OPT Workshop I
The Overview

International Student & Scholar Services
It is your responsibility to understand all the details and requirements of your immigration status.

This powerpoint presentation is designed to give you an introduction to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) application process. Workshop II– The Process will highlight the steps for an OPT application.
Overview

• What is OPT
• Types of OPT
• Post-Completion OPT
• Eligibility
• The application timeline overview
• Timeline for each semester
• Graduate Students
• The 2 BIG Steps
• Picking Your Start Date

• 90 Days of Authorized Unemployment
• USCIS Processing Times
• Searching for a Job
• Important Considerations
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What is OPT

• Optional Practical Training is a benefit of F-1 status, for which international students may apply

• U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorizes OPT for up to 12 months of employment

• This would allow F-1 students to have the opportunity to gain practical experience directly related to a completed program of study
Types of OPT

1. **Pre-Completion OPT**
   Takes place during your program

2. **Post-Completion OPT**
   Takes place after you complete your coursework

3. **STEM Extension**
   An extension of Post Completion OPT of 24 months is available for certain STEM majors (see STEM OPT Tutorial for more details)
Post-Completion OPT

OPT permits you to engage in a practical work experience AFTER you complete coursework for your program.

You must work full time.
Full time is 21 hours or more per week.

You can apply for OPT once per level (Bachelors, Master’s, Doctorate).
- STEM Extensions may be granted for certain STEM degrees for an additional 24 months. See STEM tutorial for more information.
Eligibility

You are eligible for OPT if you have met the following conditions:

1. Maintained your F-1 status for at least 1 academic year (two academic semesters – Fall & Spring or Spring & Fall)
2. Are a degree seeking student (Not available for students in Language Training)
3. Completed **ALL** required coursework for your program
4. Completed fewer than 365 days of FULL TIME CPT

You do NOT need a job offer prior to submitting OPT application.
You have a **150 day window** to apply for OPT
As early as 90 days before your Program End Date/Graduation and up to 60 days after
Timeline for Each Semester

May/Spring Graduate
- 90 days before: February 22
- May 20
- 60 days after: July 18

August/Summer Graduate
- 90 days before: May 23
- August 20
- 60 days after: October 18

December/Fall Graduate
- 90 days before: September 22
- December 20
- 60 days after: February 17
Graduate Students Only!

- You do not need to graduate in order to apply for OPT

- You can apply for OPT after completing required coursework
  - You can apply for OPT while on Dissertation/Thesis

- You should speak with an ISSS advisor for more information

- Be aware -- once your OPT is approved, you will only have until the expiration of your OPT period to remain in the United States
OPT Application – There are 2 Big Steps

1. You must first request a **new I-20 with OPT recommendation** from ISSS

THEN

2. You must submit your OPT application including your new OPT I-20 to USCIS

[OPT I-20 Request Form](#)
Picking Your Start Date

- You will be asked to select a start date for your OPT
- You can pick ANY date in your 60-day grace period following your Graduation/Program End Date

### Start Date Ranges

- **May/Spring Graduate**
  - Start Date: May 21
  - End Date: July 18

- **August/Summer Graduate**
  - Start Date: August 21
  - End Date: October 18

- **December/Fall Graduate**
  - Start Date: December 21
  - End Date: February 17
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

What is it?

You are allotted 90 days during your OPT period in which you do NOT have to be employed.

You can use these days to job search past the start date on your EAD card.

You can these days in between jobs (if you need to or want to change jobs while on OPT)

How do I calculate it?

Authorized Unemployment days are any days in which you are not employed.

Your OPT period starts on the day listed on your EAD card. If you are not working on that day, you have used 1 day of 90 authorized unemployment days.

Once you are hired and working somewhere, weekends and vacation time given to you by the employer are not counted.
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

What happens if I use it all?

If you use all 90 days of authorized employment, you must maintain your OPT status for the remainder of your OPT period.

If you are unable to find a job or opportunity AND have used all of your authorized unemployment days your F-1 status ends.

• There are a few exceptions, please speak with ISSS for more information

Who tracks it?

SEVP tracks your days based on the information you provide in your SEVP student portal account.

YOU should track your employment very closely.

ISSS does not track your days.
90 Days of Authorized Unemployment

1. We do not recommend using all 90 days at the beginning of your OPT.
2. It is important to note the absolute latest you MUST start working after your OPT begins.

Example: OPT Start Date is 05/21/2020
- Start Date = 05/21/2020
- 90 Days Later = 08/19/2020
- Must start working by 8/19/2020
- There is no 60-day grace period beyond 8/19

Example: OPT Start Date is 07/18/2020
- Start Date = 07/18/2020
- 90 Days Later = 10/16/2020
- Must start working by 10/16/2020
- There is no 60-day grace period beyond 10/16
Once your application is submitted, USCIS could take up to **90 days** or longer to make a decision on your application.

- Therefore, it is important to plan for your OPT as early as possible
- We recommend submitting your OPT application to USCIS earlier in the application window
Important Considerations

1. Do Not Travel with Pending OPT Application

We do NOT recommend that you travel outside of the U.S. with a pending OPT application.
• There is a risk that your application could be denied.
• There is a risk that you may not be allowed in without your OPT card and a job offer letter.
• (More details in Workshop II)
• You may travel outside the U.S. and return BEFORE the program end date on your I-20

2. Your Driver’s License

Your license is typically tied to the end date on your I-20
• You should be aware of the expiration date on your driver’s license
• The BMV in Ohio may not issue or renew your license until you receive your OPT/EAD card
• Another reason to submit your application as early as possible
Searching for a Job

You can start searching for your job prior to your OPT authorization.

Remember – you must find a job, internship, or volunteer position that is directly related to your major (not your minor)

You must be engaged in at least 21 hours a week or more in the job, internship, or volunteer position

There are many places that you can search for jobs

We recommend that you prepare with the Career Exploration and Develop Office. Look for career fairs and online tools
Final Considerations

Your Application is 100% Your Responsibility

• The ISSS team is here to help you and offer recommendations based on historically successful applications. We do not provide legal counsel.
• USCIS ultimately makes the final decisions on your OPT authorization.
• ISSS recommends planning as early as possible

Plan Early
Reminders

- Review the materials in Workshop II before submitting your OPT Application

- **DO NOT** START WORKING UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR OPT AUTHORIZATION
Thank You.

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