Optional Practical Training: Working in the US after degree completion

Maria Almendares | Coordinator, Student/Scholar Immigration
Cheney International Center, Ste 5  307-766-5193  wyoqtpi@uwyo.edu
Online OPT Resources
www.uwyo.edu/iss

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Today’s OPT presentation

- What is OPT? OPT Basics
- Eligibility for OPT and OPT extension
- Application and processing timeline
- Maintaining status while on OPT
- Types of employment allowed on OPT
- Unemployment while on OPT
- Reporting to ISS while on OPT
- Resources for students, advisors, and employers
- Enrolling at UW while on OPT
- Completing the OPT application
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What is OPT? OPT Basics

- OPT is designed to allow an F-1 student to remain in the US and gain experience in their field for one year after completion of their program.
- One OPT is allowed for each degree level.
- Those who completed a program in a designated STEM field may apply to extend their OPT for 24 additional months if they, and their employer, meet the criteria. Two OPT extensions are allowed per lifetime.
- Days of unemployment while on OPT are limited.
- Student remains in F-1 status for the duration of the OPT.
- Student is allowed to travel while on OPT.
- OPT allows student to apply for change of status; allows cap-gap extension with submitted H1B petition by non-cap-exempt employer.
Eligibility for post-completion OPT

- Student must have maintained lawful status including being enrolled on a full-time basis at a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) approved school for at least one full academic year.

- Student must be graduating or completing required coursework in an accredited Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral program within 90 days of application date.

- No offer of employment is required for application, but the student should be actively seeking employment to begin as soon as the OPT is approved.

*Note: 365 days of full-time CPT during degree terminates the opportunity for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect OPT.*
Eligibility for 24-month OPT extension

- Student must have been granted post-completion OPT and currently be in a valid period of post-completion OPT
- Student must have graduated or completed required coursework in an accredited Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral program included on the designate STEM degree list
- Employer and student must meet all criteria and agree to participate in all reporting required during the period of extension
- OPT Extension application must be received by USCIS on or before the post-completion OPT EAD expiration date and up to 90 days before
Application and processing timeline

- Student should begin planning for OPT application at least one year before completion of their degree. Specifically important for graduate students who will enroll in less than 9.0 credits to finish thesis/dissertation.

- Attend an ISS OPT Information and Application workshop before completing application if possible.

- Meet with ISS staff to submit application 90 days before completion of degree/graduation. Can take up to THREE months for OPT to be approved.

- May submit application up to 60 days after graduation.

- Employment is not allowed after graduation until OPT EAD is received and start date has been reached.
Receipt notice from USCIS approximately two weeks after application is mailed. Will be emailed to student by ISS staff.

Track your application online at www.uscis.gov.

Respond to ISS immediately for any Request for Evidence information that might be requested by USCIS.

Approval notice/EAD card received by ISS within 90 days of receipt date. ISS will email student THE DAY the card is received at ISS.

Employment may begin after EAD card is received and the start date on the card has been reached.

Application and processing timeline
Maintaining status while on OPT

- Employment must be directly related to major field of study
- Must work at least 20 hours per week. Multiple jobs are allowed but each job must be at least 20 hours per week. On OPT extension, all jobs must meet regulations and must submit a Form I-983 for each job
- Do not exceed 90 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT (additional 60 days added with OPT extension approval)
- Report changes to contact information and employment to ISS within 10 days of any change
- Beginning a new degree program automatically terminates OPT. Notify ISS of intent to begin a new degree so that SEVIS record can be updated/transferred appropriately
- Notify ISS of any application or approval for change of status
Types of employment allowed on OPT

- Regular paid employment – multiple employers allowed
- Payment by multiple short-term employers (“gigs”)
- Work for hire/contractual employment
- Self-employed business owner
- Employed through an agency
- Volunteering or unpaid employment

*Note: OPT extension does not allow self-employment, working for an agency, or volunteer/unpaid employment*
Unemployment while on OPT

- Must not exceed 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT (150 days total for post-completion and OPT extension period)

- Unemployment days begin counting on the start date on the EAD and stop on the start date of the job. Each day between employment when changing from one job to another also count

- Weekends and holidays ARE included in unemployment days

- Cannot stop the “unemployment clock” by leaving the US for a period of time

- Official vacation days, sick days, office closures and weekend days do not count as unemployment days once you are considered employed

- Unemployment days must be reported to ISS and should match the official human resources records of your employers
How to report updates to ISS while on OPT: www.uwyo.edu/iss/opt

- Online survey links allow easy reporting of information
- Surveys require specific information to make sure that all SEVIS fields can be completed by ISS staff
- Students receive automatic confirmation email when information is successfully submitted. ISS staff strives to complete the update in SEVIS within one week of receiving the information
- Surveys are preferred for all reporting to ensure all necessary information is given
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment benefit contained in the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regulations that will have an opportunity to obtain work experience in the United States. Post-completion OPT, and OPT extension holders, there is a maximum total period becomes eligible for another 12 months of OPT.

Resources for Individuals Currently on Post-Completion OPT

- Information for Continued Enrollment at UW while on OPT
- Tips and Requirements for Post-Completion OPT
- List of STEM-Approved Majors
- OPT Extension Responsibilities for Students and Employers
- Cap Gap Extension Request Form

Report: Update Your Contact Information - address, phone, and email
Report: Update Employment - new employment, employer update, end of employment, or leaving the US / terminating OPT early
Reporting requirements while on OPT: Contact/personal information

- Must report to ISS no more than 10 days after any change
- Physical address – not a PO or mail box
- Mailing address – PO or mail box
- Email address
- Phone number
- Leaving the US before the end of the OPT with no intention of returning (abandoning the OPT)
- Admission to start a new academic program. ISS must update SEVIS and/or transfer your record before you may begin your new program
- Any application for, or change to, your immigration status – H1B, US Permanent Resident, etc
Reporting requirements while on OPT: Employment information

- Must report to ISS no more than 10 days after any change
- Employment start and end date – must match official human resources record
- Employer information
  - Name
  - Address
  - Employer ID Number (EIN) – This is NOT your personal employee number!
  - Job Title
- Supervisor information
  - Name
  - Phone number
  - Email address
- How is the employment related to your major field of study?
  - Be brief but thorough – two sentences. Will be entered verbatim into SEVIS record
Resources for students, advisors and employers

- UW ISS website: [www.uwyo.edu/iss/opt](http://www.uwyo.edu/iss/opt)
  Presentation slides, OPT applications, STEM degree list, information reporting links, sample letter for advisor, OPT extension information for students and employers

- STEM OPT Hub: [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub)
  Form I-983 tutorial and information for students and employers about the OPT extension application and requirements. Students will work with UW ISS to process the extension application and continue to report changes to ISS while on extension
Enrolling at UW while on OPT: Undergraduates who fail a course

- If you do not officially graduate in the semester planned
  - If the OPT has not been approved, student may submit a letter to ISS asking the OPT be cancelled. Letter must be forwarded to USCIS and received by them before the OPT is approved in order to cancel the OPT request. Application fee will not be refunded
  - If the OPT has already been approved, student must continue to participate in OPT, meeting all requirements, with the exception of hours per week. Student will be limited to no more than 20 hours per week or work until completion of their degree
  - Any undergraduate who enrolls at UW while on OPT is required to pay the tuition, fees, and international student health insurance until completion of their degree. This cannot be waived
Enrolling at UW while on OPT:
Graduate students who must enroll to graduate

- If you must complete writing, defense, etc
  - Students may enroll in one credit of continuous registration (on or off campus does not matter) as a “place holder” so that they may officially graduate*
  - Student will be charged for the tuition, fees and international student health insurance
  - Student may petition to have the insurance removed, and the fees if the insurance if removed, at the beginning of the semester. This request must be made BEFORE the end of the add/drop period. The determination will be made by the Student Insurance Advocate, stuins@uwyo.edu, on a case-by-case basis. Most commonly, insurance and fees are waived for those living outside of Wyoming and/or those who have a job that provides insurance at coverages equal to or greater than UW’s policy coverage

*Depending on the timing of the start of OPT, student may be required to maintain full-time enrollment until the start of the OPT and therefore must enroll for thesis or dissertation (instead of continuous registration) and complete the Optional Fee Package
Enrolling at UW while on OPT:

Others

▪ Students who change status to H1B or other non-resident status
  – Please notify ISS of any change of status so that your status in the UW computer system and the SEVIS system may be updated. As an H1B, or any other non-resident status, you are still considered an international students and will be charged the tuition, fees and for the international student health insurance.
  – Student may request a waiver of the insurance and fees. See previous slide for details. Request MUST be made BEFORE the end of the add/drop period.

▪ Students who change status to US Permanent Resident or US Citizen
  – Please notify ISS immediately so that your status in the UW computer system and the SEVIS system can be updated. US Permanent Residents and US citizens should not be automatically charged for the fees or the student health insurance. Please review your bill carefully to make sure these charges do not appear. Contact ISS right away if these charges appear on your bill so that we can make sure that your record was updated correctly. *Refunds will not be given for those who change status in the middle of a semester.
Completing the OPT application

- Checklist for post-completion OPT application
- Complete USCIS Form I-765
- Complete the OPT Request Information form
  - *Undergraduate students* must provide a letter from their Degree Analyst in the Office of the Registrar verifying the anticipated graduation date
  - *Graduate students* must provide a letter from their Academic Advisor verifying the completion of their required coursework and the anticipated date of completion of all requirements
- Complete Tips and SEVIS Requirements while on Post-Completion OPT form
  - All passports, visas, I-20s, current I-94 and travel history printed from www.cbp.gov/i94 or I-94 card if stapled in passport, and any other relevant immigration documents you have such as I-797 for a change of status
  - Two passport photos according to USCIS requirements, taken within the last 30 days. Make sure these are good quality photos that meet requirements before you accept them
  - Filing fee of $410.00. A check or money order payable to “US Department of Homeland Security”. Cash or cards cannot be accepted as this must be mailed with the application to USCIS
OPT Request Information Form

This request is for:  
X Pre-Completion OPT (c)(3)(A)  
Post-Completion OPT (c)(3)(B)

Name:  Cowboy Joe

Date of Birth:  01/25/1990  I-94 No.  123456789 10

Date first granted F-1 status:  08/01/2011  (Date of first entry stamp in F1 status)

Major Field of Study:  Chemical Engineering  Major Code:  14.0701

Requested OPT Start Date:  05/16/2016  OPT End Date:  05/15/2017

List all previous CPT or OPT (add additional page if needed) and circle full or part time and CPT or OPT:

Start  06/01/2015  End  07/31/2015  Part or Full time  CPT or OPT

Signature of student  Cowboy Joe  Date  03/31/2016

To be completed by Designated School Official (DSO):

- Is taking a full course of study at this school for purposes of completion of  
- Is taking less than a full course of study in last semester ending on  
- Completed the course of study at this school on  

DSO Name and title:  Maria Almendra, Coordinator, Student Scholar Immigration

DSO Signature  

University of Wyoming  DEN214F00241000  307-766-5193  

ISS completes this section!

Chosen by student

Must be after the program end date (graduation/ completion date) and no more than 60 days after that date.
Tips and SEVIS Requirements While on Post-Completion OPT

Please keep this document for YOUR responsibilities and “tips” while on your Post-Completion OPT. Remember, it is YOUR responsibility to be aware of all reporting requirements and to follow procedures to report information to ISS and SEVIS.

Required Reporting While on Post-Completion OPT:

- Update your CONTACT INFORMATION within 10 days of any change. This includes your address, email, and phone number. You can update your contact information via the online survey by clicking on OPT Information on the ISS website.
- Update your EMPLOYER INFORMATION within 10 days of any change - New employer, adding second employer, leaving employment, etc. If you decide to leave the US and abandon your OPT, you must notify ISS. You may not be unemployed for a cumulative period of more than 90 days total during the period of post-completion OPT. SEVIS will terminate your record with more than the maximum days of unemployment allowed. You can update your employer information via the appropriate online survey by clicking on OPT Information on the ISS website.
- Report application for H-1B change of status when receipt notice is received. ISS staff can manually update your SEVIS record to reflect an extended I-20 for the Cap Gap extension, which ends before ISS updates your record. Please email a copy of your I-797 Receipt Notice and the completed Cap Gap Extension Request form found on the ISS OPT Information website to senglobal@iwu.edu or seng@iwu.edu and your updated I-20 will be sent to you.
- Report any CHANGE OF STATUS immediately. If you receive a change of status approval notice (US permanent resident, H-1B, etc) please submit a copy of the approval notice to ISS so that your F1 SEVIS record can be properly updated. Inform ISS if you are still registering for classes at UW so that your UW record can also be updated. You can email the approval notice to senglobal@iwu.edu or seng@iwu.edu.

Tips While on OPT:

- Your UW email will be deactivated in the semester after your graduate. Make sure to move any important emails/information to a different account before you graduate. ISS will change your contact email to the one you provide on this form for our mailing lists. This includes the Talking Stick and any separate OPT-related emails.
- You may not officially start work until you have received the Employment Authorization Document (EAD/OPT) Card from SEVIS and the start date has been reached.
- ISS will email your receipt notice to you as soon as it is received by our office. This should be approximately two weeks after your OPT application is mailed to SEVIS. You should print a copy for your records and save an electronic copy for loss.
- You may go to the ISS website to track your application status. Click on "Check Case Status" and enter your receipt number. You may “sign up” at the top of the page for automated status updates to your email. ISS staff will email you the day that your card is received in the office.
- DO NOT update your address on the Check Case Status page. This does not update SEVIS. Only ISS can do that. If you change your address on that page, ISS will no longer be able to help you track your case status or find any lost mailings.
- Travel while on active OPT. You will need to have the OPT I-20 validated on the back with a signature for travel, your EAD card, a valid visa, and a letter verifying employment. Note: applying for a visa while on OPT can be risky.
- If you are traveling while on OPT and need to apply for a new visa, use caution as it is difficult in some countries and there is no guarantee that you will be granted a visa extension. If you leave the US and re-enter on a visitor visa, or visa waiver, you may NOT use your OPT as your visa status will be F-1 status.
- If you still have to register for credits at UW to finish your thesis, defense, etc remember that you WILL be charged the optional fee package and the student health insurance. This is based on you being a non-citizen international student. You may qualify for a waiver of the health insurance and the fee package if you meet certain qualifications. You must contact the Student Insurance Advisor at 307-766-3025 BEFORE the add/drop deadline for each semester to request the waiver. No waivers will be allowed after the add/drop deadline.

Applying for an OPT Extension – STEM majors working for qualified employers only

Application may be filed three months before the EAD expiration. Student should discuss this option with their employer using the OPT Extension Considerations for Students and Employers handbook on the ISS OPT Information website and then access the OPT Extension Information and Application page on the ISS OPT Information website.

Contact Information – If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact ISS at 307-766-3188, sengglobal@iwu.edu or stop by the Cherry International Center Suite 5 (Dept. 3228, 1099 E University Avenue, Laramie, WY 82071).

Refer to the ISS OPT Information website for updates, forms, and reporting surveys. Employers also refer to the website for their responsibilities as employers of students on OPT Extension forms and forms.