1. Definition of OPT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major of study”. You may be authorized up to 12 months of OPT per educational level. If a student begins a new academic program at a higher level, the student is then eligible for another 12 months of OPT. For example, if a student completed OPT after a Bachelor’s degree, and then enrolled for a Master’s program, the student is eligible to apply for OPT after completing the master’s program.

Note: Students in certain qualifying majors may be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT in addition to the regular 12 month OPT. Those majors are: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). For more information please refer to the OPT 24 month Extension Instructions for STEM Degree Holders here https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-opt.

2. Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for OPT you must:

- Be enrolled for at least one full academic year and
- Be in valid F-1 status and
- Be in good academic standing and
- Seek employment in your area of study

A job offer is not required to apply for OPT, but the student is expected to work or be actively seeking employment in the student’s area of study after the Employment Authorization Card (EAD) is issued.

3. Types of OPT

- Post-completion OPT (After completion of studies): is granted for full-time use only.

- Pre-completion OPT (Before completion of studies): Limited to 20 hours a week (part-time) while school is in session and student still has coursework to complete, or full-time during summer vacations. This option is not recommended by OIE. For more information, please inquire with the immigration advisor.
4. Application Procedure

Step One - Complete the following and submit to International Education to request your OPT I-20:

- Optional Practical Training Request Form (NOT the I-765 form) completed by you and signed by your academic advisor

Step Two – When you bring the request form to International Education, schedule an appointment with an OIE advisor. Your appointment will be approximately one week after submitting the Optional Practical Training Request Form.

Bring the following documents with you to the appointment:

  - For post-completion OPT enter (c) (3) (B) in the brackets under item 16.
  - Under item #3, write in the address where you expect to receive mail while applying for OPT.
  - When completing the Form I-765 make sure to print legibly. Sign the form using blue ink, in between the signature lines.
- Photocopies of all pages of previous I-20s issued by ARMSTRONG and all other schools attended (make clear copies making sure that any date/visa stamps on the I-20s are clearly visible). Do not staple the copies.
- New I-20 with “OPT requested” noted (and keep the 2nd copy for your records)
- Money order or check in the amount of $410.00 payable to: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization cards, if applicable
- Photocopy of Biographical page(s) of passport (page[s] with your name, date of birth, picture, and passport expiration)
- Photocopy of I-94 record of admission front and back (make clear copy making sure the date/visa stamp is clearly visible)
  - This can be found on https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/ and selecting “Get most recent I-94”
- Photocopy of F-1 visa stamp, or photocopy of change of status approval notice
- Photocopy of ARMSTRONG ID card (Pirate card) showing your picture
- Two color pictures passport style – see instructions under section 14.
  - On the back of the pictures, write in pencil, your full name and your SEVIS ID number

Step Three – Once you have received your OPT I-20 and the advisor at International Education has checked all the documents for accuracy, mail the documents by Certified mail through the Post Office or by FedEx to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For U.S. Postal Service deliveries:</th>
<th>For FedEx deliveries:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USCIS</td>
<td>USCIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO Box 660867</td>
<td>Attn: AOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas, TX 75266</td>
<td>2501 S. State Hwy. 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Suite 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be sure to make a complete copy of your application for your records (including the check) before mailing the application.

5. OPT Filing Window

A student applying for post-completion OPT will be able to file up to 90 days prior to program completion date.

6. Selecting Dates for OPT

If you are applying for post-completion OPT, you are given a 60 day grace period following the completion of your studies. Completion of studies is the last day of finals.

Your OPT beginning date must be between the date you completed studies and the end of 60 days following completion of studies. For example, if you complete studies on December 20, 2017, then the last day that you may request to start your OPT will be February 18, 2018. If you have previously used any OPT, then please check with an OIE advisor for your beginning and ending dates.

Last updated: April 2017
Points to Remember

- Once you mail the application, you will receive a Receipt Notice informing you that USCIS has received your application. You can check the status of your application on-line by visiting www.uscis.gov (follow the link ‘Case Status & Processing Dates’). You will need to enter the Receipt Number from the notice (use the EAC number located on the top left of the receipt notice).

- Once the application is mailed to USCIS it is not possible to change the start and end dates of the OPT.

- Upon approval, the Employment Authorization Card (EAD) will be mailed to the address on file with USCIS. If you move during the application process, you must update your address with USCIS. We cannot do this on your behalf.

- You will require a valid Social Security Number (SSN) to work in the US. If you do not have a Social Security Number contact an OIE advisor.

- If you are working on campus, you must stop on campus employment by final exams (even if you get a letter from payroll stating otherwise).

- You have a 60 day grace period after the end of your OPT. You are not allowed to work during this 60 day grace period. During this time you may prepare to leave the US, transfer to a new degree program and get a new I-20, or change your status. If you are transferring to another degree program at Armstrong or at another institution, you must contact an International Student Advisor to obtain a new I-20 or to get your SEVIS record released to another institution. **Note:** This must be done within the 60 day grace period. After that your SEVIS record is automatically terminated.

- Once OPT has been granted you cannot cancel it or change the dates.

- When applying for OPT, please note that this is an immigration (USCIS) decision that has nothing to do with OIE; OPT is not a guarantee, ever. You should always have a back-up plan in case OPT does not work out. Indeed, when you come on an F-1 visa, which is a non-immigrant visa, you swore to the immigration officer who granted you this visa at your interview that you had no intention of immigrating. Please keep that in mind when you receive immigration decisions.

- If during your OPT you choose to begin a new degree program full-time, whether at Armstrong or at another institution, you must obtain an I-20 for that degree program. You will lose your remaining OPT time. You are required to cease employment upon receiving a new I-20 for the new degree program, or when your SEVIS record is released from Armstrong to another institution.

### 7. Types of Employment allowed while on OPT

All OPT employment must be in a job that is related to the student’s degree program. This employment may include:

**Paid employment** - Students may work part time or full time in their field of study

- **Multiple employers** – Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be in their field of study
- **Short-term multiple employers** (performing artists) – Students, such as musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student must maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Work for hire** – This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship.
- **Self-employed business owner** – Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s field of study.
- **Employment through an agency** – Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

**Unpaid employment** – Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.
8. Reporting Requirements while on OPT

During post-completion OPT you are still considered to be in F-1 status. This means that you are required to report to International Education:

- Any change of your name or your address within 10 days
- Name and address of your employer
- Any interruption of employment or a change in employer name and address

9. Reporting Changes in Employment to International Education

Students are required to report changes in employment to International Education as soon as possible. It is recommended that students report changes within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where it may be determined the student is out of status. The following table suggests the best way to report employment or a change in employment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| New Job                                                                  | • Name of the employer  
                            • Start date of employment  
                            • Mailing address for the employer                                    |
| Change to a new job                                                      | • Name of the previous employer  
                            • Ending date of the employment with the previous employer  
                            • Start date of employment  
                            • Mailing address for the employer                                    |
| Multiple short-term gigs in one period with less than 10 days between gigs | • Report at the beginning of the first gig and indicate “Multiple short term gigs” |
| Work for hire (start)                                                    | • Indicate “Self-employed work for hire”  
                            • Indicate the start date of the contract                              |
| Work for hire (ending more than 10 days between the end of one contract and the beginning of another contract or a new job) | • Indicate “Self-employed work for hire”  
                            • Indicate you have no current contract  
                            • Ending date of the last contract worked                              |
| More than 10 days of unemployment                                         | • Indicate “unemployed”  
                            • Ending date of last job                                               |
| Self-employed business owner (start)                                     | • Indicate “Self-employed business owner”  
                            • Indicate date went into business                                        |
| Self-employed business owner (end)                                       | • Indicate “Self-employed business owner”  
                            • Indicate date business closed or student no longer worked for the business full time |
| Student decided to exit the United States and complete his or her F-1 status prior to the end date of OPT | • Indicate “Completing OPT and exiting the United States”  
                            • Date of exit                                                            |
10. Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status

During post-completion OPT F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may have up to 90 days of unemployment. Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.

11. Travel during OPT

If you wish to travel abroad during OPT you must have the following documents with you in order to reenter the U.S.:

1. Valid OPT I-20 which must be signed by an OIE advisor
3. Valid passport
4. Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport
5. Valid employment letter. This letter from your employer must be on company letterhead and must state type of work, salary information, statement that the employment is temporary, and that the student will be employed after returning from travel.

If you do not have all of the documents listed above or plan to leave the U.S. while OPT is pending, it is not advisable to travel. Contact an OIE advisor for further guidance.

12. H-1B Cap-Gap Extension and OPT Work Authorization until October 1

Duration of F-1 student status and work authorization will be extended for a student on post-completion OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting a start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. This applies to all students, not just students in STEM majors. The extension of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student’s behalf.

Contact International Education for to file for the H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.
13. Guidelines for Passport Style Pictures

You will need to submit two color passport style pictures with your OPT application. Requirements:

- Your head must face the camera directly with full face in view.
- You must have a neutral facial expression or a natural smile, with both eyes open.
- Taken in clothing normally worn on a daily basis
- Taken in the last 6 months
- Use a plain white or off-white background
- Be sized correctly
  - 2 x 2 inches (51 x 51 mm)
  - Head must be between 1 -1 3/8 inches (25 - 35 mm) from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head
- Printed on matte or glossy photo quality paper
- Printed in color
- You cannot wear glasses.
  - If you cannot remove your glasses for medical reasons, please include a signed note from your doctor with application.
- You cannot wear a hat or head covering.
  - If you wear a hat or head covering for religious purposes, submit a signed statement that verifies that the hat or head covering in your photo is part of recognized, traditional religious attire that is customarily or required to be worn continuously in public.
  - If you wear a hat or head covering for medical purposes, submit a signed doctor's statement verifying the hat or head covering in your photo is used daily for medical purposes.
  - Your full face must be visible and your hat or head covering cannot obscure your hairline or cast shadows on your face.
- You cannot wear headphones or wireless hands-free devices.
- See more here: https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos.html
OPT Checklist

Step One - Application

☐ Attend OPT workshop or meeting with OIE advisor to go over regulations
☐ Armstrong ID card (Pirate card) showing your picture
☐ Biographical page(s) of passport (page[s] with your name, date of birth, picture, and passport expiration)
☐ F-1 visa stamp, or photocopy of change of status approval notice
☐ Form I-765.
☐ I-94 record of admission front and back (make clear copy making sure the date/visa stamp is clearly visible)
☐ Money order or check in the amount of $410.00 payable to: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
☐ Optional Practical Training Request Form completed by you and signed by your academic advisor
☐ Previous Employment Authorization cards, if applicable
☐ Previous I-20s
☐ New I-20 with “OPT requested” noted
☐ Two color pictures passport style
☐ Mail the application packet, making sure to request a tracking number

Step Two - Processing

☐ Receive Receipt Notice (797 Notice of Action) from USCIS. If you do not receive this within 2 weeks, contact USCIS to check on it
☐ You can use the Receipt Number to check the status of your request https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do
  ➢ Note: OIE advisors cannot receive information from USCIS about your case without you being present at the time of the phone call.
  ➢ Note: Estimated wait times for adjudication are around 90 days (3 months).

Step Three - Decision

If you are approved
☐ The case status website will say this
☐ You should receive your EAD (work card) in the mail
☐ If you do not receive it within 2 weeks, contact USCIS for a replacement

If you are denied
☐ The case status website will say this
☐ Look for the denial letter in the mail
  ➢ Note: If you do not receive this within 2 weeks, contact USCIS immediately for a copy
☐ Read the letter carefully for instructions about the possibility to appeal the decision
☐ Follow all steps listed in the letter; contact USCIS for more specific information

❖ USCIS customer service: 1 (800) 375-5283
Part 1: To Be Completed by Student

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Family/Last Name: ___________________________ First Name: ________________ Middle Name: __________

Email address: ______________________________________________________ Phone: _______________________

Level of Studies currently pursuing: Undergraduate _____ Graduate _____ Doctorate _____ Certificate _____

Major: _____________________________________________________________ Concentration: __________________

Are you currently a Graduate Assistant on campus? Yes _____ No _____

OPT Beginning date: ___________________ OPT Ending date: ___________________ (See section on ‘Selecting Dates for OPT’)

List all periods of previously authorized practical training (attach separate sheet if needed):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Practical Training (CPT)</th>
<th>Optional Practical Training (OPT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>End Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List all institutions attended prior to Armstrong and attach copies of all pages of all I-20s issued to you (attach separate sheet if needed):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Dates attended (From – To)</th>
<th>City, State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

By signing this form:
- I certify that the information provided is true and accurate and I understand the rules and regulations concerning Optional Practical Training.
- I understand that accruing an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during my post-completion OPT may result in a violation of the F-1 student status.
- I understand that I must report to International Education any change to my name or address, or any interruption of OPT employment within 10 days.
- I give International Education permission to open correspondence that arrives from USCIS to ensure a timely response to any queries that may arise.
- I understand that OPT approval is not guaranteed and that I must prepare for a backup plan in case my OPT request is denied.

Student’s Signature: _______________________________ Date: _______________________

Part 2: To Be Completed by Academic Advisor

The completion of this section by you is required for an international student in F-1 student status to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Please complete in full and return it to the student. If you have any questions, please contact an International Student Advisor. Thank you for your cooperation.

I anticipate that the above named student will complete all requirements for the current program of study on or about:

Please indicate year: _______ Fall __________ Spring __________ Summer __________

Advisor’s Name & Title

Advisor’s Signature

Department __________________ Telephone __________________ Date __________________