YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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International Programs Office
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www.ysu.edu/ipo

F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity for F-1 students to apply knowledge gained in their degree program to off-campus work. All work during OPT must be directly related to your level and field of study. OPT is recommended by the International Programs Office (IPO) and authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Normal processing time for this authorization is 60 to 90+ days.

The maximum amount of time granted to work on OPT is 12 months per degree level plus a 24-month STEM extension for those who qualify. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full 12 months to use after you complete your program. OPT used during your course of study is called Pre-Completion OPT. OPT used during after graduation is called Post-completion OPT.

Eligibility for OPT:

- You must have been in full-time student status for at least one academic year (two semesters) by the requested start date of the OPT period
- You must be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application
- You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT

Application timelines:

- For **Post-Completion OPT**, USCIS must receive your OPT application within the following timelines or the application will be **denied**:
    - No more than 90 days before program completion date
    - No more than 60 days after program completion date
    - New OPT I-20 issued within 30 days

Application Process: You must submit a timely application to USCIS and must receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) before you may begin working. Follow the steps below:

STEP 1: Be Informed. Read this handout thoroughly and carefully. With questions, consult the International Programs Office. Also refer to the OPT power point for tips on filing this application.

STEP 2: Attend an OPT session and submit a complete OPT Recommendation Form to isss@ysu.edu. A new I-20 recommending OPT will be ready in 5-7 business days.

STEP 3: Compile the required OPT application materials:

- ☐ I-765 filing fee. Check the USCIS website for the current filing fee.
- ☐ Photocopy of OPT I-20 (be sure you have signed the OPT I-20 on page 1)
- ☐ I-94 record (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/) or front and back of paper record (if applicable).
- ☐ Photocopy of your valid passport ID page(s)
- ☐ Photocopy of previous EAD card(s) – if you have applied for OPT before.
- ☐ One "passport" photo. No eyeglasses can be worn in passport photos. Passport photos can be obtained at some U.S. Post Offices, FedEx offices, and many retailers such as CVS.

STEP 4: E-file your OPT application. Refer to the OPT power point for a step-by-step guide to file for OPT.

- Create an account with USCIS: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/
    - Choose "my USCIS" to apply for an immigration benefit.
    - Choose "File a form online"
    - Complete the OPT application electronically.
    - Upload your application materials (see "STEP 3")
    - Pay and submit the application.

Tips for Filing the Online Application:

- The form uses logic which allows you to skip the questions you don't need to answer!
- Your form will save in draft status for 30 days. If you start the application and realize you messed up your OPT dates or need to get new photos taken, you can take a break and complete the form later.
- If you're inactive for 15 minutes, you will be automatically logged out.
- Make sure your files uploaded properly. Documents and photos can only be up to 6 MB and they only accept certain file types. If you are getting an error, check the error message and do what you need to do to correct it.
- **REVIEW!** Always review your application before you pay the fee. If you pay the fee and submit, you cannot make corrections.

STEP 5: Wait for the EAD
Within one month of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard receipt notice. The "Receipt Number" in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to check the status of your case on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov or by calling the phone number indicated on the receipt. Keep in mind that this information is updated infrequently. You CANNOT begin working until you have received your EAD and are within the start and end dates printed on the card.

CHOOSING YOUR OPT START DATE

You are eligible to choose an OPT start date any time within the 60 days following your program completion date as noted on the OPT Recommendation Form. If you are a PhD student or a Master's student with a thesis option, you may have more flexibility as to when your OPT can start. Factors to consider when choosing your start date are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you _CANNOT_ begin to work BEFORE the start date on the EAD).** If you choose a start date farther into the future and then receive an earlier offer, you will not be able to change the OPT start date. If you are and plan to continue working at YSU after your program is complete, your OPT must start the day after your program ends. **All of your work authorization ends (even on-campus work) on your program completion date.** Be sure to take this into account!
2. The latest OPT start day you may choose is 60 *calendar days* after your program completion date. Remember that some months have 31 days and USCIS counts each calendar day!

Once you have filed the application with USCIS, you may not change your OPT dates!

REMINDERS: REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON OPT

❑ During your 12 months of OPT, you cannot be unemployed for more than 90 days.
❑ **REQUIRED UPDATES**. **You are _required_ to report address, employer name and employer address changes within 10 days**.
- o [SEVP reporting portal -](#) This portal allows you to update SEVIS directly.
- o [YSU OPT reporting portal -](#) Upon updating this portal, IPO will update the information in SEVIS on your behalf.

TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON OPT:
❑ In order to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status while on OPT, you must have:

Valid passport	**EAD (OPT work card)**
Valid F-1 visa stamp/sticker in your passport	**Offer letter of employment from your employer****
OPT I-20 signed within the last 6 months	**Employer/address entered in SEVIS**

> **F regulations allow for travel and re-entry in order to "resume employment." While a job offer letter is not required to obtain OPT, it is recommended that students who travel have a job offer letter with them when they are entering the U.S. Note that the EAD says "Not Valid for Travel" on the face of the EAD. This means that the EAD cannot be used _alone_ to re-enter the U.S.

❑ **Dependent Travel**: An F-2 dependent must carry COPIES of the F-1 student's I-20 with the OPT recommendation, EAD and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 (endorsed within 6 months of re-entry to the U.S.).

❑ **NEVER enter the U.S. in any VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1** while on OPT (it will invalidate OPT!).

OPT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?
Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work. The work must be directly related to your level and field of study. OPT is recommended by IPO and authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete.

2. What are the eligibility requirements to apply for F-1 Optional Practical Training?
To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full-time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application and (3) apply no more than 90 days prior to your program completion date, no more than 60 days after your program completion date and within 30 days of the date OPT was recommended in SEVIS. Applying outside of these timelines will result in denial of your OPT application.

3. If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study at another degree level, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?
Yes, you are eligible to apply for another 12-month period of Optional Practical Training after changing to a **higher degree level**. This does not apply to a second degree at the same level (i.e., a second master's degree).

4. If I don't use OPT at the bachelor's level can I get two 12 month periods of OPT?
No. OPT for each level cannot be combined but must be used during/immediately after each level. Authorized OPT cannot be "saved" for use in the future.

5. I applied for 12 months of OPT based on another degree I already completed, but then my employer changed my status to H-1B after 4 months. So I have 8 months of OPT remaining, right?
No. Immigration does not "refund" time after a change to a different immigration status. The amount of time you applied for (as appears on the EAD card) is the amount of time USCIS considers you to have used at that educational level.

6. How can I use OPT while I am still in my program?

You may use OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you have completed all course requirements for the degree and have a thesis requirement remaining. These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate. For example; if you use 4 months of part-time OPT, then you still have 10 months of full time OPT left to apply for with USCIS.

7. How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?
It takes IPO 3 business days to process your new OPT I-20. After you mail your OPT application to USCIS, it takes USCIS approximately 90 days to approve your OPT. Therefore, it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working. You may apply up to 90 days before your program completion date and **NO LATER THAN** 60 days after your completion date. ****NOTE**: The OPT I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!

8. **My OPT I-20 was issued almost 30 days ago and I haven't filed yet. What do I do?**
Your OPT application _**MUST**_ be receipted by USCIS prior to 30 days of the issuance date as noted on the new OPT I-20. Otherwise, your application will be denied and the filing fee will not be refunded. If your OPT I-20 times out, you must come to IPO's front desk to request a new I-20 with a new OPT issuance date. The new I-20 will take 5 business days to re-issue. Do not wait to file your OPT application!!

9. Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?
You **DO NOT** need to have a job offer before applying for Optional Practical Training.

10. Do I need to have a job/job offer while I am on OPT?
Yes. F-1 regulations require that you do have employment in your field of study while in your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12-month period of OPT (or 150 days if you apply for and receive the 24-month extension). This unemployment "clock" begins on your OPT start date as indicated on your EAD card. **If you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment, your SEVIS record will be terminated.** You are required to report address, employer and employer address changes within **10 days**. Updates must be made using one of the following two OPT reporting portals:

25-Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?
For the first 12-month period of post-completion OPT, the employment does NOT have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed, interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered "employed" for the purpose of OPT. Employers may not be able to write letters for unpaid work - check before starting work. Unpaid work is acceptable by USCIS, but unless it's truly "volunteer" work, there could be problems with U.S. Department of Labor laws. For the 24-month STEM extension, employment must be paid and full-time.

26-Can I have more than one job or can I work for myself during OPT?
Yes. You may have more than one job and can even be self-employed during your 12-month post-completion OPT. All work must be directly related to your level and field of study at YSU. Immigration considers anything over 20 hours per week as full-time employment for the purpose of OPT. Be sure to keep good records of all employment during the OP period (offer letters, pay stubs, job descriptions, tax documents, etc.).

27-Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?
NO. You may _**NOT**_ begin employment before you receive your EAD card from USCIS. Working before practical training has been authorized by USCIS, and you have physically received the EAD card, constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

28-May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?
No. USCIS allows students to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the program end date. USCIS does not honor expedite requests for OPT. Should you make a request to expedite anyway, it will result in longer processing times. You should apply as early as you are able.

29-Do I have to do anything with IPO while I am on OPT?
YES! Immigration regulations **REQUIRE** that while you are on OPT, you _**MUST**_ report address, employer and employer address changes to IPO within **10 days**. Updates must be made using one of the following two OPT reporting portals:

SEVP reporting portal - This portal allows you to update SEVIS directly.
YSU OPT reporting portal - Upon updating this portal, IPO will update the information in SEVIS on your behalf.

16. Can I extend my OPT after the 12 months?
Possibly. There are two types of extensions available: 1) a 24-month extension for those in certain fields (see information on page 6) and 2) an "H-1B Cap Gap Extension." The cap gap extends your work authorization through to the start of your "cap-subject" H-1B visa if your OPT ends after your "cap subject" company has applied for an H-1B for you but before the H-1B starts on the following October 1st. This cap gap extension is available to all F-1 students using OPT in any field, as long as you have a pending or approved "cap subject" H-1B application and the employer applied for the H-1B with a request for change of status as part of the application. The extension is automatic - you do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. "Cap Subject" refers to any H-1B application that must be counted against the quota on H-1B applications.

17. I will live in Ohio while on OPT. Can I get a new/extended OH driver's license/state ID?
Yes. You will need your EAD before you can apply for an OH driver's license or state ID. Check with a local BMV office (http://bmv.ohio.gov/).

18. I went to the OH BMV to get a new/renewed license and they told me my information wasn't in SEVIS or there was an error with my information. What should I do?
The OH BMV has to confirm information from various databases that link to SEVIS. Students on OPT should present the required documentation and make sure to show the EAD and point out the A# located on the card. This gives BMV the number they need to find your data in their system.

INFORMATION ON THE 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

19. What is the 24- month STEM extension of OPT?
The 24-month extension allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in a designated STEM-field (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), to apply for a 24-month extension of their OPT period. **You will NOT apply for the 36 months up front.** You are eligible to file for the STEM extension up to 90 days prior to your post-completion OPT end date.

CRITERIA FOR THE 24-MONTH EXTENSION:
- ❑ You must have graduated from and be working in a STEM-eligible field: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf
- ❑ Your employer must be enrolled in the "E-Verify" program and complete Form I-983.
- ❑ Employment must be paid during the 24-month STEM extension and you cannot be self-employed.
- ❑ You must have maintained status while on OPT and be within 3 months of the end date on your EAD card.

20. What is "E-Verify"?
E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The E-Verify program is currently free to employers and is available in all 50 states. E-Verify provides an automated link to federal databases to help employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers. More information is available at: www.uscis.gov/e-verify. Do not assume that your company is enrolled in E-Verify! Ask your company's Human Resources department if they participate in this program.

21. I think I qualify; how do I apply for the 24-month extension?
Email the International Programs Office to request the 24-month STEM Extension Form and power point. IPO will recommend the STEM extension and you will submit a new application to USCIS for issuance of a new EAD card.

22. Are there any other requirements while I am on the 24-month extension?
Yes. You are obligated to verify your address and employer information *__every 6 months__* while on the 24-month extension (even if the information has not changed). You must also submit a 12-month and 24-month/final evaluation. Verification reports and evaluations must be submitted to isss@ysu.edu in a timely manner.

TRAVEL and OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

23. Now that I've submitted my OPT application to USCIS, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the EAD to arrive?
After you complete your program, you will need the following documents in order to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status:

- ❑ Valid passport
- ❑ Valid F-1 visa stamp
- ❑ OPT I-20 signed for travel
- ❑ EAD card
- ❑ Job offer letter or proof of employment
- ❑ Employer/address reported to SEVIS

**Before you program end date, you should be able to return to the U.S. without the EAD as long as it is still long enough in advance of your program end date.

With specific travel questions, contact the International Programs Office.

24. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the EAD will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can't I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I'm waiting to get the EAD then start work with the card once I get it?
NO!!! If you intend to continue working on your OPT, **NEVER** enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter in tourist status - you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be **invalid**!

25. What if I have applied for OPT but I have not yet received the EAD, can I travel out of the U.S.?
IPO advises that while OPT is pending, you should **NOT** try to re-enter the U.S. until you receive the EAD card. If there are any problems with your OPT application and you are outside of the U.S., it will be difficult for you to respond. If you are outside the U.S. and your OPT application is rejected or denied, it will not be possible for you to reapply or return to the U.S. in F-1 status. If you choose to travel while your application is pending, be sure that you are monitoring your mail and have arranged to have the EAD sent to you overseas.

26. The F-1 visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?
Yes. You must have a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status during the OPT period. **NOTE**: while on F-1 OPT, you can still be subject to a 4 to 6-week security clearance delay. If you have questions regarding your visa application, contact IPO**.**

EXCPTION – Automatic Visa Revalidation. If you are going to Canada, Mexico or one of the adjacent islands, and staying for fewer than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp. Review the Automatic Revalidation policy before you travel to ensure you qualify! https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/automatic-revalidation.html
All other travel documents during OPT are *required*.

27. In what way is my application to the Embassy for a new visa stamp affected by being on OPT?
Applying for a new F-1 visa sticker during OPT does have an added layer of risk. The F-1 student visa status requires that the applicant must intend to return to their home country at the end of the program. If the Embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application could be denied. Many students have been successful in renewing their F-1 visa during the OPT period, but you will have to be comfortable with this risk and be careful to demonstrate nonimmigrant intent. Consult IPO to discuss in more detail.

28. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new F-1 visa stamp while I am on OPT?
Valid passport, EAD, OPT I-20, job offer letter or proof of employment and employer/address reported to IPO and updated in SEVIS**.** Because you are seeking a nonimmigrant visa, the official job offer letter should indicate that your employment is temporary and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you will apply your OPT work experience there.

29. Do I still need to get a travel signature on my I-20 from IPO while on OPT?
Yes! To re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status, you must have a valid travel signature on your OPT I-20. IPO recommends that you request a new travel signature every 6 months during the OPT period. If you are not located in Youngstown, we will make arrangements for you to send your I-20 to IPO and we will ship it back to you. A trip to Youngstown is not required.

Employment Related Information

Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9)
When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled "Employment Eligibility Verification" (IRS Form I-9) which verifies your eligibility to work in the U.S. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. This form requires you to document your identity and work authorization. For F-1 students, the most typical combination of documentation is: your passport, I-94 Record, I-20, and EAD.

Social Security Number (SSN)
For payroll purposes, you will need to provide your SSN. If you do not already have an SSN, you are required to bring your passport, I-94 record, OPT I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and apply for an SSN card. The same documents are required for a replacement card. **To find the closest SSA, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/locator.

Social Security Withholding and Other Taxes
In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. fewer than five years are "non-residents for tax purposes" and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. If you are a non-resident for tax purposes and your employer does withhold FICA, speak to your payroll office. You and your employer can refer to Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens" for additional information. Your earnings **are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes.** Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. The results of the filing will determine if any of the withheld income taxes can be refunded to you.

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Optional Practical Training (OPT) Recommendation Form

To the Student: Complete the following information.

Family Name: _____ **First Name:** _____ **Y Number:** _____

Non-YSU e-mail: _____ **Phone Number:** _____

Address: _____
(Street # and Name)   (City)   (State & Zip Code)

☐ **Check here if you have a secondary MAJOR.**

OPT Start Date: _____ **OPT End Date:** _____

Have you applied for OPT before?: ☐ **No** ☐ **Yes** **If yes, at what educational Level:** ☐ **Bachelor's** ☐ **Master's** ☐ **PhD**

I attended an OPT session on _____ Student Signature: _____

....

To: Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel

The above-named student is applying for permission to engage in employment for OPT as provided in the immigration regulations for F-1 students. OPT is employment in a job related to the student's field of study and is intended to enhance and supplement the formal, classroom education. U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) will authorize OPT.

- IPO must have a statement from the student's academic advisor indicating the date the student is expected to complete all degree requirements. The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date, but the date by which all requirements for the degree program are expected to be fulfilled.
- PhD students are eligible to start OPT once they have passed qualifying exams. Completion date may be in the future.

Please complete the information below and return it to the student so we may process the student's request. Should you have any questions, please call IPO at 330-941-2336.

The information below must be completed and signed by the <u>academic advisor</u>, not by the student.

This is to certify that the student listed above is expected to complete all requirements for the degree on

_____ and will receive the degree of _____ in the field/major of _____.
(Date: mm/dd/yyyy)   *(Level)*   *(Field of Study)*

_____   _____
(Printed name of Academic Advisor)   (Signature of Academic Advisor)

_____   _____
(Telephone Number and/or email address)   (Date)

YOUNGSTOWN
STATE
UNIVERSITY

12-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) Attestation

Initial each box to indicate that you have read and understood each item.

I certify that:

☐	I understand that all work during the OPT period must be directly related to my level and field of study at Youngstown State University.
☐	I am aware of the timelines to apply for OPT and understand that if I do not adhere to these timelines, my OPT application will be denied.

USCIS must receive your application:
- No more than 90 days before your program completion date
- No more than 60 days after your program completion date
- Within 30 days of receiving your I-20 with OPT recommendation

☐	I understand that I must report any address or employment change within 10 days using one of the following two reporting portals; SEVP reporting portal - This portal allows you to update SEVIS directly. YSU OPT reporting portal - Upon updating this portal, IPO will update the information in SEVIS on your behalf.
☐	I understand that I cannot begin working until I receive the physical copy of the EAD card and am within the start and end dates printed on the card.
☐	I understand that during my 12-month period of OPT, I cannot be unemployed for more than 90 days. If unemployed for more than 90 days, I understand that my SEVIS record will be terminated.
☐	If traveling internationally, I will make a timely request for an IPO travel signature on my I-20 (at least one week before traveling outside the U.S.). To request the signature, I will email IPO (isss@ysu.edu) for next steps.
☐	If my immigration status changes, I will notify IPO by providing IPO with a copy of my I-94 showing my new status so that my F-1 SEVIS record can be properly updated.
☐	I will always provide a current email address to IPO and I will read IPO emails carefully to ensure that I am aware of any changes pertaining to my immigration status.

_____   _____   _____

Name (printed)   Signature   Date

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