

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is off campus employment authorization approved by USCIS that lets F-1 students get work experience in their major field of study. The amount of work you are permitted is a maximum of 12 months of *full-time* employment for each *higher* educational level you pursue in the U.S. You can use it during or after your studies once approved. You can work for any employer, anywhere in the country. Part-time employment is considered to be less than 20 hours per week. Full-time employment is considered to be more than 20 hours per week. Part time employment accrues at half the full time rate.

Think of it as an OPT bank account. In that account are 12 months of full-time Optional Practical Training for your current program of study. Let's say you'd like to work full-time for three months during the summer break after your sophomore (second) year of your Bachelor's degree. That's a three month withdrawal of full-time employment, leaving you nine months left to spend during your Bachelor's degree. During your junior (third) year, you decide to work part-time (less than 20 hours a week) for two semesters (nine months). Since part-time employment counts at half the full-time rate, you've made a withdrawal of four and a half months of full-time employment. This leaves you with four and a half months of full-time employment remaining in your account to use once you graduate.

If you decide to spend all of your OPT after you complete your degree, you must request all of it at once, that is, the full year. You cannot use it in pieces.

If you decide to go on for your Master's degree after completing your OPT for your Bachelor's, your bank account will be *full* again with another 12 months available to you!

HOW CAN IT BE USED?

- ✓ **Summer vacation and semester break** – either part-time or full-time employment.
- ✓ **While school is in session** – part-time employment only.
- ✓ **After completion of all course requirements for a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree, excluding the thesis or equivalent** – either part-time or full-time employment.
- ✓ **After completion of ALL requirements for the course of study** – full-time employment only.

HOW CAN YOU QUALIFY FOR IT?

1. You must have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year.
2. Your employment must be directly related to your current degree program.
3. You do not have to have a job offer to apply for OPT. If you are applying for "before completion of studies OPT" it is wise that you be as sure as possible of a job so that you do not waste any of your OPT "account".
4. You may apply for after-completion of studies OPT up to 90 days before your program completion date and 60 days after your program completion date.
5. Please note that you are **not eligible** for any type of employment once you academic program ends, pending your OPT approval and start date selection (including on campus employment).

PLEASE NOTE: You will **NOT** be eligible for OPT if you have used 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT).

IMPORTANT INFORMATION



You must not begin employment prior to receiving employment authorization from USCIS. Working off-campus without authorization is a very serious violation of your F-1 status, and it may result in deportation and denial of future immigration benefits. If you make a Designated School Official (DSO) aware that you have worked illegally, the government requires the DSO to report this to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Please be advised that you must always consult with the Immigration Services Office if you have any questions about your status. Our office is located in the Hillwood Commons 270. You can contact us at (516) 299-1451.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPT?

IF YOU COME TO YOUR APPOINTMENT WITHOUT ALL OF THE COMPLETED PAPERWORK (INCLUDING PHOTOCOPIES), WE WILL RESCHEDULE YOU FOR ANOTHER DAY!

- Step 1:** Read and review OPT information on page one.
- Step 2:** Gather all required paperwork listed at the bottom of page 3:
- I-765 Form (available at www.uscis.gov)**
 - Certification of Completion form**
 - OPT Request Form**
 - Two Passport Style Photographs**
 - Size must be 2" x 2"
 - white background
 - Print your name and SEVIS # on back of both pictures
 - Photos must be taken within the last 30 days at time of application
 - Photocopies of all previous I-20 forms** issued by all schools you have attended (including LIU Post) (ONLY pages 1 and 3).
 - Copy of Form I-94** Print a copy of this card at www.cbp.gov/I94.
 - Photocopies of your passport identification pages and visa**
 - Fee: \$380 fee, in the form of check or money order**
 - write out check/MO as: three hundred eighty and 00
 - Make it payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**.
 - If using a personal check, it must have your name and current address on it.
 - Please write your SEVIS # on the check or money order
 - Photocopy of any previous EAD Card(s)** (will only have if you have been approved for OPT or Severe Economic Hardship in the past)
- Step 3:** Make an appointment with your ISS advisor (appointments are for 1 hour).
- Step 4:** Be on time for your appointment! At this appointment you and your advisor will put together an OPT packet for USCIS. You will receive a new I-20 at this time. Your packet is mailed and you can track the package online.
- Step 5:** You will receive a receipt notice in the mail within 2 to 4 weeks from the application arrival date. You can track your application online using the EAC number on the receipt notice.
- Step 6:** Once you receive your approval notice and EAD card, please bring them to the ISS office. At this time you will receive a new OPT approval I-20.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

After you return your application to the International Student Services Office, it can take up to three months for your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to be returned to you from USCIS. If there is an emergency and you need the EAD Card earlier, you may request "Expeditious Handling" of your application. For more information go www.uscis.gov and search for "expedite criteria". **PLEASE NOTE: It is important to take USCIS processing time into consideration when planning the date you want to start working!**
You cannot begin to work until you have your EAD Card!

HOW TO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED OPT REQUEST FORM (PAGE 4)

- ✓ **Item #1: Personal and Program Information.** Please note that we will only accept a paper application no less than two weeks away from 60 days after your completion date. If you apply after this time you will need to e-file your application (follow instructions on page 2, option 2 of this application).
- ✓ **Item #2:** Indicate what type of OPT you are applying for and the dates you want to work. Tell us how much of your 12-month OPT benefit you have already used for this degree level, if any.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED USCIS I-765 FORM (Page 5)

- ✓ If this is your first OPT, under, "I am applying for" check off "**Permission to accept employment**".
- ✓ Item #3: Address: This is the address your EAD will be mailed to. List your current physical address.
- ✓ Item #10 – A-Number or I-94 Number: Put your I-94 number unless USCIS has previously assigned you an alien registration number.
- ✓ Item #11: If you have ever applied for Severe Economic Hardship or Optional Practical Training employment before, answer yes, where and when you applied, whether it was granted or denied and attach a photocopy of any EAD card issued for it.
- ✓ Item #16: Write (c) (3) (A) for pre-completion OPT; (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT.
- ✓ Item #17: Write N/A in each line unless you are applying for an extension of your current OPT.
- ✓ Your Certification: Sign, put your telephone number and the date.
- ✓ If you do not complete a line please write N/A in that line.

HOW CAN YOU EXTEND YOUR OPT?

You can extend pre-completion of studies OPT by filing another application. You may not continue to work until it has been authorized by USCIS.

For post completion OPT, you must apply for the full amount of time remaining in your 12 months bank account. You will be entitled to another 12-month period of OPT if you go on to a higher level of study. Post-completion OPT can be extended only for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) degree programs.

STUDY AND POST-COMPLETION OPT

Immigration regulations state that, "Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level." If you decide to begin studying again, your OPT will end automatically at the start of your studies here or when you transfer your I-20 to a new school.

TRACKING YOUR APPLICATION AFTER IT IS SUBMITTED

USCIS will send you a receipt within four weeks of receiving your application. This receipt will have an EAC Number that you can use to track the status of your application online at: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND STATUS

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. You are required to report any interruptions in your employment to the ISS office within 10 days.

Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month OPT period.



STOP! DON'T START WORKING UNTIL USCIS AUTHORIZES YOUR EMPLOYMENT AND YOU HAVE YOUR EAD CARD!



CERTIFICATION OF COMPLETION OF STUDIES FOR F-1 STUDENTS

TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT

Student's Name _____
Last Name First Name Middle Name

Major _____ Degree Level _____

LIU Post ID# _____ Phone _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY ACADEMIC ADVISOR

(Please return form to student)

Degree Expected: Doctorate Graduate Undergraduate Other _____

Major field of Study: _____

When will this student complete his/her studies at LIU Post (mm/dd/yyyy)? ____/____/____

This date represents (please check one):

- Final day of classes in student's final semester
- Submission of dissertation/thesis
- Masters/PhD Defense Date
- Other (please explain)

Please be specific with additional comments: _____

By signing below, I certify that the information above is true and accurate. I am aware that any questions regarding this form should be directed to Immigration Services Office, (516) 299 – 1451, prior to signing the form.

Advisor's Name (Print) _____ Ext. _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Dept. _____

Please return this original form to Immigration Services Office, Hillwood Commons 270.