

## **Valparaiso University Office of International Programs (OIP) Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide students in F-1 status with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in the student's field of study, as listed on the I-20. OPT is different from CPT in the following ways:

- A job offer is not needed before applying for OPT
- US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), not OIP, authorizes the training
- It takes 3 months to receive authorization
- Student may work for one or more employers, change jobs, or look for work (up to 90 days) during OPT
- OPT is limited to 12 months per degree level (exception for some STEM majors); it does NOT mean 12 months after each undergraduate degree or each master's degree if you do multiple undergraduate degrees or multiple masters degree. (See an international student advisor at OIP for details)

### **Eligibility Requirements**

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must:

- be in full-time student status for 1 full semester year (Fall and Spring semesters). Time spent at INTERLINK does not count towards the one academic year requirement;
- be in F-1 visa status when applying;
- be registered full time every semester (except for summer vacation or for the semester you are authorized for Reduced Course Load);
- possess a valid, unexpired passport;
- possess an I-20 that is unexpired and reflects current information such as major and educational level. Please note that if your I-20 is not current, you will need to provide document to reflect the changes so we can update your I-20 before processing the work authorization. This will delay the processing time of your OPT application;
- be willing to make periodic reports to OIP regarding your employment.

Students enrolled in English language training programs (INTERLINK) are not eligible for OPT after completion of their English studies.

### **When to Apply**

- You may apply for OPT up to 90 days before your expected program completion date.
- You may apply for OPT no later than 60 days after the completion of the program requirements.
- Filing later will NOT give you additional OPT time. Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT, and those 12 months must be taken within the 14 months following the completion of degree requirements.

- The date you complete your program requirement is NOT the graduation date or the date you receive a certificate of diploma. In most cases, it is the last day of the term in which you finish all degree requirements, BUT for students who participate in internship or research, their program completion date may be any day during the year. In this case, the last day of an academic term may not be the date you complete program requirements.
- Processing time for OPT applications can be found on the USCIS website. (www.uscis.gov) In general, expect that the OPT application will take three months to be approved.

### **How to Apply**

- Attend OPT workshop, pick up an OPT application packet
- Have your academic advisor complete the second half of the attached Academic Advisor Recommendation Form and return it to you (not to OIP)
- Complete the attached I-765 Form. Please follow the handout: “Instructions for Completing Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization”
- Call OIP at 464-5333 and make an appointment

### **Bring with you:**

- 1) Completed forms (Advisor Recommendation form and I-765)
- 2) Two passport style photographs, taken within 30 days of application
  - Available at the One Card office in the Christopher Center Room 250 (Two photos for \$10)
  - print your name and SEVIS ID on the back of your pictures, put them in a small envelope
- 3) A certified check, money order, or a personal check for the application fee (\$380), payable to Department of Homeland Security; on the memo line put your name, SEVIS ID, and “I-765 application.”
  - **Important:** If you pay with your personal check, make sure there are sufficient funds in your account; do not close your bank account until your check is cashed.
- 4) Your passport, I-94, **all** I-20’s, and Employment Authorization Documents (EAD cards), if any.
- 5) **Originals and copies of all documents** including a copy of the informational page of your passport, F1 Visa, front and back of I-94, page 1 and 3 of I-20’s, and EAD cards.
- 6) If you have a job offer, bring the formal job offer letter with you, it will help expedite the application process.

During the appointment, we will review all the forms, answer any remaining questions you may have, make copies, and enter data into the SEVIS system recommending OPT. A new I-20 will be issued to you with the recommended dates for OPT. This is **NOT** authorization for you to work.

Once OPT is granted, it may not be changed or stopped. Be very sure of the dates you want. An unexpected delay in completing degree requirements, the inability to find an

appropriate job or the loss of a job will not change the dates that you are allowed to work.

Once permission to work begins it continues until the expiration date and cannot be changed.

**Important:** Make photocopies of each item in the application packet for your records and mail the entire packet (by certified or return receipt mail) to the Service Center with jurisdiction over the address on your application (item #3 on Form I-765). The application must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after the OPT I-20 is printed during the OPT appointment.

<b>If your I-765 address is in:</b>	<b>Mail your application to:</b>
Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.	<p><b><u>USCIS Phoenix Lockbox</u></b></p> <p>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:                      USCIS                      PO Box 21281                      Phoenix, AZ 85036</p> <p>For Express mail and courier deliveries:                      USCIS                      Attn: AOS                      1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S                      Suite 100                      Phoenix, AZ 85034</p>
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia	<p><b><u>USCIS Dallas Lockbox</u></b></p> <p>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:                      USCIS                      PO Box 660867                      Dallas, TX 75266</p> <p>For Express mail and courier deliveries:                      USCIS                      Attn: AOS                      2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business                      Suite 400                      Lewisville, TX 75067</p>

### **While on OPT**

- Students are still considered to be in F-1 status while on OPT, OIP will continue to assist you if you have concerns or questions  
You may begin working:
  - only upon receiving the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS;
  - only during the dates listed on the card (with the exception of the Cap Gap Prevention, which will be discussed separately); and
  - only upon completion of all degree requirement.
- Students must work in their major field of study, as noted on their I-20
- Students may work for one or more employers, change jobs, or look for work (up to 90 days) during OPT
- There are no maximum limits on the number of hours per week students can work while on OPT, but students must work for at least 20 hours per week while on OPT.
- You must continue to verify your information in SEVIS every 6 months by reporting to OIP,
- Report any change in name, address, employment, immigration status, any interruption of employment (including a return to studies, termination of employment, or exiting the U.S.) to OIP within 10 days of your change. OIP needs to update this information in SEVIS.

### **Unemployment Issues:**

- You may not accumulate a total of more than 90 days of unemployment (120 days for students with 17 month/STEM extension)
- Days spent outside the U.S. while unemployed count towards the 90 days of unemployment permitted.
- Students who are unemployed for more than 90 days will be considered out of status.
- Failure to report interruptions of employment or accruing more than 90 days of unemployment may result in USCIS not approving future benefits or request.

### **Traveling Issues:**

While employed, if you are traveling outside the U.S. for a vacation or for business, those dates outside the U.S. do not count as days of unemployment.

Traveling outside the U.S. after your OPT has been approved AND after the completion date on your I-20, you must take with you:

- Your most current I-20 endorsed for travel by OIP (each travel signature is valid for only 6 months during the period of OPT)
- Your valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- A valid passport (at least 6 months into the future from the date of re-entry)
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Employment letter showing that you are hired or working in your major field of study and will be returning to the U.S. to resume employment

Traveling outside of the U.S. while waiting for your OPT to be approved and **before you complete your degree**, take these items with you:

- A valid passport (at least 6 months into the future from the date of re-entry)
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your most current I-20 with travel signature (valid for 6 months during OPT)
- I-797 receipt notice for pending OPT

Traveling outside the U.S. while waiting for your OPT to be approved **AND AFTER** your degree completion:

OIP does not recommend students to travel outside the U.S. in this case as it is risky and you may not be allowed to reenter to the U.S. Also, please note that it is very difficult to apply for an F-1 visa while on OPT. Please see an advisor to discuss your travel options.

### After OPT

You have a 60-day grace period after the last day listed on your EAD. You may not work during your grace period but you may stay in the U.S. legally to prepare for your departure, to begin a new program of study or to submit an application for a change of status.

- **CAP-GAP Prevention:**

- 1) If an H-1 B application is pending or approved for your H-1B cap-subject employer, you may continue your employment until your employment start date (October 1 of the following fiscal year) or until your application is denied. The CAP-GAP work authorization continuation only applies in cases where the H-1 B petition is filed BEFORE the EAD expires. In this case, the permission to allow student to continue to work is automatic and no new EAD will be issued. The student should contact OIP to issue a new I-20 to prove your work authorization during this period.
- 2) If the EAD expires before the H-1B petition is filed, but the student is still within the 60- day grace period, that student may stay in the U.S. until a decision on the H-1B petition is reached; however, that student may not work.

- **OPT 17 month Extension (Previously know as STEM extension)**

(See separate handout or check our web site for details)

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**Please keep this handout with your immigration documents for future references.**

## ***Instructions for Completing Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization***

F-1 students applying for employment authorization must complete Form I-765 to submit with the appropriate documents to USCIS.

I am applying for:

- *Permission to accept employment* Check this box if you have never had an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) before.
- *Replacement (of lost employment authorization document)* Check here if you are requesting a replacement EAD card
- *Renewal of my permission to accept employment* (attach previous employment authorization document) Check here if you have had a previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD). This would include 17 month extension (previously known as STEM extension) applicants.

### *#1. Name*

Family Name in CAPS (capital letters) First Middle  
e.g., SMITH, Amy

*#3. Address.* This is where USCIS will send your EAD card, and should be valid until you receive it. **The US Post Office will not forward this mail** and your EAD card will be returned to USCIS. If you anticipate you will move before the EAD arrives, you should put down a friend's address. Write on the address line in this format:

c/o your friend's name  
your friend's address

(The symbol "c/o" stands for "in care of", it is important to follow this format especially if you do not reside at that address.)

If the EAD card is lost you will be responsible for filing for a replacement card which will cost you another \$380.

*#9. Social Security Number.* If you don't have one, write in "N/A" (not applicable).

*#10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if Any).* Use your I-94 card number. Your I-94 card is the small white card issued to you when you first entered the US. The number will be an 11-digit number at the top of the card. (If the typewritten number is crossed out, use the handwritten 11-digit number directly below it.) If you have been issued a previous EAD card, also list the A-Number that is on that card.

*#16. Eligibility Category.* F-1 students applying for Optional Practical Training:

Post-completion OPT: (c) (3) (B)

17 month extension (previously known as STEM extension): (c) (3) (C)

**Sign, write your current phone number and date.**

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

I-765, Application For
Employment Authorization

Do not write in this block.

Remarks, Action Block, Fee Stamp
A#
Applicant is filing under §274a.12
Application Approved. Employment Authorized / Extended (Circle One) until (Date).
Subject to the following conditions:
Application Denied.
Failed to establish eligibility under 8 CFR 274a.12 (a) or (c).
Failed to establish economic necessity as required in 8 CFR 274a.12(c)(14), (18) and 8 CFR 214.2(f)

I am applying for:
[X] Permission to accept employment.
[ ] Replacement (of lost employment authorization document).
[ ] Renewal of my permission to accept employment (attach previous employment authorization document).

1. Name (Family Name in CAPS) (First) (Middle) Which USCIS Office? Date(s)
2. Other Names Used (include Maiden Name) Results (Granted or Denied - attach all documentation)
3. Address in the United States (Street Number and Name) (Apt. Number) 12. Date of Last Entry into the U.S. (mm/dd/yyyy)
(Town or City) (State/Country) (ZIP Code) 13. Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
4. Country of Citizenship/Nationality 14. Manner of Last Entry (Visitor, Student, etc.)
5. Place of Birth (Town or City) (State/Province) (Country) 15. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)
6. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy) 7. Gender [ ] Male [ ] Female
8. Marital Status [ ] Married [ ] Single
[ ] Widowed [ ] Divorced
9. Social Security Number (include all numbers you have ever used) (if any)
10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if any)
11. Have you ever before applied for employment authorization from USCIS?
[ ] Yes (If "Yes," complete below) [ ] No
16. Go to Part 2 of the Instructions, Eligibility Categories. In the space below, place the letter and number of the category you selected from the instructions (For example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii), etc.).
Eligibility under 8 CFR 274a.12 ( c ) ( 3 ) ( B )
17. If you entered the Eligibility Category, (c)(3)(C), in item 16 above, list your degree, your employer's name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in the space below.
Degree:
Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify:
Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number

Certification

Your Certification: I certify, under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America, that the foregoing is true and correct. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking. I have read the Instructions in Part 2 and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in Block 16.

Signature Telephone Number Date

Signature of Person Preparing Form, If Other Than Above: I declare that this document was prepared by me at the request of the applicant and is based on all information of which I have any knowledge.

Print Name Address Signature Date

Table with 7 columns: Remarks, Initial Receipt, Resubmitted, Relocated (Rec'd, Sent, Approved), Completed (Denied, Returned)



**ACADEMIC ADVISOR'S RECOMMENDATION FORM  
For Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

**A. To be completed by student:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
VU email: \_\_\_\_\_ alternate email: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing below, I understand that:

- With Optional Practical Training (OPT), I must work in a position directly related to my major;
- I must apply for OPT latest by 60 days of the completion of my course of study (it does not necessarily mean the graduation date);
- I will report any change of address or employer to OIP within 10 days while on OPT
- I may have a maximum of 90 days of unemployment on a standard OPT

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**B. To be completed by the above student's academic advisor:**

The student listed above is applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is work authorization granted by Department of Homeland Security for F-1 students to work in a job related to their major field of study. Unlike Curricular Practical Training (CPT), a job offer is not required and the student does not need to register for a course for the employment. Please complete the following information to help our office to determine whether the student is eligible to apply. Please contact the Office of International Programs (OIP) for any questions.

Phone: 464-5333; fax:464-6868; location: 209 Harre Union

Web site: [www.valpo.edu/international](http://www.valpo.edu/international)

Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree level: \_\_\_\_\_

Check one:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date to complete all degree requirement: \_\_\_\_\_

(this is not necessarily graduation date)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date to complete all course requirements excluding the thesis or dissertation:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and title: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_