, date of birth (dd/mm/yr) and SEVIS number written on the back of both photos. In your photo, your head should be between 1 and 1 3/8 inches from the top of your head to your chin. See the Department of State website for additional photo specifications (http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html).
6. Copy of all your I-20s from POC, including the one showing your entry into the U.S. or approved change of status to F-1 (if you applied for a change of status in the U.S.) and any I-20s that show any CPT that you may have done.
7. Copy of your visa, and the biographical pages of your passport; include a copy of any pages indicating extensions of your passport as your passport must be valid to be granted OPT.
8. Copy of front and back of your I-94 card. You will also need to include a copy of your electronic I-94 verification card which can be accessed online at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html
9. Copy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) (both sides)

While on OPT, you still will be considered in F-1 status, although you may no longer be an actual student. During this time, you are still required to adhere to all F-1 immigration regulations and remain in touch with your DSO at POC. Pacific Oaks College is responsible for notifying SEVIS with any changes in your

address, employer, if you terminate OPT, or begin a new program. You must remember to update us with these changes.

OPT Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: How do I choose my OPT start date?
A: There are several factors that you will want to take into consideration when determining a start date for OPT, including the type of OPT for which you are applying, when you wish to start employment, the date on which you apply for OPT, and OPT immigration regulations. If you will be applying for post-completion OPT, you can request a start date anytime after you have completed your studies, but not to exceed more than 60 days after you your completion date (this is not necessarily the same as your graduation date). Regardless of the type of OPT, it is best to allow at least 60 days processing time before a requested start date.

Q: How many times am I eligible for OPT?
A: A student is eligible for up to 12 months of full time OPT per academic level (Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate). However, once a student has changed educational levels, he/she loses the privilege to engage in OPT for the lower educational level if he/she does not engage in OPT employment BEFORE changing levels.

Q: How does use of OPT part-time (20 hours or less per week) affect the 12 month limit of full time OPT for which I am eligible?
A: Time on OPT is deducted at Full Time, and does not have a pro-rating if it is done Part Time.

Q: Does use of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) affect my eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT)?
A: In some cases, yes. Use of full time CPT for 12 months or more eliminates the participant's eligibility for OPT. However, use of less than 12 months of full time CPT or part time CPT does NOT affect eligibility for OPT.

Q: Can I change my OPT start date once my application has been submitted to USCIS?
A: Maybe; a request may be submitted to USCIS but it is unlikely that USCIS will be able to adjust your dates of employment once they have processed your application.

Q: Can I cancel my OPT request after it has been submitted to USCIS without losing the possibility of doing OPT at a later time?
A: Maybe; it depends on whether USCIS has approved the application for OPT. After it has been approved by USCIS, a student cannot reset the OPT clock. Thus a student must use the time or lose it.

Q: I think I may complete my degree this semester, but I'm not sure. When should I apply for OPT?
A: Typically we recommend a student apply for OPT before they complete their degree requirements, however, if you are unsure, you may want to wait until the end of the semester to apply. You may submit your application for OPT up to 60 days following the completion of your degree (during your grace period).

Q: Can I take some time off between completing my degree and when I start OPT?
A: Students who have completed their degree and have maintained their F-1 status are entitled to a 60 day grace period in which time they may prepare to depart the United States, begin a new program of study, change status or prepare for OPT. However, students who wish to complete a full 12 months of OPT must do so within 14 months of the date they completed their degree requirements. Consequently, students should NOT plan to start OPT more than 2 months after they have completed their degree. Once a student departs on their grace period, their F-1 status effectively ends, and they are no longer eligible to re-enter on their previous F-1 status nor apply for OPT

Q: Can I begin work as soon as I receive my EAD card?
A: No, you may not begin employment until the start date indicated on the card.

Q: What if I can't find a job while authorized for OPT?
A: You may want to consider volunteering your services in a position related to your field of study. Recent changes in immigration regulations now state that a student on post-completion OPT may not accrue more than 90 aggregate days of unemployment or she will be considered out of status. A student can also choose to end his/her OPT at any time in order to resume his/her studies or return home, although unused time CANNOT be reused at a later time.

Q: Can I travel while on OPT?
A: In general, it is not advisable to travel after you have received your EAD card *unless* you already have a job.

Q: Can I take classes while on post-completion OPT?
A: If a student is already approved for post-completion OPT but discovers that coursework must still be completed, he/she can return to school but may only use the EAD to work part-time (20 hours/week). Other students who are on OPT may pursue additional studies so long as they continue to work full time. However, per immigration regulations, "authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level." Thus, if you have just been authorized for OPT on the basis of your Master's and wish to work on your doctorate, you cannot do both things at the same time.

Q: How long do I have after my OPT ends to remain in the United States?
A: Students have a 60 day grace period starting at the end of their last day of OPT authorization. During this grace period, students may travel within the U.S., pack, etc. Students may not begin a new degree program during this grace period, but must transfer to the new program before beginning studies. Once a student exits the U.S. while on their grace period, their F-1 status effectively ends and they are no longer able to re-enter the U.S. on this specific F-1 status.Therefore, you must take steps to maintain your status by applying for a change of status, beginning a new program of study or depart the United States BEFORE your OPT end date. If your employer has applied for an H1-B for you, however, please consult your DSO for additional

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Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information Sheet
2014-2015

Directions: Please complete this form and attach it to the front of your application for OPT. Either drop the completed application off at CARE for review, or make an appointment to see a DSO in CARE and bring the application with you. Remember to apply about 90 days prior to the date you wish to begin employment.

Part I: To be completed by the student.

First Name: _____   **Last Name:** _____

Current Address: _____

City: _____   **State:** _____   **Zip Code:** _____

PO Email: _____   **Personal Email:** _____

Department: _____   **Level of study:** ☐ Bachelors ☐ Master's

Degree Program Status: I am pursuing a: ☐ thesis   ☐ non-thesis

Choose one:
☐ I have completed all requirements for my degree
☐ I have not completed all requirements for my degree
☐ I have completed all course requirements for my degree and am just working on my thesis

Anticipated Date of Completion (mm/dd/yr): _____

Type of OPT Requested: ☐ Pre-completion   ☐ Post-completion (see instructions for definition)

Requested OPT Start Date: _____   **Requested OPT End Date:** _____

Have you been authorized for more than 12 months of *full time* CPT for this degree program?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Prior to this request, have you been authorized for any OPT for your current degree program?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Location of Optional Practical Training (if known at time of application) –NOTE: Employment information must be provided to the CARE Office once your OPT has been approved and you secure employment.

Name of Employer/Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____   **State:** _____   **Zip Code:** _____

Telephone: _____   **Fax:** _____

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Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information Sheet

2014-2015

Part 2: To be completed by the student's academic advisor.

Note to Advisor: This student is applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT), a type of off-campus work authorization available to international students in F-1 status. Immigration regulations restricts the type of OPT for which the student can apply based on the student's academic status. Please complete the form below, indicating the student's anticipated date of completion, and return this form to the student to submit. If you have questions, please contact Pat Meda at the Center for Achievement, Resources and Enrichment (CARE).

Student's First Name: _____   **Student's Last Name:** _____

Degree Program: _____   **Degree Level:** _____

Anticipated Date of Completion (mm/dd/yr): _____

This date represents (check one):
☐ **Last day of classes in final semester**
☐ **Submission of thesis**
☐ **Date of degree conferral**

Advisor's Name (Written): _____

Advisor's Department: _____   **Advisor's Title:** _____

Advisor's Phone: _____   **Advisor's Email:** _____

Advisor's Signature: _____   **Date:** _____