OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) CHECKLIST

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) permit lawful F-1 students the opportunity to gain practical work experience in their major field of study. This experience is called Optional Practical Training (OPT). By law, OPT must be approved by the Principal Designated School Official (PDSO, Director of Student Support Collaborative and Intercultural Affairs in the [IC]) and submitted to USCIS within 60 days of degree program completion. F-1 visa holders become eligible for another year of OPT when they change to a higher educational level. The checklist below will offer guidance in requesting OPT.

NOTE: OPT application process is not complete until you sign a new Form I-20.

Checklist:

Initial Eligibility Requirements:

You must:

- ❑ have valid F-1 status.
- ❑ have been lawfully enrolled full-time for at least one academic year.
- ❑ have used less than one year of full time Curricular Practical Training (CPT).
- ❑ have not already used a full year of OPT based on your current degree.
- ❑ be in the last semester of your degree program or completing your thesis or equivalent.

Submit paperwork to the IC:

- ❑ *Legible* copies of:
  - o passport ID pages
  - o latest Admission Stamp (red stamp inside passport)
  - o latest Visa
  - o front and back of I-94 Card (or Approval Notice with new I-94)
  - o front page and signature page of *all* previous I-20s from all schools
  - o any previously-issued Employment Authorization Documents
- ❑ Form I-765 (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf)
  - o Item 16 Eligibility Category:
    - ✓ Pre-completion OPT input "(c)(3)(A)"
    - ✓ Post-completion OPT input "(c)(3)(B)"
- ❑ 2 passport-style photos (see back of OPT Release Form for details)
- ❑ $380 Fee: check or money order payable to *Department of Homeland Security*

Authorization:

- A new Form I-20 will be issued to you with OPT dates.
- Upon USCIS approval of your request for OPT, you will be issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Since it can take up to 4 months for the USCIS to process your request for OPT, timely submission of your application to the IC will help avoid loss of OPT time. OPT may be authorized for up to one year and can be extended for additional 17 months. To be eligible for the 17 month OPT extension, you must have completed a degree in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM degrees). It is illegal to begin employment until you receive the EAD, and you are only permitted to work within the dates specified on the EAD. You may work for more than one employer and/or change employers during your period of authorized OPT. The employment you select for your OPT must be directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level. While on OPT, you are still in F-1 status and subject to F-1 regulations. Students are permitted to engage in part time study while on OPT, **but please note that beginning a new full time educational program will cancel your OPT. Transferring your SEVIS record to another school during OPT automatically cancels your OPT.**

Traveling and OPT:

Travel outside the U.S. prior to receipt of the EAD may constitute an abandonment of the OPT application, causing it to be cancelled and prohibiting your re-entry to the U.S.

If you travel during your OPT, you will need:

- A properly endorsed I-20 (within the last 6 months)
- Your EAD
- Letter of Employment:
  - on company letterhead and signed by a company official
  - stating a brief job description showing relation to your current major
  - stating dates of employment: beginning & ending (must match EAD)
  - stating the number of hours per week: full or part time

Upon expiration of your EAD/OPT, you have a 60-day grace period during which you must depart the US, obtain a new I-20 for further study, extend the duration of your OPT or secure another immigration status.

17 Month OPT Extension

OPT can be extended for additional 17 months. To be eligible for the 17 month OPT extension, you must have completed a degree in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM degrees).

Eligibility Requirements:

You must:

- ❑ Have valid F-1 status
- ❑ Be a STEM student

- Actuarial Science
- Engineering
- Engineering Technologies
- Science Technologies

- Mathematics and Statistics
- Military Technologies
- Physical Sciences
- Medical Scientist

- ❑ Submit a copy of your degree
- ❑ Submit a copy of your employer name as listed in E-Verify
- ❑ Submit your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number

Submit paperwork to the IC:

- ❑ Form I-765 (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf)
  - o Item 20 Eligibility Category: OPT-17 month extension input "(c)(3)(C)"
  - o Complete information requested in "Item 17"
- ❑ $380 Fee: check or money order payable to *Department of Homeland Security*
- ❑ Copy of previous Employment Authorization Card

Authorization:

- ❑ A new Form I-20 will be issued to you with new OPT dates
- ❑ Upon USCIS's approval of your request for OPT, you will be issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- ❑ If filed in a timely manner, you can continue working for up to 180 days before the arrival of your new EAD card

NOTE: Immigration regulations requires students to report to their DSO any change within 10 days.