

Optional Practical Training (OPT) **Handout & Checklist for F-1 Students**

General Information:

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment benefit extended to F-1 students who have been maintaining status. Its purpose is to give students the opportunity to gain work experience pre- or post-completion of their degree and is limited to 12 months total for each degree level in a field directly related to the student's course of study.

Different ways to use OPT:

- Part-time OPT (no more than 20 hours per week) while school is in session. Or full-time OPT during the student's annual vacation, when school is not in session and the student intends to register for the next semester.
- Full-time OPT for up to one year after completion of the student's program.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Students must be in valid F-1 status at the time of the application.
- Students must have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year before making an application.
- Students are eligible for one year of OPT per level of program.

How to Apply:

- Apply in a timely manner –your application packet must reach USCIS well before the expiration of your current EAD card (ISS recommends to apply between 90 and 120 days before graduation). USCIS allows you to apply up to 90 days prior to your graduation date and up to 60 days after your graduation date; provided that it is received within 30 days of your Designated School Officer at the FSW International Student Services office issuing a new I-20 recommending OPT. Your application will not be considered by USCIS if received after 60 days from your graduation date.
- Schedule an appointment with the Designated School Official at the FSW International Student Services office. Student must initiate the OPT application process by requesting a new I-20 from his or her DSO. The student must then submit to ISS Form I-765, and applicable supporting documents. You can mail the OPT packet to the USCIS Texas Service Center.

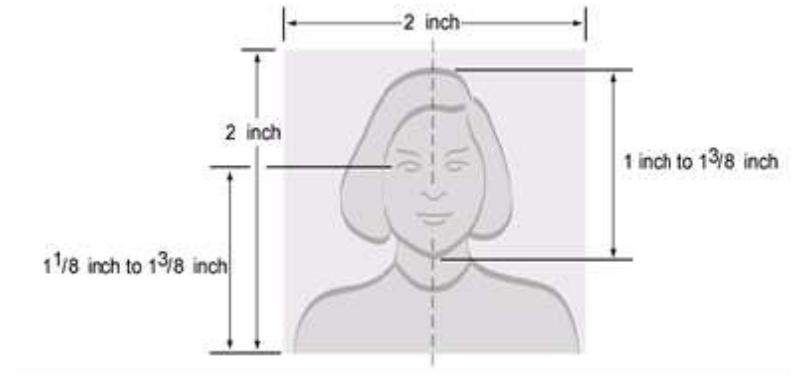
Your application packet will include the following:

- During your meeting with the DSO, you will need to select a start date for your OPT. This start date must be within 60 days of your graduation date.
- I-765 Form (Please visit www.uscis.gov Click on FORMS and Locate I-765 in the list) When filling out the I-765 form ensure you use the correct eligibility category as listed on the instructions for I-765 application instructions (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765instr.pdf>).

The correct OPT employment eligibility category is: **C-3-A for Pre-Completion** or **C-3-B for Post-Completion OPT**).

- Your DSO will recommend OPT, indicated on the third page of your new SEVIS I-20.
- Review the OPT Application Documents in this **checklist** and **bring all items** to your appointment.
- Student's Letter of Application (see sample below)
- Photocopy of both sides of your most recent **I-94** card
- Photocopy of the **passport** page showing biographical data and expiration date

- Photocopy of your **US Visa page**
- Photocopies of previous I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** authorization(s), if any.
- Two **(2)** passport **photos** (see example below). Gently print in pencil your name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.



- **\$380.00** personal check, bank draft, or money order made payable to: **“Department of Homeland Security”** (please do not abbreviate).
- You can mail your application packet via certified mail to the USCIS Service Center.
- Within several weeks of mailing your application, you will receive a Notice of Receipt. This is proof that you have an application pending with USCIS. The Notice of Action/Receipt will contain your Receipt Number (“SRC number”). You can use this number to check your case status online at www.uscis.gov (in the top right corner).

Your OPT Application Letter Addressed to:

USCIS,
P.O. Box 660867,
Dallas, TX 75266

1. Your Full Name and Today’s Date:
2. Explain that you are a student at FSW, studying (title of your degree) to prepare for a career in (your field of study). Include the date you expect to complete your degree on (last day of semester) and would like to pursue employment for one year of Practical Training. You may want to add something about yourself, your plans, your student experience...but keep this to one or two sentences.
3. Sign your letter

After Applying for OPT:

You cannot start employment until you receive your employment authorization document (EAD) card and by the “valid from” date listed on the card.

- USCIS will cash your application fee. When your check has cleared your bank, you will know that USCIS has begun processing your application.
- Once you have received your Notice of Receipt from USCIS, you may check the status of your case online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>
- If you have not received your card within 90 days of your receipt notice date contact the FSW International Student Services for further assistance with your application.
- Once the new EAD card is made, it will be mailed to the address listed on your application (I-765). Please note the U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from the federal government to a different address.

- If you chose to list the ISS address on your I-765 application form, upon approval and delivery to ISS, you will be notified to pick up your Employment Authorization Document/Card. Review your card for errors. If there are any errors, please make an appointment with the ISS, who will then determine whether or not you should send your card back for correction.
- If you chose to mail everything to your address, you must send a copy of your card to ISS to keep in your file.

While on OPT:

- You may only work within the dates authorized on your EAD card
- You are allowed to work for more than one employer or change employers provided that employment is directly related to your field of academic study.
- Travel outside of the U.S. is permitted **if you are employed.**
- You will need your I-20 (endorsed for travel by a Designated School Official at ISO), your EAD card, and a letter from your employer as well as a valid passport and valid F-1 entry visa. If you are renewing your visa while on OPT, you may be subject to more scrutiny, as you will need to establish that your purpose in the U.S. is still temporary even though you have completed your studies. To obtain additional information on travel during OPT please visit http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#_Toc81222041.
- You are required to report changes of address, legal name, employer's name and address, and/or interruption of unemployment within 10 days of the change. To report these changes please contact the International Services via e-mail at jsantiago18@fsw.edu and also update your current address with the FSW Office of the Registrar and ISS coordinator by submitting the change of data form.
- Employer must agree to report termination or departure of the OPT employee to the FSW International Student Services (ISS) within 48 hours.
- You must make a "validation report" via e-mail to ISS every six months from the start date of the OPT to verify your full legal name, current address, current employer's name and address as well as the date you began working for the current employer.
- You may enroll at FSW as a **non-degree** seeking student for up to 6 credits per semester.

Options After OPT:

- You will have 60 days after your EAD card expires to make departure plans or other arrangements within the U.S. You may elect to do one of the following:
- Return to your home country
- Request a new I-20 for a new program at FSW. Apply before or during the 60 day grace period (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Transfer to another institution within the U.S. Apply before or during the 60 day grace period (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Apply for a nonimmigrant/immigrant status change

Optional Practical Training (OPT) **Application Checklist and Agreement**

Make an appointment with the FSW International Student Services coordinator and have all items below completed and prepared BEFORE the appointment **(incomplete OPT Packets will delay your application process)**.

- **New Form I-20 (issued by the Designated School Official at the International Services Office during OPT application)**
- **I-765 (Please visit www.uscis.gov and read instructions very carefully)**
- **I-1145 [E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance](#) (optional)**
- **Your OPT Application Letter**
- **ALL immigration documents (I-94, valid passport, and visa)**
- **Any correspondence with the Department of Homeland Security**
- **ALL previous I-20s**
- **Previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD Cards), if applicable**
- **Two recent 2 in x 2 in full frontal color passport photos with your name and I-94 card number written in pencil on the back. (See the U.S. Department of Homeland Security specifications at www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html)**
- **Check/Money Order/Bank Check for \$380, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security and indicate I-94 number on check for identification reasons. Please note that**
- **USCIS fees are subject to change. To verify, please visit www.uscis.gov.**
- **Students must have filed an Application to Graduate Form with the FSW Office of the Registrar.**

Application Deadline

Apply early! USCIS allows you to apply up to 90 days prior to your graduation date and up to 60 days after your graduation date, provided that it is received within 30 days of your immigration adviser issuing a new I-20 recommending OPT. Your application will not be considered by USCIS if received after 60 days from your graduation date.

Agreement

I, (your full name), _____ understand that while on Optional Practical Training will be required to abide by all immigration regulations governing the F-1 visa. I also understand, agree and accept the following specific items (please check all the boxes below):

- I have read and understand the ISS OPT Handout for F-1 Students
- I cannot start employment until I receive my employment authorization document (EAD) card **and** by the "valid from" date listed on the card has been reached.
- I will provide ISS with a copy of my EAD card once received from USCIS
- I cannot accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any initial post-completion OPT.
- I will report any changes of address, legal name, employer's name and address, and/or any interruption of employment within 10 days of the change. To report these changes, please contact ISS coordinator at: jsantiago18@fsw.edu and fill out Form AR-11 Change of Address with the USCIS at <https://egov.uscis.gov/crisgwi/go?action=coa.Terms>

Signature: _____ FSW Student Number: @ _____ Date: _____