

# Optional Practical Training (OPT) Guide

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## 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, you must meet all of the following conditions:

- You must be in Active F-1 status.
- You must be in the last semester of your program of study.
- You cannot have 12 or more months of full-time CPT authorization.
- You must have completed one academic year, which is defined as two (2) semesters at full-time enrollment.
- You must be in a degree program; ESL certificate programs are not eligible for OPT.
- If you transferred from another school, the time spent at the previous school(s) can count toward the one academic year requirement, provided you were enrolled full-time and were not in an ESL certificate program at the previous school(s). You will need to provide proof of full-time academic study at the other school(s) if you intend to count that time toward the one academic year requirement.

## ELIGIBILITY OF EMPLOYMENT

- You do not need to be employed or have a job offer to apply for OPT.
- Employment must be full time (21 or more hours per week) and in your field of study.
  - It cannot relate to a previous area of study.
  - Example: If you are completing an MBA, but previously completed a Bachelor's of Mechanical Engineering, you must seek employment in a management position; you cannot accept an engineering position.

## LIMITS AND DURATION OF OPT

- OPT is authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS), not by LTU.
- You are limited to one OPT period of 12 months per education level.
- If you were authorized for 12 or more months of full-time CPT, you are not eligible for OPT. Use of part-time CPT has no effect on OPT eligibility.

## UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITS

- You are limited to 90 days of unemployment during your OPT period.
- After 90 days of unemployment, you are considered to be out of status and must depart the U.S. immediately.
  - After 60 days of unemployment, you should start making plans to depart the U.S. or return to a school to pursue a new degree program.
- Unemployment time is monitored through SEVIS so it is critical that you update your employment to avoid termination.

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

- If you realize that you will not meet all degree requirements as expected, you must contact International Programs to get a program extension IMMEDIATELY and for instructions on how to withdraw your OPT application.
  - The extension must be processed BEFORE your program end date, or you will be out of status.
- If you are not sure that you will graduate, you may want to wait & apply for OPT once final grades are posted to confirm graduation.
- You can apply for OPT if you have completed all courses but still need to finish your thesis, dissertation, or similar capstone project. The thesis, dissertation or capstone project can be completed while starting your OPT.
- You cannot begin a new degree program while you are on OPT, although you can take part-time classes, incidental to your OPT employment.
  - For example, you could pursue a graduate certificate on a part-time basis while working on OPT.

## STEM EXTENSION

- If your degree is in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), you may be eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of your OPT authorization, assuming all other eligibility criteria are met.
- You can apply for the OPT STEM Extension up to 3 months before the end of your original OPT period.
  - For more information, refer to LTU's "OPT STEM Guide"

## CHANGE OF STATUS TO H-1B and CAP GAP EXTENSIONS

- If your employer files a petition to change your visa status to H-1B while you are on OPT, you should contact International Programs to let us know.
  - You may be eligible for the Cap Gap extension and will need to work with the IP staff to ensure that your SEVIS record is updated correctly to make the transition from F-1 to H-1B status.
- An H-1B work visa is related directly to your employment and your employer must sponsor you as their employee by petitioning for the H-1B visa.
- **An H-1B visa is not academic; the University cannot assist you in petitioning for an H-1B visa.**

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- You must provide a copy of your I-797C Notice of Receipt and a copy of your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to International Programs.
- Use LTU's online OPT Information Update form to report the following to the LTU while you are on OPT:
  - Current residential address
  - Current employment status (employed, unemployed, self-employed, etc.)
  - Employer name – if self-employed, you must provide proof of your company's name EIN
  - Employer address – report the address where you usually work
  - Employer EIN Number – this is different than their e-verify number & can be obtained from HR
  - Supervisor's name, phone number & email address
  - Dates of employment
  - Number of hours per week
  - How employment pertains to LTU degree

You are required by law to report this information at the start of your OPT period, and **within 10 days of changes** to any of the information listed above.

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

## APPLICATION PROCESS

You can apply for OPT no sooner than 90 days before your program end date, and no later than 60 days after your program end date. Current processing times are available on the [USCIS website](#). You should apply for OPT in your final semester. You should read the “Optional Practical Training (OPT) Guide” before submitting your documents for review.

- 1. Complete the OPT Module.** The OPT module is available in Canvas in the International Programs Organization. Once all documents are review, students must score a 15 or better on the OPT module quiz.
- 2. Obtain academic advisor’s confirmation.** Student’s must ask their Academic advisor to complete the online OPT graduation verification form: <https://goo.gl/forms/YtUHRN5EvdYXGZln2>
- 3. Complete the required forms and gather the supporting documents.** The OPT application packet requires 2 forms that must be completed and has a checklist of all the other required supporting documents.
- 4. Submit your OPT application for review.** Once all your documents are gathered, please email them to [international@ltu.edu](mailto:international@ltu.edu) as PDF attachments. An International Advisor will review your documents & advise you electronically.
- 5. Send completed OPT application to USCIS for processing.** Students should file their applications electronically with USCIS. Once the application is filed online you can download of the i-797-c receipt from your My USCIS account. When you get your receipt, provide a copy to International Programs. If you receive any other correspondence from USCIS, contact International Programs.

## IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

### DO NOT WORK WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION

- You cannot begin working until you receive your EAD **and** you are within your authorized OPT 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, you must wait until you receive the EAD 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 INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

- You must send a copy of your I-797C Notice of Receipt, which indicates that USCIS has received your OPT application packet
- You must send a copy of the front & back of your EAD, which is your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), indicating that your OPT has been approved.
- You must also notify International Programs of your residential address, employment status, and employment information. All required information is requested on the [online OPT update form](#).
  - This information must be reported at the start of your OPT period, 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.**

- Make sure all scanned 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**
    - 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
  - **Academic Advisor's online verification**
    - Your academic advisor must complete the verification process. It must be done online by your academic advisor . <https://goo.gl/forms/YtUHRN5EvdYXGZln2>
    - If your advisor has not confirmed your expected graduation, the International Advisor will not issue the new I-20 showing the OPT request to complete the OPT application
  - **Completed [form I-765](#), Application for Employment Authorization**
    - **You will fill out the electronic I-765 within your myUSCIS account**
    - Eligibility Category for post-completion OPT, should be (c) (3) (B)
    - **Use the address where you currently reside. DO NOT use an address where you plan to live in the future.** If you might move during the application process, please let us know during your document review so we can advise you how to update it
      - Canadian addresses will not be accepted
    - If you have EVER been issued an SSN while in the US you must mark YES to having an SSN & include it in your application
    - You do not have an alien number, or USCIS number, or a travel document number
    - (c)(3)C), (c)(26) and (c)(35) and (c)(36) Eligibility Category questions do not apply to F-1 status. Leave them blank
  - **Application fee** – Check with International Programs for current fee
    - If you file electronically you must pay via credit card directly after completing the online application
  - **Color photo of you, taken according to U.S. passport specifications**
    - U.S. passports specifications can be found online - <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos.html>
    - Photos must be current. DO NOT USE OLD PHOTOS – IT WILL DELAY THE APPROVAL PROCESS
    - When filing electronically you will need digital files of your photos (JPEG)
  - **Copies of all prior I-20 forms, even those issued by other schools**
    - Include pages 1 & 2 only. You do not need to include the page with the regulations
  - **Color copies of your passport page(s) showing biographical and validity information**
    - This is the page with your photo on it
  - **Color copies of your U.S. visa page(s) from your passport**
  - **Copy of your I-94 form**
    - For electronic I-94 records, print your I-94 using the online form at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search>
    - If you were issued an I-94 card upon entry to the U.S., make a color copy of the front and back of your I-94
  - **Copy of new I-20 showing OPT request on page 2. *This will be issued after document review is completed***
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**IP Advisor will provide instructions for submitting the application to USCIS.**

**USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of issuance of the OPT I-20, or it may be denied. You should submit your application within 2 weeks of getting your new I-20. However, we recommend submitting it ASAP.**

# OPT Request Form

Office of International Programs ♦ 21000 West Ten Mile Road ♦ Southfield, MI 48075  
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Please read the "Guide to Optional Practical Training (OPT)" before completing this form. This form must be submitted with your other documents via email.

## TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ BANNER ID: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

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

HAVE YOU APPLIED TO GRADUATE?  Yes  No - Contact Enrollment Services for more information.

**OPT AUTHORIZATION REQUESTED:** Post completion OPT is authorized for a 12 month period. Please be aware you cannot work until your OPT is approved & you are within your OPT period.

OPT TYPE REQUESTED:  Post-completion full-time OPT REQUESTED START DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACADEMIC ADVISOR GRADUATION VERIFICATION

Please email your academic advisor to complete the online verification PRIOR to emailing your OPT documents to International Programs. If we do not receive confirmation from your academic advisor, we will not be able to issue your new I-20.

This form **MUST BE** completed by your advisor. Students should **NOT** complete this form. <https://goo.gl/forms/H8V0tQUZuwFpNo1E3>

## TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR

### Documents

- OPT Form
- I-765
- Filing Fee
- Photos
- Advisor confirmation
- Passport
- Visa
- I-94
- I-20s

### DSO Updates:

- Shorten program
- Registration updated
- Update CPT dates & excel
- OPT Requested
- Banner dates updated
- End of program hold
- End of Program Excel
- OPT Tracker updated

### CPT:

- No
  - Yes
  - Full Time
  - Part Time
  - Under 12 months FT
- CPT Period(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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