University of Colorado Boulder

Office of International Education
   International Students & Scholar Services
Center for Community, Suite S355
123 UCB
Boulder, Colorado 80309-0123

t +1 303 492 6016
t +1 303 492 8057
f +1 303 492 5185
w http://www.colorado.edu/oie
e ISSS@colorado.edu

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined by the regulations as "temporary employment authorization for practical training directly related to a student's major field of study." Standard OPT is available for a cumulative maximum of 12 months of employment authorization per higher degree level completed in the U.S. An extension of OPT is available for students with certain STEM degrees and E-Verify employers.

WHEN CAN OPT OCCUR?

Pre-Completion OPT: Part-time while school is in session; during annual vacation; once all coursework except for thesis or dissertation remains in academic program. Pre-completion OPT does not automatically convert to post-completion OPT with the completion of one's degree; a separate OPT application must be submitted to USCIS including the application fee.

Most students utilize Curricular Practical Training instead of pre-completion OPT during their degree program in order to preserve their eligibility to apply for 12 months of post-completion OPT. Any OPT utilized prior to degree completion is deducted from the initial 12 month allowable benefit.

Post-Completion OPT: After completion of all degree requirements; after completion of all coursework (excluding thesis or dissertation); 24 Month STEM Extension of OPT

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS (For Pre-Completion OPT or Initial 12 Months of Post-Completion OPT)

In order to be eligible to apply for OPT, you must:

- [ ] Currently be in the U.S. in valid F-1 status;
- [ ] Have a valid passport and I-94 record indicating F-1 and D/S (duration of status);
- [ ] Have been continuously enrolled full-time for at least one full academic year before your requested OPT start date;
- [ ] Be enrolled full-time at CU-Boulder (or be authorized for a Reduced Course Load) in the semester in which you apply for OPT;
- [ ] Have not completed a year of full-time CPT at the current degree level;
- [ ] Have not previously completed a higher degree level in the U.S.;
- [ ] Have not previously been approved for 12 months of OPT at the current degree level or a higher degree level;
- [ ] Have not completed more than a year of full-time CPT at the current degree level or a higher degree level; AND
- [ ] Only pursue employment in your major field of study.

You cannot apply for OPT if you depart the U.S. during your grace period. OPT applications must be filed while you are in valid F-1 status and you are not eligible to re-enter the U.S.in F-1 status during your grace period if you do not already have a pending or approved OPT application

WHEN TO APPLY FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT (For Initial 12 months of OPT Only)

PLAN AHEAD! OPT applications are processed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). **Processing often takes 2- 4 months.**

Post-Completion OPT applications based on the completion of all degree requirements, must be received by USCIS:
- No more than 90 days prior to degree completion;
- As late as 60 days after the completion of your degree program or the program end date indicated on your I-20, whichever occurs first; AND
  - ➢ OPT must be completed within 14 months of your degree completion. If you apply for OPT in the 60 days after the completion of your degree, you will likely receive less than 12 months of OPT authorization.
- Within 30 days from when ISSS issues the OPT recommendation I-20.

Applying for Pre-Completion OPT or Post-Completion OPT with Thesis/Dissertation Remaining? Consult ISSS about the application timeline.

PROCESS FOR REQUESTING AN OPT RECOMMENDATION I-20 (From ISSS)

Step 1: Submit All of Your OPT Request Documents to ISSS during Advising Hours (incomplete request will not be processed)
- Allow at least 5 business days for ISSS processing

Step 2: ISSS Will Issue an I-20 Recommending OPT
- If you will complete your degree program prior to the end date on your current I-20, ISSS will shorten your I-20 program end date based on the completion date your Academic Advisor provides on the *ISSS OPT Application Form* (see p.3).
- An ISSS advisor will issue a new I-20 that indicates on page 2 that OPT is **recommended**.
  - ➢ Please note that ISSS only RECOMMENDS that the application be approved; the final decision is made by USCIS.

Step 3: Pick up Your OPT Application Materials at ISSS *AFTER* You Receive an Email from ISSS (Bring a Photo ID with you.)
- At the meeting, you will review the I-20 and sign it. ISSS will make a copy of the signed document for your application.
- ISSS will provide a handout with instructions for mailing your OPT application to USCIS. YOU are responsible for mailing the application!

Step 4: Mail your Completed Application to USCIS to the Appropriate USCIS Lockbox/ Service Center
- It is recommended that you mail your application via a service that provides a delivery confirmation.
- Applications must be received by USCIS within 30 days of issuance of the OPT Recommendation I-20 and no later than 60 days after the end date of your degree program indicated on your OPT recommendation I-20.

~ PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING ~

- It is your responsibility to confirm that you do not have incompletes or classes you must retake and that you have completed all degree requirements (or coursework for students with thesis or dissertation remaining). If you do not complete your degree as expected, contact ISSS.

- You may begin to search for employment prior to receiving OPT authorization, but you may not begin working until: 1) you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD/OPT card); 2) it is within the OPT employment authorization period indicated on the EAD card; and 3) you obtain employment that is directly related to your major field of study and does not violate U.S. labor laws.

- On-campus employment eligibility and CPT employment authorization expire on the I-20 program end date indicated on the OPT Recommendation I-20. You are only eligible to resume employment if the employment is in your major field of study and it is within you employment authorization period as noted on your EAD card.

- OPT employment will automatically terminate when you transfer to a new program/school or begin a new level of study even if it is before the EAD end date. Consult with ISSS to plan the timing of the transfer and beginning of new levels of study.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO REQUEST AN I-20 RECOMMENDING OPT (from ISSS)

Submit the following documents to ISSS. <u>Color photocopies are recommended.</u>

☐ **ISSS OPT Application Form with Advisor Signature**
- You must indicate a requested OPT start date. The requested end date will be 1 year from that date minus 1 day (e.g., 5/12/2017 to 5/11/2018).

☐ **Two identical color U.S.-style passport photographs taken within the last 30 days** (The BuffOne Card Office offers passport photos for $5)
   Must be 2" x 2" on white background in accordance with Department of State requirements:
- You <u>cannot</u> be wearing glasses.
- Do not cut, trim, or otherwise alter the photos.
- Do not reuse old photos or photos used in passport/visa applications. If USCIS requests new photos, it will delay OPT application processing.
- Gently write your name and your I-94 number on the back of each photo.

☐ **Personal check or money order (from a U.S. bank) for the amount $410.00 made payable to *U.S. Department of Homeland Security***
- Do NOT abbreviate name to DHS or USDHS
- Sign and date the check; do <u>not</u> sign the back of the check. On the memo line, indicate—OPT and your I-94 number

☐ **Form I-765:** https://www.uscis.gov/i-765. Type information into the form, print, and sign in *black* ink.
- Mark "Permission to accept employment" as the reason for completing the form
- Item 1: Type your last/family name in CAPITAL LETTERS. Your first and middle name does not have to be in all capital letters.
- Item 3: It is recommended that you utilize the ISSS address since USCIS does not forward mail:
     ISSS, 123 UCB
     Boulder, CO, 80309-0123
   If you do not use the ISSS address on your application, you must submit a copy of your EAD card to ISSS.
- Item 9: Do not enter your SSN. It is not a required field.
- Item 10: Enter your complete I-94 number
     Electronic I-94—Enter the Admission (I-94) Record Number from your electronic I-94
     Paper I-94—Enter the complete number found on the upper left corner of your paper I-94 card
- Item 11: Mark "Yes" if you have previously been issued an EAD from USCIS (e.g., OPT, STEM OPT, economic hardship employment) and be sure to answer the two related questions. Otherwise, mark "No" and continue to item 12 (CPT does not count; it is authorized by ISSS).
- Item 12: Enter the date of your last entry to the U.S. This will most likely be the date indicated on your I-94 unless you traveled to Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent island for less than 30 days and did not obtain a new I-94.
- Item 13: Enter the city and state where you last passed through U.S. Customs. Unless you utilized the automatic visa revalidation program it should be the port of entry indicated in your electronic I-94 travel history accessible at: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/history-search
- Item 16: Please enter the appropriate eligibility category based on the information below:
     (c) (3) (A)– Pre-completion OPT (employment occurring *prior to* degree completion)
     (c) (3) (B)– Employment occurring *after* degree completion or after all course requirements with thesis/dissertation remaining
- Certification: Sign (original signature) above the line, date, and include current telephone number. Do <u>not</u> sign over/beyond the line.

☐ **Current I-94 Record**
- Electronic I-94 (issued after 5/21/2013): Download copy from: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/
- Paper I-94 Card (issued prior to 5/21/2013 or for land entries): Include photocopies of the front and back of your I-94 card

☐ **Clear (color) photocopy of your valid passport ID page(s) and any renewal, extension, amendment, or correction pages**

☐ **Clear (color) photocopy of your most recent U.S. entry visa or change of status I-797 approval notice (Exception: Canadians)**

<u>If applicable</u>: ☐ **Clear photocopies of the front and back of any Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) issued previous** 03/15/2017 CS
   and photocopies of any related I-20s issued for the I-765 application

<u>Optional</u>: ☐ **Form G-1145:** To receive electronic notification by USCIS when your OPT application has been received

ISSS OPT I-20 REQUEST FORM

University of Colorado Boulder

STUDENT INFORMATION AND ATTESTATION: Please complete all required fields below.

STUDENT NAME:_____ **STUDENT ID #:** _____
  LAST NAME   First Name

EMAIL ADDRESS (you will use during OPT): _____

HAVE YOU COMPLETED ONE ACADEMIC YEAR IN STATUS? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

REQUESTED DATES FOR OPT EMPLOYMENT WORK AUTHORIZATION
The OPT start date must be within the 60 days of your degree completion date.
   (e.g. If the last day of finals is 5/11, OPT may begin the next day on 05/12 or as late as 07/10)

Requested Start Date (mm/dd/yyyy) _____ Requested End Date (mm/dd/yyyy)_____

MULTIPLE MAJORS: Do you have more than 1 major that you will complete in your current degree program?
☐ No   ☐ Yes—My majors are: _____

ATTESTATION
I understand that during the OPT authorization period I must report the following to ISSS within 10 days of the change via the *OPT Information Update Form*:
- Any legal name change or change of citizenship;
- Any changes to my physical address;
- The name and address of my employer, employment start date, job title, supervisor's information, and an explanation of how the employment is directly related to my major field of study;
- Any interruptions and terminations of employment or days of unemployment; and
- Any change of status.

I also understand the following:
- On-campus presence is required in my final term;
- Post-completion OPT requires that I finish all required degree coursework by the end of the current term;
  o Undergraduate or a graduate students in a non-thesis option: I confirm that I expect to graduate this term;
- My I-20 end date will be shortened (if necessary) to reflect my last date of enrollment;
- I will not be eligible for on-campus employment including assistantships or CPT after my last date of enrollment;
- To work on OPT, I must have a job in my major, the EAD in my hand, and it must be within the authorization period noted on the card; and
- Accumulating more than 90 days of unemployment during the OPT authorization period will mean that I am out of status.

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Date

ACADEMIC ADVISOR VERIFICATION

Are you an undergraduate student completing a degree in the College of Arts & Sciences?
  ☐ Yes— I will complete my degree on the following date: _____. An Academic Advisor signature is not required below.
  ☐ No—Please have your Academic Advisor complete the Academic Advisor Verification section below.

Academic Advisors: **Indicate the student's degree level, program type, and complete all additional fields in the program type section**.

<u>Student Degree Level</u>:   ☐ B.S./ B.A.   ☐ M.S / M.A.   ☐ Ph. D.

<u>Degree Program Type</u>:

☐ *Undergraduate Student* (***Undergraduate Business School Students: Obtain signature from Kelli Stevens**.*)
  The student will complete enrollment for degree on the following date: _____ and does not need additional coursework to complete the degree if s/he successfully completes all coursework in the final semester: ☐ Spring ☐ Summer ☐ Fall _____ (year).

☐ *Graduate Student No Thesis Option*—**Please enter when the student will complete the degree below.**
  The student will complete enrollment for degree on the following date: _____ and does not need additional coursework to complete the degree if s/he successfully completes all coursework in the final semester: ☐ Spring ☐ Summer ☐ Fall _____ (year).

☐ *Graduate student with Thesis/Dissertation Option*—**Please complete <u>all</u> fields below**.
  - Student <u>completed the necessary course work</u> for the degree: ☐ Spring ☐ Summer ☐ Fall / Year of Completion: _____
  - Student will <u>defend the thesis/dissertation</u> on _____ (indicate date: mm/dd/yyyy).   (YYYY)
  - Student is <u>scheduled to graduate</u> ☐ Spring ☐ Summer ☐ Fall   / Year of Completion: _____
                                                                                          (YYYY)

Advisor Name: _____   Signature: _____   Date: _____

Phone & Email:_____ Department _____

03/15/2017 CS