

## Optional Practical Training (OPT)

*You may be authorized for temporary employment through Optional Practical Training (OPT) while you are still pursuing your course of study and/or after you have finished your degree. Most students choose to do CPT instead of pre-completion OPT while they are still pursuing their degree in order to preserve 12 months of post-completion OPT.*

**Post-completion OPT = Full Time employment after completion of studies.** Please note that students who have not yet completed all of the required coursework for the degree (excluding dissertation and thesis hours), are not eligible for post-completion OPT and should instead apply for pre-completion OPT, which is limited to 20 hours/week while school is in session. Time used for pre-completion OPT will be deducted against the 12 months of OPT available for F-1 students.

Two Types of Post-Completion OPT are available when you have completed all of the required coursework for the degree (excluding dissertation and thesis hours):

1. 12 months of OPT after graduation
2. If you are graduating with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) major, you potentially qualify for an additional 17 months of OPT if you meet certain specific conditions. See "OPT Changes in Regulations Since April 2008" handout.

### **1. ELIGIBILITY FOR OPT (PRE-COMPLETION OR INITIAL 12 MONTHS POST COMPLETION OPT):**

- a. You must be in F-1 status.
- b. You must have a valid passport.
- c. You must be enrolled full time at CU (or have Reduced Course Load permission in the semester in which you apply for OPT).
- d. You must have been continuously enrolled full time for a full academic year before OPT may begin.
- e. OPT must be directly related to your major area of study.
- f. The **total** amount of OPT time permitted is 12 months initially.

If you have received 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), you are not eligible for OPT.

### **2. APPLICATION PROCESS FOR INITIAL 12 MONTHS OF OPT:**

**PLEASE PLAN AHEAD (USCIS processing times can take 2.5 - 4 months and you must have the Employment Authorization Document (EAD), which is the OPT card, in your possession with a valid start date before you can begin to work!)**

Applications can be submitted as early as 90 days before your program completion date (or graduation), or as late as 60 days after your program completion date. We recommend applying as early as possible, but no later than the following:

- Undergraduates: Apply at least two weeks **before** graduation to give ISSS time to process the I-20.
- Graduate students with **no thesis**: Apply at least two weeks **before** you finish all of your coursework and **before** graduation.
- Graduate students with **thesis/dissertation**: Apply **while you are still enrolled as a full time student, after you finish your coursework. You must apply at least two weeks before your graduation date.**

### **3. COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS AND BRING THEM TO ISSS:**

- a. The attached ISSS OPT Application Form with the signature of your academic advisor. (Note: A&S undergraduate students do not need a signature from their major advisor.)
- b. Form I-765 (download from <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)  
**PLEASE FILL OUT THE FORM ON LINE (USING ADOBE ACROBAT) BEFORE PRINTING IT FOR SUBMISSION TO ISSS.**  
The answer to item #16 on the form is (c)(3)(A) if you are applying for pre-completion OPT. Use (c)(3)(B) for post completion OPT. While you may list your own address on the I-765 application, it is **STRONGLY** recommended that you use the ISSS address. The Nebraska Service Center has specifically stated that they prefer it if the ISSS address is used: ISSS, 123 UCB, Boulder,

**CO 80309-0123.** If you do choose to use your own home address on the form I-765, make sure you will remain at the address you list for at least the next 3-4 months, as the US Postal Service **will not** forward the OPT receipt or approval notice (EAD).

- c. **Two passport photographs** and **lightly** print your name with a pen on the back of each photo. The BuffOne card office makes passport photos for \$5. The photos must be taken within the last month; **do not use old photos**. See the requirements listed here: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq\\_5333.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html)
- d. A check or money order for \$380 from a U.S. bank, made payable to the Department of Homeland Security.
- e. Copies of the following:
  - 1. **Passport important data** e.g. the **passport page with photo and issue/expiration dates**
  - 2. **US visa page** (most recent) in your **passport (Canadians are exempted from obtaining a visa)**
  - 3. **I-94 Departure Record (front and back)**

**5. AN ISSS ADVISOR WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:** (Allow at least 2 weeks to finish this process at ISSS.)

- o Review your application and print your CPT employment history from SEVIS;
- o Make a recommendation for pre or post completion OPT in your SEVIS record;
- o For Post-Completion OPT, ISSS will **shorten the F-1 program end date on the I-20 to the completion date**;
- o Print and give you a new I-20 Form, reflecting these changes. You must sign this new I-20;
- o Review and help you assemble the OPT application so you can mail it to the appropriate USCIS Service Center via regular U.S. Postal Service or courier service.

If you use an address on the I-765 outside of the State of Colorado, you will have to file the OPT at a Service Center that has jurisdiction over that state. Check with an ISSS adviser about where to send the OPT application if this is the case for you.

**6. UPON RECEIPT OF YOUR APPLICATION, USCIS WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:**

- o Send a receipt notice indicating the date upon which they received your application.
- o Process your application. Processing times for Employment Authorization Documents (EAD or OPT card) vary from one USCIS regional office to another and may take 90 days or more. **Be sure to allow enough time for this.**
- o If approved, USCIS issues your EAD (OPT card), specifies the dates of your work authorization and sends it to the address you listed on the I-765 form. **USCIS may take 3-4 months to issue the card.**

**HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR F-1 STATUS WHILE ON OPT**

- o Please remember that you are still in F-1 status while on OPT and ISSS still has SEVIS reporting responsibility for your F-1 record.
- o You must have the EAD (OPT card) in your possession before you begin to work; you can only work during the dates listed on the EAD (OPT card).
- o You must be EMPLOYED (paid or unpaid) to maintain your status. If you accumulate more than 90 DAYS OF UNEMPLOYMENT, you will be out of status and your SEVIS record may be terminated.
- o Unpaid employment "counts" as employment. It must still be reported, it must still be in your field of study and you must work at least 21 hours per week for it to count as full time employment.
- o You must report the following to ISSS while on OPT (please email ISSS, [cusevis@colorado.edu](mailto:cusevis@colorado.edu)):
  - Any name change
  - Any address change within 10 days of a move;
  - The name and address of your employer;
  - Any interruptions in employment;
  - Any days of unemployment; and
  - Any change of status to another category, e.g. H1B, etc., or to another program of study.

**PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:**

- o Any on campus employment OR CPT permission expires as of the program end date on the I-20.
- o **New program of study:** OPT employment will automatically terminate when you transfer to a new program/school or begin a new level of study. Consult with ISSS to plan the timing of the transfer and beginning of new levels of study.
- o **Do NOT leave the U.S. if you have a change of status pending.**
- o **Re-entering the U.S. while on OPT:** Please carefully plan your travel and consult with ISSS well in advance of your departure from the US. Re-entry to the U.S. while on OPT is allowed for "temporary absences" only. In order to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT, you must have your EAD in hand and proof of a job offer or employment. *Please see the attached sheet, "What happens after I have applied for OPT?"*

# ISSS OPT APPLICATION FORM

(Please complete and return this signed form to ISSS with the other items outlined on page 1.)

**STUDENT INFORMATION AND ATTESTATIONS:** (Please print)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS I WILL USE DURING OPT IS: \_\_\_\_\_

**REQUESTED DATES FOR OPT EMPLOYMENT** (The OPT start date must be within the 60 days of the new program completion date on your I-20, e.g. if the last day of finals is May 10, OPT can begin the next day on May 11 or as late as July 9):

Start date (mm/dd/yyyy) \_\_\_\_\_ End date (mm/dd/yyyy) \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTESTATION:**

I am requesting OPT and I understand that during the authorized OPT period I must report to ISSS:

- any legal name change to ISSS within 10 days of the change
- any changes to my physical address to ISSS within 10 days of the change
- the name of the employer and address of employer that I am working for
- any interruptions of employment
- any days of unemployment

I also understand the following:

- my program end date will be shortened on my I-20 to reflect my completion of studies;
- accumulating more than 90 days of unemployment during OPT will mean that I will be considered out of status;
- I understand that I will not be eligible for on-campus employment or CPT after the program end date on my I-20;
- I must have finished all coursework required for my degree by the end of the current term; and
- If I am an undergraduate student or a graduate student in a non-thesis option, I confirm that I expect to graduate this term.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

=====

**ACADEMIC ADVISOR - PLEASE COMPLETE THE INFORMATION BELOW AND SIGN OFF:** QUESTIONS? CALL ISSS, 303 492 8057

**UNDERGRADUATES:**

The student is in the final semester of his/her degree program and will **not** need additional coursework to complete the degree if he/she successfully completes all coursework undertaken this semester.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Advisor's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department

**GRADUATE STUDENTS:** Please indicate which level \_\_\_\_\_ M.S./M.A. \_\_\_\_\_ Ph.D.

**A. No Thesis option:**

The student is in the final semester of his/her degree program, does not need additional coursework to complete the degree, and is scheduled to graduate \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate Semester and year).

**B. With Thesis/Dissertation option: Please complete every blank below.**

- Student completed the necessary coursework for the degree in the fall / spring / summer (circle one) semester of \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate year).
- Student will defend the thesis/dissertation on \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate mm/ dd / yyyy).
- Student is scheduled to graduate \_\_\_\_\_ (indicate Semester and year).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's Name  
Department \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

## What happens after I have applied for OPT?

- **RECEIPT NOTICE:** You will receive a “receipt notice” from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) giving you a receipt number (LIN#) and the date they received your application. To check on the processing status of your OPT application, use your LIN# at this website: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>
- **REPORT ANY CHANGES TO ISSS AT CU BOULDER:** *While on OPT, you are still in F-1 status and you still must maintain ties with the University of Colorado at Boulder and ISSS, because your SEVIS record remains active through CU Boulder. You must report the following by emailing ISSS at [cusevis@colorado.edu](mailto:cusevis@colorado.edu) to update your information:*
  - name change
  - physical address changes within 10 days of any change of address (must be the address where you reside)
  - employer name and mailing address
  - dates of employment
  - any periods of unemployment (you cannot accumulate more than 90 days or you will be out of status)
  - If you leave the U.S. and will not return to use your OPT, please let ISSS know so that we can complete your SEVIS record.
  - If you change your status (e.g. change to H-1B status or a permanent resident), you must provide documentation to ISSS. Please send ISSS a copy of your new visa or your approval notice so that we can update our records and SEVIS. You can also fax the documents to 303-492-5185 (Attn: ISSS) or email a scanned copy to [cusevis@colorado.edu](mailto:cusevis@colorado.edu)
- **TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT:** If you leave the U.S. while on OPT, you must have proof of employment or a job offer in order to re-enter the U.S. You will also need to have a recent travel signature (within the last 6 months) from ISSS on your I-20 before you travel. You should carry the following with you:
  - your I-20, signed for travel within the last 6 months
  - the Employment Authorization Document (OPT card)
  - a valid passport
  - a valid F-1 visa
  - proof of employment or job offer

### PLEASE NOTE:

1. **If you do not have a job already**, we do not recommend that you travel out of the U.S. while on OPT, since you may not be allowed back into the country.
  2. **If you are gone for more than 5 months while on OPT**, even if you have a job offer, your absence will not be considered “temporary” and you may be denied entry to the U.S.
  3. Do not travel if you have a change of status pending.
- **GETTING A NEW F1 VISA WHILE ON OPT:** It might help to have a copy of this cable to explain why your I-20 dates will have already passed. See [http://travel.state.gov/visa/laws/telegrams/telegrams\\_1444.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/laws/telegrams/telegrams_1444.html) which states, “OPT is separate from a student’s academic work and time for OPT will not normally be reflected during the student’s academic program or in the completed study date. Therefore, students applying for a visa to do OPT may present an I-20 with an original end of study date that may have passed”...
  - **APPLYING FOR AN ADDITIONAL 17 MONTHS OF OPT, IF YOU QUALIFY:** Contact an adviser at ISSS at least 3-4 months prior to your current OPT end date if you would like to apply for an additional 17 months of OPT, if you think you qualify. See: <http://www.colorado.edu/oie/iss/documents/NEWOPREGULATIONS.pdf> for eligibility requirements.

If you have any further questions about OPT, your immigration status, or SEVIS, please contact the International Student and Scholar Services office at 303-492-8057. You may also email us at [adviser@colorado.edu](mailto:adviser@colorado.edu).