

## **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

### **DEFINITION**

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment benefit which may be granted, under specific circumstances, to F-1 students to enable them to gain practical experience in their field of study by working off-campus for a period of 1 year following completion of their studies. Federal regulations state that OPT employment must be "directly related to the student's major area of study." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

### **ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENT**

To be eligible for OPT, the student must meet all of the following conditions:

- The student must be in Active F-1 status.
- The student must be in the last semester of their program of study.
- The student must not have 12 or more months of full-time CPT authorization.
- The student must have completed one academic year, which is defined as two (2) semesters, at full-time enrollment.
- Students pursuing only an ESL certificate are not eligible for OPT.
- Students who transferred from another school may count the time spent at the previous school(s) toward the one academic year requirement, provided they were enrolled full-time and were not only in an ESL program at the previous school(s). Students will need to provide proof of full-time study at the other school(s) if they intend to count that time toward the one academic year requirement.

### **ELIGIBILITY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

A student does not need to be employed or have a job offer to apply for OPT. Once authorized for OPT, employment must be in the student's field of study; it cannot relate to a previous area of study.

*Example: A student completing an MBA, who previously completed a Bachelor's of Mechanical Engineering, must seek employment in a management position; the student cannot accept an engineering position.*

### **LIMITS AND DURATION OF OPT**

OPT is authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS), not by the University.

Students need to contact the Office of International Programs to set up an OPT advising appointment. During this appointment, the student will work with an international student advisor to create an application packet consisting of the required forms and supporting documents. An international student advisor from the University must recommend OPT by issuing a new I-20 showing that OPT has been requested on your SEVIS record; this new I-20 will be provided to you during an OPT advising appointment.

Students are limited to one OPT period of 12 months per education level. For example, a student who pursues a bachelor's degree may apply for OPT following completion of that bachelor's degree, return to school to pursue a master's degree, and then apply for another OPT period following completion of the master's degree. However, a student who pursues one master's degree followed by a second master's degree is only eligible for one OPT period. Doctoral programs are considered to be a third educational level.

If a student was authorized for 12 or more months of full-time CPT, they are not eligible for OPT. Use of part-time CPT has no effect on OPT eligibility.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITS**

While on OPT, students are limited to 90 days of unemployment. After 90 days of unemployment, a student is considered to be out of status and must depart the U.S. immediately. Therefore, we recommend that after 60 days of unemployment, students should start making plans to depart the U.S. or return to a school to pursue a new degree program.

## **FAILRE TO COMPLETE YOUR DEGREE WHEN YOU'VE APPLIED FOR OPT**

If a student realizes that they will not meet all degree requirements as expected, they must immediately contact the Office of International Programs to get a program extension BEFORE their program end date, or they will be out of status. If the student has already applied for OPT, this can create some difficulties for the student. Any student who applies for OPT and then learns that they are not going to graduate as planned should contact the Office of International Programs immediately.

Students who have completed all courses but still need to finish their thesis, dissertation, or similar capstone project can apply for OPT and complete that project while starting their OPT period.

While on OPT, a student cannot begin a new degree program, although they can take part-time classes, incidental to their OPT employment. For example, a student could pursue a graduate certificate on a part-time basis while working on OPT.

## **STEM AND CAP-GAP EXTENSIONS**

### **STEM EXTENSION**

Students in certain degree programs may be eligible to apply for a 17-month extension of their OPT authorization. For more information, refer to LTU's "Guide to OPT STEM Extension" or contact the Office of International Programs.

### **CAP-GAP EXTENSION**

If a student is employed during their OPT period, and the employer petitions for an H1-B work visa for them, the student should contact the Office of International Programs immediately. Students will need to work with the OIP staff to ensure that their SEVIS record is updated correctly to make the transition from F-1 to H1-B status without any problems. Failure to notify the Office of International Programs of a change in status may cause problems when applying for visa or visa extensions in the future.

F-1 students on OPT with a timely filed petition for an H1-B visa are eligible for the Cap Gap extension, which extends their F-1 status and work authorization through September 30<sup>th</sup> of the year in which the H1-B status begins (note that H1-B visas begin on October 1<sup>st</sup> of every year). This is done so that there is no gap in employment between the end of the student's F-1 status and OPT authorization and the start of the H1-B work visa.

An H1-B work visa is related directly to the student's employment. The student's employer must sponsor the student as their employee by petitioning for the H1-B visa. **An H1-B visa is not academic; the University cannot assist students in petitioning for an H1-B visa.**

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

When you receive your I-797C Notice of Receipt, and later when you receive your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card, you must provide a copy to the Office of International Programs.

Once the OPT period begins, the student is required by law to report certain information to the University at the start of their OPT period, 6 months later, and **within 10 days of changes** to any of the following information:

- Current residential address
- Current employment status (employed, unemployed, self-employed, etc.)
- Employer name – if self-employed, student must provide their company name and federal tax ID number
- Employer address – if the employer has multiple locations, use the address where you usually work
- Supervisor's name and phone number

Students should use LTU's OPT Information Update form (available on-line or in the office) to satisfy the reporting requirements.

***Failure to provide these documents and updates may result in the cancellation of your OPT and the loss of your F-1 status.***

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Students can apply for OPT no sooner than 90 days prior to their program end date, and no later than 60 days after their program end date. Additionally, it will take USCIS approximately 3 months to process the application. Therefore, students should apply for OPT approximately 3 months prior to the end of the semester when you will be finishing your coursework. Students should read the Guide to Optional Practical Training before scheduling an advising appointment.

- 1. Attend an OPT Info Session and pick up an OPT application packet.** OPT Info Sessions are offered each semester; students are required to attend so that they are well-informed on the OPT regulations and application process. Read the entire "Guide to OPT" and review all forms and the list of required documents.
- 2. Contact the Office of International Programs to make an OPT advising appointment.** You must schedule an appointment for OPT advising; the international student advisors will not do OPT advising on a walk-in basis. Be sure to make a note of your appointment date and time.
- 3. Complete the required forms and gather the supporting documents.** The OPT application packet includes 2 forms that must be completed and has a checklist of all the required supporting documents. Use the time until your OPT advising appointment to complete the forms and gather your documents.
- 4. Meet the international student advisor for your OPT advising appointment.** Please arrive on-time for your appointment and come to the appointment fully prepared. If a student is very late for their appointment, or if the student does not have all of the completed forms and documents, the international student advisors reserve the right to reschedule the appointment for a later date.
- 5. Take your completed OPT packet from your appointment and send it to USCIS for processing.** If you followed all of these steps, you should have a completed OPT application packet. Send it off to USCIS, and wait for a response. Let your international student advisor know when you receive a receipt notice. If you receive any other correspondence from USCIS, contact your international student advisor for further information. It will take approximately 90 days for USCIS to process your application and send you an approval notice and your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card.

## **IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER**

### **DO NOT WORK WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION**

You cannot begin working, or continue working (for extensions and updates), until you receive your EAD card from USCIS **AND** you are within your OPT authorization dates. If you receive your card before your OPT authorization period begins, you must wait until your OPT start date until you begin working. If you reach your OPT start date but have not yet received your EAD card, you must wait until you receive the EAD card before you can begin working. **Working without authorization is a violation of F-1 status, and could result in termination of your status, denial of future applications (e.g. STEM Extensions, H1B, etc.), or denial of entry to the U.S. in the future.**

### **PROVIDE UPDATES TO THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS**

You must provide the Office of International Programs with a copy of your I-797C Notice of Receipt, which indicates that USCIS has received your OPT application packet, and with a copy of your EAD card, which is your Employment Authorization Document indicating that your OPT has been approved.

You must also notify the Office of International Programs of your residential address, employment status, employer, employment location, supervisor and supervisor's phone number. This information must be reported at the start of your OPT period, 6 months later, and within 10 days of any changes to any of that information.

***Failure to provide these documents and updates may result in the cancellation of your OPT and the loss of your F-1 status.***

# **OPT Document Checklist**

**THIS IS ONLY A LIST OF DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO APPLY FOR OPT. READ THE ATTACHED “Guide to Optional Practical Training (OPT)” FOR FULL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE OPT PROCESS.**

You must have all required documents with you and all forms filled out prior to your OPT advising appointment, or the international student advisor may reschedule your appointment for a later date.

**DO NOT STAPLE ANY ITEMS TOGETHER. THIS WILL FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF MAKING COPIES.**

Make sure all copies are clear and all information on the original document can be read on the copy.

Be careful when writing dates and make sure to use the U.S. format: mm/dd/yyyy (2-digit Month/2-digit Date/4-digit Year)

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**Completed OPT Request Form.**

- This is an internal LTU form that is required by the school.
- The middle section must be completed and signed by your academic advisor. If it is not signed by your academic advisor, the International Advisor will not issue the new I-20 showing the OPT request to complete the OPT application.
- Select your own OPT starting date within 60 days from your date of completion of studies. If you are not certain about the dates you want OPT, you can discuss it with the international student advisor during your OPT advising appointment.

**Completed form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.**

- This is the government’s form that is required by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- Write your family name first, using all uppercase letters; use uppercase and lowercase letters for your other, given names.
- **Use the address where you currently reside. DO NOT use an address where you plan to live in the future.** If you move during the application process, you must update your address on-line at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov); click on the “Change Your Address with USCIS” link, located on the left side of the webpage.
  - ➔ Canadian addresses will not be accepted. Canadian residents must use the University address and will be notified of any correspondence that is received on your behalf.
- Item #16 has already been completed. For OPT, it should read (c ) (3) (B)
- Item #17 is used only when applying for the OPT STEM extension.

**\$380 application fee.**

- The fee may be paid by a personal check or money order; CASH AND CREDIT CARDS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.
- The check or money order needs to be from a U.S. bank or other U.S. financial institution and must be payable in U.S. dollars; currencies from other countries, including Canada, will not be accepted.
- The check or money order must be made payable to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. Use the full name, no abbreviations other than “U.S.”

**Two color photos of you, taken according to U.S. passport specifications.**

- U.S. passports specifications are 2 in. x 2 in. (5cm x 5cm) in size and on a white background.
- Photos must be current. DO NOT USE OLD PHOTOS – IT WILL DELAY THE APPROVAL PROCESS.
- Write your name and admission number from your I-94 arrival/departure record on the back of both photos.

**Copies of all prior I-20 forms, even those issued by other schools.** Copy pages 1 & 3 only; do not copy page 2.

**Color copies of your passport page(s) showing biographical and validity information.**

**Color copies of your visa page(s) from your passport.**

**Color copies of front and back of your I-94 form.**

**New I-20 showing OPT request on page 3. THIS WILL BE ISSUED DURING THE OPT APPOINTMENT.**

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**Send application packet to: USCIS, P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036**

You are responsible for mailing your application packet to the USCIS Service Center. Send your package through the U.S. Postal Service, as they are the only service that will deliver to a P.O. Box. They have several service options; go to your local post office for more information. We strongly recommend using a service that has delivery confirmation. If you want to use FedEx, UPS or other courier services, ask the International Advisor for instructions, and send it to this address: *USCIS, Attn: AOS, 1820 Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85034*

**Students residing in other states at the time of application may need to send their application to a different address. Please notify the international advisor if you are not residing in Michigan.**

# OPT Request Form

**READ THE ATTACHED "Guide to Optional Practical Training (OPT)" BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM.**

*You must also complete and attach a USCIS Form I-765, which is a separate document.*

## **TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
*FAMILY NAME IN CAPITAL LETTERS, FOLLOWED BY GIVEN NAME IN REGULAR SCRIPT (EX: SMITH, John)*

LTU BANNER ID: \_\_\_\_\_ SEVIS ID: \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. HOME ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE FIRST GRANTED F-1 STATUS: \_\_\_\_\_

DEGREE LEVEL:  Bachelor's  Master's  Doctorate MAJOR: \_\_\_\_\_

REQUEST TYPE:  New OPT  STEM Extension of current OPT (End date of current OPT: \_\_\_\_\_)

OPT AUTHORIZATION REQUESTED:

START DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ END DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

OPT TYPE REQUESTED:  Post-completion full-time OPT  STEM Extension  Pre-completion part-time OPT

STUDENT'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## **TO BE SIGNED BY THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR FOR VERIFICATION** *(This section not required for STEM Extensions)*

WHEN WILL YOU COMPLETE YOUR COURSEWORK:  Fall (Dec)  Spring (May)  Summer (Jul/Aug) YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

HAVE YOU PETITIONED TO GRADUATE?  Yes  No - Contact Enrollment Services for more information on petition process.

**YOUR ACADEMIC ADVISOR'S SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED TO VERIFY WHEN YOU WILL COMPLETE YOUR COURSEWORK.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Advisor's Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Advisor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR**

Has the student had previous periods of CPT authorization?  No  Yes:  Part-time  Full-time

Are student's CPT periods part-time or full-time but under the 12 month limit?  No  Yes  N/A – no CPT  
*(If there is prior CPT authorization, attach print out from SEVIS showing the previous CPT periods.)*

SEVIS UPDATES:  Registration updated to reflect last semester  Program end date changed  OPT request entered

**OPT Recommended:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
DSO Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date entered into SEVIS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date I-20 issued (if different)