



***An International Student's Guide to Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training:  
ISSI Form 221***

## **PART 1: ABOUT PRE-COMPLETION OPT**

### ***What is Optional Practical Training?***

Optional Practical Training or OPT is temporary employment for students in F-1 visa classification. Its purpose is to allow the student to gain **practical experience directly related to the student's major field of study**.

### ***Who is eligible?***

A student must currently be in F-1 status and must have been in lawful student status (i.e. enrolled full-time) for at least one academic year by the start date of the OPT. Students who have been authorized for 12 months or more of Co-op or full time Curricular Practical Training within the U.S. are not eligible for OPT. Students in language training programs or preparatory programs are not eligible for OPT.

### ***How long may Optional Practical Training last?***

Students can engage in up to 12 months of OPT for each higher level degree, i.e. 12 months after a Bachelor's, 12 more after a Master's etc. In addition, some students may be eligible for the Cap Gap Extension of OPT or the 17-Month Extension of OPT. Once OPT has been authorized by USCIS (U.S Citizenship and Immigration Service), it may not be changed or rescinded. Any employment time authorized is considered to have been used whether or not the student engages in employment.

### ***When should one apply for Optional Practical Training?***

When to apply for OPT depends upon whether the student intends to engage in OPT before or after completion of studies. Please note that students must send their application for OPT to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) within 30 days of the date of recommendation for OPT by the International Student Advisor at the ISSI. This is the date of issuance of the I-20 that bears the recommendation for OPT. Students may apply for pre-completion OPT as early as 90 days before the desired start date of employment authorization. Students may apply for post-completion OPT as early as 90 days before completion of their studies and the application must be at USCIS no later than 60 days after completion of studies. It is usually recommended that students apply earlier rather than later during the application period.

### ***When may one engage in Optional Practical Training?***

Students may engage in OPT either after a program of study (Post-completion OPT) or in certain circumstances during a program of study (Pre-completion OPT). In addition, some students may be eligible for the Cap Gap Extension of OPT or the 17-Month Extension of OPT. Following are descriptions of the types of OPT.

#### **Post-Completion OPT**

The majority of students engage in OPT after completion of their studies, otherwise known as "post-completion OPT." An F-1 student applying for post-completion OPT **should apply for OPT no earlier than 90 days prior to completion of studies, but no later than 60 days after completion of the program** (completion of a program does not necessarily coincide with a graduation ceremony).

#### **Pre-Completion OPT**

Students may engage in OPT during their academic program. This is known as "pre-completion OPT." Any authorized pre-completion OPT will be subtracted from the available time for post-completion OPT. **Any graduate student who is requesting pre-completion OPT must first obtain clearance (Form ISSI 217) from their graduate school before applying.** A student is eligible to apply for OPT prior to completion of studies under the following circumstances: 1) during the annual vacation (full- or part-time); 2) if you have completed all course work except for a thesis or dissertation (full- or part-time); 3) while school is in session, if the employment does not exceed 20 hours per week (part-time only). To qualify for pre-completion OPT, a student must be registered full-time. Students are not required to have a job offer to apply; however, it is usually advantageous to obtain a definite employment prospect for pre-completion OPT since any time authorized for pre-completion OPT is subtracted from the time available for post-completion OPT, as previously stated.



***When may one engage in Optional Practical Training? (continued from previous page)***

**Cap Gap Extension**

The Cap Gap Extension of OPT employment or extension of stay may be available to students whose employers have applied for an H1B working visa. The Cap Gap is meant to bridge the gap that exists between the OPT employment authorization and October 1, the date at which the H1B goes into effect. Additional information is available at [www.northeastern.edu/issi](http://www.northeastern.edu/issi) in the “Cap Gap” section of OPT information.

**17-Month Extension**

The 17-month extension of OPT may be available in certain STEM degrees as designated by the Department of Homeland Security. Also, to be eligible for the 17-month extension of OPT students must have an employer who is enrolled in the E-Verify program. Students may apply for the 17-month extension as early as 120 days prior to the end of their original 12 months of post-completion OPT. Applications must be at USCIS prior to the end date of the OPT. Additional information is available at [www.northeastern.edu/issi](http://www.northeastern.edu/issi) in the “17-Month Extension” section of OPT information.

***Can one travel abroad during Pre-completion Optional Practical Training?***

During pre-completion OPT, there are no travel restrictions as there are during the application process for post-completion OPT.

***What effect does authorization of Pre-OPT have on future Post-OPT?***

Any Pre-completion OPT that is authorized by USCIS during a degree program will be subtracted from the time available for Post-completion OPT whether the student finds employment or not. Part-time Pre-OPT is subtracted at the rate of part time (for example, 4 months of part-time Pre-OPT would be equivalent to 2 months of full-time OPT, thus 2 months would be subtracted from the 12 months available for Post-OPT).

***Who can one speak to about OPT?***

The advisors at the ISSI are available to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about OPT or any other employment options. The ISSI holds regularly scheduled OPT Seminars to give students the opportunity to learn about all regulations pertaining to OPT as well as application procedures. Attendance at an OPT Seminar is the first step required for students who plan to apply for OPT.



## **PART 2: APPLYING FOR PRE-COMPLETION OPT**

### **Step 1: Make an appointment with the ISSI**

It is mandatory for all international students who wish to apply for OPT to make an appointment to discuss Pre-completion OPT with an ISSI advisor. If you are currently on Co-op, you may make a telephone appointment. I advisor.

### **Step 2 – Submit OPT Application Documents to the ISSI**

The student must bring the following documents to the ISSI so that the ISSI can issue a new I-20 with a recommendation for OPT. Students will receive an email from the ISSI when their I-20 with OPT recommendation is ready for them to pick up.

1. Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional) (download from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)).
2. ISSI Form 210 – Request for SEVIS I-20
3. ISSI Form 217 –Pre-OPT Clearance (for graduate students)
4. Form I-765 (original)
5. Photocopy of **ALL** previous I-20s (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pages)
6. Photocopy of your last Employment Authorization Card (front and back), if applicable
7. Photocopy of identity pages of your passport, including correction and extension pages
8. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp; if you do not have an F-1 visa stamp due to change of status, you must send in your approval notice from USCIS
9. Photocopy of your I-94 card(front and back)

### **Step 3 – Mailing the Application to USCIS**

After attending one of the seminars, submitting requests for a new I-20, and obtaining a new I-20 with a recommendation for OPT, the student must assemble the following documents for mailing:

1. Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional)
2. Form I-765 (original)
3. Photocopy of new I-20 with the OPT recommendation— be sure to sign and date the new I-20 first
4. Photocopy of **ALL** previous I-20s (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pages)
5. Photocopy of your last Employment Authorization Card (front and back), if applicable
6. Photocopy of identity pages of your passport, including correction and extension pages
7. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp; if you do not have an F-1 visa stamp due to change of status, you must send in your approval notice from USCIS
8. Photocopy of your I-94 card(front and back)
9. Check, Money Order, or Bank Check for \$380 made payable to the Dept. of Homeland Security
10. Two passport photos (white background)—print your name and SEVIS ID# on the back of each photo

Mail the items above through the U.S. Postal Service **Certified Mail with return receipt** to the USCIS service center that has jurisdiction over your district of residence. If you reside in Massachusetts send your application to (students who live in other states should refer to page 10 of Form I-765 instructions or ISSI Form 208 for the correct mailing address):

**U.S. Postal Service**  
USCIS  
P.O. Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

**Express or Courier Service**  
USCIS  
ATTN: AOS  
2501 S. State Highway 121  
Business Suite 401  
Lewisville, TX 75067

### **Step 4 – Processing of the OPT Application by USCIS**

**Receipt Notice (Form I-797):** After the student has mailed the OPT application to the USCIS, he or she will receive a confirmation of receipt, Form I-797. *Please keep this form.* This confirmation notification contains a case number assigned to you by the USCIS that you can use to track your case status online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).