

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Packet



COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

How to Apply: Read this packet, collect documents listed on page 2, and make an appointment to meet with CGE to review OPT application and obtain OPT Form I-20. If outside the area scan and e-mail or mail all documents to CGE.

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)?

Immigration regulations (8 CFR214.2(f) (10)(ii)) for F-1 visa holders permit students to apply for a work card (employment authorization document-EAD) for off-campus work permission called Optional Practical Training (OPT) for a total of 12 months of full-time work. This work card allows students to work in the U.S. in their field of study, but does not restrict the number of jobs or number of hours they work. Most students use this after they graduate to gain work experience, but some students also use this for summer work permission. However, if you want to work during summers or classes, you can also opt to apply for smaller time periods of OPT. USCIS issues a work card (EAD) to be eligible to work anywhere in the U.S., at any pay scale, for any number of hours. You do not need a job offer to apply. Work permission can be split into more than 1 time period – see below. Each application for OPT must be filed separately and include fees and appropriate documentation. USCIS takes 60-90 days to process OPT applications. Please plan ahead.

OPT START AND END DATES:

The student chooses the start and end dates. For those completing their program, the OPT start date must be within 60 days your program completion and end exactly 12 months later. For example, if you graduate on May 6, 2023 you must start OPT on or before July 6, 2023, and the end date is 12 months later. OPT is usually used after graduation as one 12-month work period. You also can not apply for OPT prior to 90 days before the end date listed on your Form I-20.

Example of Post-Completion OPT- Most students use OPT after graduation

All Students	Complete Coursework Apply for OPT last semester of study	12 months OPT
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If you want to use OPT while enrolled, you choose the exact start and end time (Example of summer work dates: May 9, 2019 to August 9, 2019). Sometimes, students need work permission during summers or during their studies. This is possible but each time OPT is applied for, an entire application must be filed with USCIS (\$410, documents, see page 2).

Example of Pre-Completion OPT – Working during Thesis or Summertime

Summer OPT (can be full-time or part-time)	Complete 2 semesters of coursework <i>Apply for Summer OPT 3-4 months before OPT start date</i>	Full-time or part-time summer OPT (must be part-time if taking other courses)	Complete coursework <i>Apply for OPT in last semester</i>	Use remaining 8 months OPT at end of degree
ALL STUDENTS' OPT use during classes (part-time OPT during classes) *Masters students exception to this rule.	Complete 2 semesters of coursework to qualify for OPT	Students wanting to use OPT while taking classes can only use Part-Time OPT (20 hours/week). Example: If you use OPT during an academic year, apply for 8 months of part-time OPT (= 4 months full-time OPT) and have remaining 8 months of full-time OPT left after graduation or for another semester. At any time after classes are completed (during thesis credits), Master students can apply for part-time or full-time OPT. For temporary positions OPT is needed. If OPT overlaps with graduation, students must file 2 separate OPT applications (see CGE for more details).		

File OPT with USCIS as early as 90 days before your completion date or no later than 60 days after you complete your program.



Optional Practical Training Agreement

This meeting is designed for informational purposes only and is in no way, a substitute for legal advice. The goal of this meeting is to provide a basic overview of the OPT application process and it is ultimately your responsibility to complete and mail the application for OPT permission.

By signing this contract you as a student are agreeing with these terms and stating that you are taking responsibility for your OPT application.

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION

Name: _____		Date: _____	
CU _____	E-Mail _____	:	Student ID #: _____
Telephone _____	Number: _____	Personal	E-mail: _____

OPT Request:

_____ I am requesting OPT for use AFTER GRADUATION (Post-Completion OPT)

_____ I am requesting OPT for use DURING MY STUDIES, I have NOT graduated yet. (Full-time: _____ Part-time: _____)

OPT Dates:

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____

I understand how to maintain my F-1 visa status during OPT. _____

Sign and Date

Bring all documents listed below to your appointment with Center for Global Engagement. If not in the area, scan and email documents to CGE. All documents are required to issue a new OPT Form I-20.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR OPT (Please check that you have each of the requirements below):

- ☐ Completed Commonwealth OPT Application
- ☐ Letter from your academic department (see example on page 5)
- ☐ Commonwealth Transcript - unofficial from My Commonwealth U is acceptable
- ☐ Money order or personal check for \$410 (as of 12/2016) made payable to **Department of Homeland Security**. (If you use a personal check, it could take an extra 2 weeks to clear the check).
- ☐ Two color photographs (U.S. style passport photo – CVS) White background only. Write your name in CAPS and Alien Number (I-94 Number) on back of both photos.
- ☐ Complete I-765 use fillable on-line form at ww.uscis.gov – click “Forms & Employment,” then click “I-765” see instructions & fillable form. For #16 use (c)(3)(A) for Pre-completion OPT and (c)(3)(B) if using Post-completion OPT.
- ☐ Complete G-1145 use fillable on-line form at www.uscis.gov click “Forms & Employment,” then click “G-1145” see instructions & fillable form. (see example on page 3)
- ☐ Complete Student Responsibility Statement signed (use form on page 8)
- ☐ Photocopies of ALL immigration documents: current passport, visa, I-94 (front and back), and all I-20s ever issued (every degree/program ever studied in US), including the one issued for OPT.
- ☐ Copy of EAD card if previously participated in OPT

MAILING INSTRUCTIONS: Make sure to have a copy of all documents before mailing. DO NOT MAIL YOUR ORIGINAL OPT I-20. See boxes below to see which USCIS address to use depending on the courier service. OPT cards can take 60-90 days to be processed.

E-Notification: If you want to receive an e-mail and/or text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application.

Depending on which mail courier service you plan to use, be sure to use the appropriate address below:

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):	FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:
USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680	USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517

*If completing online, we still collect all this information prior to submission, except for the money order.

SAMPLE USCIS G-1145 FORM



e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS
Form G-1145

What Is the Purpose of This Form?

Use this form to request an electronic notification (e-Notification) when U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services accepts your immigration application. This service is available for applications filed at a USCIS Lockbox facility.

General Information

Complete the information below and clip this form to the first page of your application package. You will receive one e-mail and/or text message for each form you are filing.

We will send the e-Notification within 24 hours after we accept your application. Domestic customers will receive an e-mail and/or text message; overseas customers will only receive an e-mail. Undeliverable e-Notifications cannot be resent.

The e-mail or text message will display your receipt number and tell you how to get updated case status information. It will not include any personal information. The e-Notification does not grant any type of status or benefit; rather it is provided as a convenience to customers.

USCIS will also mail you a receipt notice (I-797C), which you will receive within 10 days after your application has been accepted; use this notice as proof of your pending application or petition.

USCIS Privacy Act Statement

AUTHORITIES: The information requested on this form is collected pursuant to section 103(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended INA section 101, et seq.

PURPOSE: The primary purpose for providing the information on this form is to request an electronic notification when USCIS accepts immigration form. The information you provide will be used to send you a text and/or email message.

DISCLOSURE: The information you provide is voluntary. However, failure to provide the requested information may prevent USCIS from providing you a text and/or email message receipting your immigration form.

ROUTINE USES: The information provided on this form will be used by and disclosed to DHS personnel and contractors in accordance with approved routine uses, as described in the associated published system of records notices [[DHS/USCIS-007 - Benefits Information System and DHS/USCIS-001 - Alien File \(A-File\) and Central Index System \(CIS\)](#)], which can be found at www.dhs.gov/privacy. The information may also be made available, as appropriate for law enforcement purposes or in the interest of national security.

Complete this form and clip it on top of the first page of your immigration form(s).

Applicant/Petitioner Full Last Name	Applicant/Petitioner Full First Name	Applicant/Petitioner Full Middle Name
Email Address		Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACULTY

Please detach this page and the next page and provide it to your academic adviser

Dear Faculty Colleague:

One of your advisees, is an international student on an F-1 visa, who will be graduating this semester. As an F-1 student, your advisee is entitled to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) work authorization as part of his/her academic experience in the United States.

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WHAT DOES THE STUDENT REQUIRE FROM YOU?

Your advisee needs evidence that confirms he/she will complete his/her degree this term. Evidence that he/she will graduate this term can be a short note from you (see the next page for a sample) or from the Department Chair, typed on Commonwealth University letterhead.

If you have any questions or require more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for supporting Commonwealth University international graduates.

Sincerely,

Rosana Campbell - Director, Center for Global Engagement (rcampbel@commonwealthu.edu)

John Gradel - Assistant Director, Lock Haven (jrg5874@commonwealthu.edu)

Jennifer Lehman, Bloomsburg (jlehman@commonwealthu.edu)

Rachel Green, Assistant Director, Mansfield (rgreen3@commonwealthu.edu)

SAMPLE ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT LETTER

USE COMMONWEALTH LETTERHEAD

Date

To whom it may concern:

This is to verify that STUDENTS NAME, an undergraduate student in the Department of (DEPARTMENT NAME), will complete his/her degree in DATE. I understand that this student is eligible to apply for OPT.

If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

PROFESSOR NAME

TITLE

PLEASE PROVIDE CONTACT INFORMATION

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR F-1 STATUS ON OPT

You are still in F-1 status while waiting for your approval. You are legal while waiting and do not need to do anything extra to maintain your status after filing for your OPT card.

RESPONSIBILITIES TO MAINTAIN F-1 STATUS DURING OPT

(NEW) REPORT APPROVAL OF EAD (Employment Authorization Document) CARD TO IIS: Scan a copy of your EAD card or approval notice and e-mail it to jgrade@lockhaven.edu. SEVIS is not always accurate, if your approval is noted in SEVIS by USCIS, your I-20 could be accidentally/ automatically cancelled.

(NEW) REPORT ALL CHANGES OF U.S. ADDRESS AND EMPLOYER'S ADDRESS TO IIS: E-mail John at jgradel@lockhaven.edu with changes.

(NEW) HAVE NO MORE THAN 90 DAYS WITHOUT WORK: After completion of your degree, your F-1 status during OPT is dependent upon employment. Students must be employed within 90 days of the OPT start date.

WORK DURING OPT PERIOD ONLY: You cannot be paid until you have the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) in your possession and the start date is reached.

TRAVEL WITH PROPER DOCUMENTS: You can travel out of the U.S. after graduation and before the OPT date begins. You must take your OPT receipt, I-20, visa and passport to reenter the USA. However, during the OPT period students must be employed to reenter the USA – you will need a letter from your employer in addition to the OPT card, I-20, visa and passport. Renewing a visa while on OPT is not prohibited, but not guaranteed. For updated travel info see: www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f.htm

EAD CARD INFO: You should receive a receipt from USCIS – keep this document. It has a number on it “EAC--###-###” which can be used to check the status of your card online or by phone. Check the status of your case: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do> or call 1-800-375-5283. If you hear nothing within 60 days, please contact John at jgradel@lockhaven.edu and he can email the Service Center to double check your address.

Interim / Temporary EAD Card: After 90 days from your receipt date, you can apply for an Interim EAD card through the USCIS center where you applied. Contact the 800-number on your receipt for more information or to see if you qualify.

Errors on Your Card: If your name or date of birth is incorrect, send a copy of your application, card and a letter asking for the card to be changed.

SOCIAL SECURITY APPLICATIONS: If you do not have an SSN, take a letter from your employer to apply for a SSN. Have your employer contact the local SSN office if he/she doesn't understand why you don't have a SSN.

TAKING CLASSES –ENROLLING IN A NEW DEGREE PROGRAM: If you choose to begin a new degree program at another university while you have OPT time left, you will lose the rest of OPT. Once a new I-20 is issued for a new program of study—OPT ends. You can, however, take 1-2 classes during OPT to help you in your job or prerequisites for a different degree.

TAXES: Students who have been in the US for fewer than 5 calendar years are exempt from Social security and Medicare taxes. Let your employer know this. Be sure to file taxes the year after you work, even if you depart from the US.

H-1B VISA: Please see this site for more information: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1271.html. Your employer must file an H1B application for you. H1Bs can be renewed for up to 6 years.

WHAT DOES DHS CONSIDER "EMPLOYMENT" DURING OPT GUIDANCE FOR COMMONWEALTH STUDENTS ON OPT: EMPLOYMENT & UNEMPLOYMENT

INFORMATION FROM DHS IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS FOR OPT – 8 CFR 214.2(f)(12)(E) & (i)

Periods of Unemployment during OPT

(E) *Periods of unemployment during post-completion OPT.* During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total OPT period comprising any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization and the subsequent 17-month extension period.

Reporting requirements while on standard post-completion OPT

(i) *General.* An F-1 student authorized by USCIS to engage in optional practical training (OPT) is required to report any change of name or address, or interruption of such employment to the DSO for the duration of the authorized training. A DSO who recommends a student for OPT is responsible for updating the student's record to reflect these reported changes for the duration of the time that training is authorized.

Types of work that constitute employment while on OPT

Clearly under the new rule, periods of unemployment may put a student's F-1 status at risk. SEVP's OPT Policy Guidance [7.2.1] states that the following activities are considered allowable employment on both pre-completion and standard post-completion OPT, provided that the job is related to the student's program of study:

Regular paid employment for at least 20 hours per week in a position directly related to the student's program of study. Students may work for multiple employers, as long as it is directly related to the student's program of study.

Payment by multiple short-term employers. SEVP says that "Students, such as musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs."

Work for hire. SEVP says, "This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company."

Self-employed business owner. SEVP says, "Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program."

Employment through an agency. SEVP says, "Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency."

Volunteers or unpaid interns. SEVP says, "Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment."

Note that a volunteer position or unpaid internship would be a valid option for someone who otherwise might not meet the minimum employment requirement. For the 17-month STEM extension, however, employment must be paid employment, and although volunteering or unpaid activity is permitted, it will not be counted towards the employment requirement as it is for standard post-completion OPT.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

Reporting Responsibilities: I understand the following:

- My address must be updated within 10 days of moving. This information can be updated by e-mailing the CGE. This must be my residential address, not the address of my employer or friend.
- I am required to update any changes of employer name, address, or interruption of employment to the CGE by e-mailing.
- If my immigration status changes, I am required to send the CGE copies of my new documents within 10 days of the change.
- I will provide the CGE with a legible copy of the front and back of my EAD card when I receive it.
- Failure to do the above could result in loss of my legal non-immigrant status and that if this occurs, I may have to stop working and/or leave the U.S.

General Responsibilities: I understand the following:

- In order to apply for OPT, I must first complete the application and submit it to the CGE and request an OPT recommendation.
- It is my responsibility to properly file my application in a timely manner with all correct information requested from USCIS per Federal Immigration Regulations. My OPT application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the CGE issuing a new Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation on the second page.
- My authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated if I transfer to another school or begin study at another education level.
- DHS regulations require me to seek employment directly related to my major area of study and commensurate with my education level.
- The first day I will be eligible to work is the OPT Start Date listed on my EAD card.
- I cannot accrue 90 days or more of unemployment at any time during OPT. If I do not report my employer information to the CGE, unemployment will continue to accrue.
- If I decide to travel while on OPT I must have a valid I-20 signed by a DSO within six months before reentering the U.S., an unexpired EAD card, a valid passport, a valid employment letter, and a valid F-1 visa stamp to be readmitted to the U.S. The employment letter should contain a statement that the employment is temporary and verification that I will be employed after returning from travel.
- It is my responsibility to stay informed about changing federal regulations that may impact my OPT or F-1 status.
- I understand that failure to follow F-1 regulations and the above statements could result in the termination of my F-1 status.

My signature confirms that the information provided on this form is true and accurate and that I read and understand the Student Responsibility Statement listed above (electronic signatures not permitted). I understand the rules and regulations concerning my engagement in Optional Practical Training (OPT) and agree to all conditions listed above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____