



Office of International Programs

Taubman Student Services Center – C405 ■ 248.204.4100 ■ Fax 248.204.4115 ■ international@ltu.edu

Guide to

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 be "directly related to the student's major area of study." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENT

All of the following conditions must be met in order for a student to be eligible for OPT.

- The student must be in Active F-1 status.
- For an initial period of OPT, the student must be in the last semester of their program of study. For the STEM Extension, the student file for the extension before the end date of their current OPT period.
- 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 in ESL programs are not eligible for OPT.
- Students who transferred from another school may count the time spent at the other school toward the one academic year requirement, provided they were enrolled full-time and were not in an ESL program. Students will need to provide proof of full-time study at the other school 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. Customs and Immigrations Services (USCIS), not by the University. 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.

OPT is generally used following completion of a student's degree; this is referred to as Post-Completion OPT. It is authorized for full-time employment for a period of 12 months. In rare instances, OPT can be authorized for part-time employment while a student is completing their degree; contact an international student advisor for more information on Pre-Completion OPT.

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.

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. Students must meet the following criteria to be eligible:

- Students must have completed a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree.
- The degree must be a designated STEM degree, as defined by the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). A list of the STEM degrees can be found on the SEVP website at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>
- The student must be **currently engaged** in an authorized period of post-completion OPT.
- The student must be employed by or have a job offer from an E-verify employer. The University has no means of determining which employers are enrolled in the E-verify program. It is the responsibility of the student to ask their employer if they are enrolled in the E-verify program.

Students who meet all of the above criteria are eligible to apply for the 17-month STEM extension. **Students must contact an international student advisor to obtain a new I-20 showing the extension request.** Students should contact the advisor approximately 4 months before the end of their current OPT period.

Students cannot apply for the STEM extension when they are applying for their initial 12-month OPT period. This is not a single 29-month period of OPT, but a 12-month period followed by a 17-month extension.

CAP-GAP EXTENSION

If a student is employed during their OPT period and receives approval for an H1-B work visa, their F-1 status and OPT authorization will be extended until September 30th of the year in which the H1-B begins (note that H1-B visas begin on October 1st 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.**

If a student is approved for an H1-B visa, they should provide a copy of their H1-B approval notice to the Office of International Programs. An international student advisor will then contact SEVP to request that the student's SEVIS record be updated to reflect that the student's F-1 status and OPT authorization have been extended through September 30th of that year. This process can take several weeks, as the advisor has to wait for SEVP to make the changes to the student's record. Please note that the extension is actually automatic. As soon as a student who is engaged in an authorized period of OPT is approved for an H1-B visa, their F-1 status and OPT authorization are automatically extended. The computer systems of the U.S. government do not, unfortunately, automatically update the student's SEVIS record. Therefore, you need to work with an international student advisor to get the SEVIS record updated so that you can provide updated documentation to your employer.

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. Failure to provide this documentation could result in the cancellation of your OPT.

Once the OPT period begins, the student is required by law to report to the University **within 10 days** any 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

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.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Students should contact the Office of International Programs to set up an OPT advising appointment 3-4 months **before** they will complete their degree. For example, a student who is going to be finishing their courses and complete their degree in May should contact the OIP in late-January to early February. Students should read the Guide to Optional Practical Training before contacting the OIP for 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 strongly encouraged to attend so that they are well-informed on the OPT regulations and application process. If you have missed the OPT Info Session, you will be provided with similar information during your OPT advising appointment, but there is not a way to “make-up” the Info Session. Read the entire “Guide to OPT” and familiarize themselves with all of the forms.
- 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 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 within 10 days of any change to your residential address, employment status, employer, or employment location.

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

OPT Process 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.

- Completed OPT Request Form.**
 - This is an internal LTU form that is required by the school.
 - 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. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS).
 - Use only the revised edition from 10/16/08 as noted in the bottom right corner.
 - 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; 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 will be completed by the international student advisor.
 - Item #17 is used only when applying for the OPT STEM extension.
- \$340 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.”
 - Write out the date in full, such as Oct. 1, 2008. Do not use the numeric abbreviation, such as 10/1/08.
- Two color passport photos of you, taken according to U.S. passport specifications.**
 - Photos must be on a white background
 - Photos must be 2 in. x 2 in. (5cm x 5cm) in size
 - Write your name and admission number from your I-94 arrival/departure record on the back of both photos.
 - Do not trim the photos as the image will be scanned.
- Copies of all prior I-20 forms, even those issued by other schools.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of front and back of your I-94 form.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of your passport page(s) showing the validity dates.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of your visa page(s) from your passport.**
- New I-20 showing OPT request on page 3. THIS WILL BE ISSUED TO YOU DURING THE OPT ADVISING APPOINTMENT WITH AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR.**

You are responsible for mailing your application packet to the USCIS Service Center. We recommend going to a local U.S. Post Office and using one of their traceable deliver services, such as registered, certified, priority or express mail. A postal clerk at the post office can provide more information on these services.

The mailing address is: USCIS Service Center
P.O. Box 87765
Lincoln, NE 68501-7765

If you use FedEx, UPS or another delivery service, they will not deliver to a P.O. Box. You will need to place your packet in a blank envelope with the above address on it, and then place that envelope in the delivery service’s envelope and put the following address on their shipping ticket:

USCIS Service Center, 850 S. Street, Lincoln, NE 68501



Office of International Programs

Taubman Student Services Center – C405 ■ 248.204.4100 ■ Fax 248.204.4115 ■ international@tu.edu

OPT Request Form

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

GENERAL INFORMATION

To apply for OPT, you must complete this form, form I-765, and gather the supporting documents as detailed in the Guide to Optional Practical Training. Once your paperwork is ready, you will need to schedule a meeting with an international student advisor to review your application packet. If your paperwork is acceptable, the international student advisor will issue an I-20 showing that you are requesting OPT. It is YOUR responsibility to submit the application packet to USCIS; the address is provided in the Guide to Optional Practical Training.

You cannot begin working until you have received your EAD card from USCIS, you have completed all coursework for your program of study, and it is within the OPT time period that was authorized by USCIS, as indicated on your EAD card.

You must apply for OPT 3 - 4 months prior to the end of the semester when you will be finishing your coursework. It will take 3-4 months for USCIS to process your application and determine whether or not you will be authorized for OPT. You should make an appointment with an international student advisor 3-4 months before the end of the semester when you will be finishing your coursework.

BRING ALL PAPERWORK TO THE APPOINTMENT WITH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR. You must have filled out this form, the I-765 and have all supporting documents. If the forms are not filled out and/or you do not have all the supporting documents, the advisor may reschedule your appointment for another time.

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)