Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows you to gain experience in your field of study prior to or after graduation. You are eligible for 12 months of OPT for each higher education level that you finish, i.e. 12 months of OPT for Bachelors and 12 months for Master’s. You continue to be an F-1 student while on OPT, and Missouri State University is responsible for updating SEVIS with any changes in your address, or if you terminate your OPT. It is your responsibility to inform ISS of these changes.

Authorization for OPT is granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and applications are submitted to the CIS office in Lincoln, Nebraska. Your application for OPT must be received by CIS up to 60 days after your program completion date. Processing time is generally 3 months.

Checklist for the OPT application

___ Practical Training Information Sheet / Advisor Verification Form
___ Form I-765, completed and signed (current forms and instructions available at USCIS.gov or ISS office)
___ Two color passport-style photographs
___ Copy of new OPT I-20 (provided at your ISS intake appointment)
___ Copy of the visa page and photo page of your passport
___ Copy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (front and back)
___ Copy of I-94 card (front and back)
___ Check or money order for US $340 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Guidelines for the “Two Passport Style” photos

- Head should be positioned directly facing the camera
- Photo should capture from slightly above top of hair to middle of chest
- Eyes should be open and looking at the camera
- Glare on eyeglasses can usually be avoided with a slight upward or downward tilt of the head
- Background should be plain white or off-white
- Include headpieces of worn daily for religious purposes; they should not obscure or cast shadows on the eyes or any other part of the face
- Photos should be taken within the last 30 days prior to OPT application intake appointment

Next Steps:

- Complete all “Checklist” items.
- Call ISS (836-6618) to make an appointment for your “OPT Intake.”

Send your complete application to:

USCIS Service Center
Nebraska Service Center
P.O. Box 87765
Lincoln, NE  68501-7765

Note: If you have a friend or relative you can trust to receive your EAD and any other mail from USCIS for you, then you may use that person’s address on the Form I-765. In that case, write that person’s name in Item #3, i.e. “c/o Friend’s Name and Address.”

Remember if you use the address of a friend or relative in the U.S., you must confirm to which USCIS service office your OPT application must be sent. Check with your International Student Advisor for the correct USCIS address.
OPT Basics

Application Process:

1. Collect all forms required for the application as detailed on the "Checklist for OPT application." Call the Office of International Student Services at 836-6618 to make an appointment for an "OPT Intake." At the appointment, the advisor will review your application materials, issue you a new I-20 for OPT purposes, copy your application for your file and give you your packet to mail to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service (CIS) in Lincoln, Nebraska.

2. Approximately 2-3 weeks after CIS receives your application, a Receipt Notice will be mailed to you at the address you provide on the Form I-765. There is a tracking number on the notice that you can use to track the progress of your OPT application online at www.cis.gov. When you are logged into the website, refer to the "Processing Dates" (Use the "Case Status and Processing Dates" on the menu and the "Nebraska Service Center"), and then scroll to the bottom of the page to find "Based on a request by a qualified F-1 student [(c)(3)(B)]." The date listed is the receipt date of the application that is being processed.

3. You should receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card in approximately 3 months after CIS receives your application. You may begin working once you receive the EAD and reach the start date printed on the card.

Timing:

- You may file your application up to 90 days before your program completion date and up to 60 days after the program end date, provided that it is filed within 30 days of the date the DSO enters the OPT recommendation in SEVIS. We suggest that you apply for OPT 3 months before your program end date.
- Your OPT start date must fall within 60 days after the last day of final exams. For example: If you graduate in the spring of 2008, the last exam day is May 15. You may select a start date between May 15, 2008 and July 14, 2008.
- Applications for the 17-month STEM extension must be filed before the current EAD expires. You may apply for this extension near the end of your initial 12-month period of OPT.

Employment while on OPT:

- You must wait until you have the EAD card and reach the "start date" to begin work. Between the time you graduate and the start date on the card, you cannot work. This includes on-campus employment.
- Work must be in your field of study.
- You may work for as many hours and as many employers as you want. Your employer does not need to sponsor you because you already have work authorization. If your employer does not understand OPT, they may contact ISS. Inform the International Student Advisor that your employer plans to contact the office.
- You will fill out an I-9 for your employer when you begin work. Show the employer your EAD, passport, I-20, and I-94 card. Use the end date on the card for the expiration date of your employment authorization.
- You are not authorized to work past the end date printed on your EAD. In order to work past that date, you must obtain a different type of employment authorization, (i.e. H-1B). Ask your employer for details.
- During post-completion OPT; F-1 status is dependent on employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. 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.

Hints for filling out the CIS form I-765

Item #3 If you are unsure of your location after graduation, you may wish to use our address: c/o International Student Services, Carrington Hall Room 302, Springfield, MO 65897
Item #9 Use your U.S. Social Security Number.
Item #10 This is the 11 digit number on your most recent I-94 card.
Item #11 This only includes employment for which you received a card directly from immigration. This does not include CPT or on-campus employment.
Item #14 CIS wants to know what your status was the last time you entered the U.S. For most students applying for OPT it is "F-1 Student."
Item #15 This must be "F-1 Student."
Frequently Asked Questions

When I am on OPT what is my status?
OPT is part of F-1 status. Even though you are no longer a student, you are still in F-1 status.

Do I need to have health insurance while on OPT?
No. However, we do recommend that you extend your Missouri State University insurance coverage for up to 6 months after your current policy expires. If you graduate in the fall, your insurance expires December 31. If you graduate in the spring or summer, your insurance expires August 9. In order to extend your policy, call Academic Health Plans (Missouri State University's student insurance provider) at 1-888-308-7320, ask for Customer Service, say that you would like to extend your insurance policy, and they will assist you. If you register for any courses at Missouri State University you will be charged for insurance.

Can I travel while on OPT or before my OPT begins?
Yes, but you need to have all necessary documents with you: valid passport, valid visa, your OPT I-20 with a valid travel signature signed within the last six months, your EAD card, and a job offer letter. Keep in mind that it is very difficult to apply for an F-1 visa in your home country while on OPT. So, if your visa is expired, or will soon expire, keep this in mind. Remember any time you leave the U.S. there is never a guarantee that the immigration official at the port of entry will allow you to reenter. Speak to the International Student Advisor if you have questions.

Do I have to pay taxes while working on OPT?
Yes. You must pay state and federal income taxes. Taxes are due on April 15 each year. Most large cities will have tax assistance services to help you with this process. VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) is an example of such assistance. When dealing with a tax service center, make sure that the tax consultant confirms if you are classified as a resident or non-resident for tax filing purposes, which is different from immigration status. NOTE: If you have been in the U.S. for less than 5 years, you may be exempt from Social Security taxes. Look at IRS publication 519 (www.irs.gov), pages 5 and 42 for more information.

Do I need a new social security card?
You only need a new social security card if your current one says, “NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT,” In order to obtain a card that says, “VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT WITH CIS WORK AUTHORIZATION,” go to any Social Security office with your passport, I-94 card, OPT 1-20, job offer letter, and EAD (OPT card).

Can I take classes while on OPT?
You make take one or two classes for credit as a non-degree student. If you begin studying in a degree program your OPT authorization is automatically terminated. If you desire to take a class, you must first speak with a Missouri State University International Student Advisor.

SEVIS (Student Exchange and Visitor Information System)
While you are on OPT, ISS is responsible for your SEVIS record; therefore remember to: 1) Notify ISS when you have any change in your employment status. This would include current employment, periods of unemployment, or change of employer. Send this information to: internationalstudentservices@missouristate.edu; 2) continue to update your local address by emailing changes to internationalstudentservices@missouristate.edu within 10 days of any move (new apartment, house, city, etc.); 3) notify ISS via email if you change status or begin a new degree program at any U.S. academic institution. If you begin a new degree program and are issued a new I-20 from Missouri State University or any other academic institution, your OPT authorization is automatically terminated.

What if CIS takes a really long time to process my application?
If USCIS does not approve or deny your Form I-765, Employment Authorization Document (EAD) application within 90 days, you may request an Interim EAD. To request an Interim EAD, you must schedule an INFOPASS appointment at the Kansas City Immigration Office, http://infopass.uscis.gov, on their website, to visit this office in person. You must bring the following items to the office: proof of your identity and any documents that USCIS has sent to you regarding your Employment Authorization application. Once you make your request at the Local office, the local office personnel will forward your request (send a referral) to the Service Center for processing and inform you of the next steps.

If my employer wants to sponsor me for an H-1B, when should I start the process? Start as soon as possible. The number of available visas has been reduced considerably. A good resource for information on the H-1B is http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis.
Academic Advisor Recommendation for Optional Practical Training (OPT)

--To Be Completed By Student--

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Student ID Number</th>
<th>Non-Missouri State University Email Address</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours per week</th>
<th>Dates OPT requested (12 months)</th>
<th>Major</th>
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List types of positions sought (must relate to major)

* If you already have a job, complete the following

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of employer if known</th>
<th>Supervisor if known</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address of employer if known</th>
<th>Title of position if known</th>
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Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment authorization that allows students, as a benefit of their F-1 immigration status, to work off-campus in a job that is related to their program of study for a maximum of 12 months following completion of the academic program. The student is not required to have a job offer at the time of application for OPT, and as long as proof of a job search continues, the student may remain in the U.S. without being offered a position. It is the student’s and the employer’s responsibility to ensure that the following requirements are met.

- The proposed work must be full-time; and
- The proposed work must be related to the student’s field of study.

A portion of the 12 months of OPT can be used prior to completion of studies part-time during fall and spring semesters or full-time during breaks and summers. However, any part-time pre-completion OPT will be deducted at half the rate and full-time will be deducted at the full rate from the 12 months available following completion of study. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) does not effect OPT unless the student has completed 12 months or more of full-time CPT.

--To Be Completed by Academic Advisor--

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of credits remaining to graduate</th>
<th>Anticipated program completion date including</th>
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As Academic Advisor, I have discussed with the student the types of employment which would relate to the academic program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Academic Advisor</th>
<th>Typed/Printed Name of Advisor</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Please give completed form to the student to submit to the ISS office.
## IMMIGRATION PHOTOS

**FOR**

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION  
(Optional Practical Training)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Phone No.</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence Photo (Lab)</td>
<td>883-8300</td>
<td>9:00 am – 6:00 pm Monday – Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2550 S. Campbell</td>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 am – 5:00 pm Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sears Photo Studio</td>
<td>883-2085</td>
<td>9:30 am – 8:00 pm Monday – Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield Mall</td>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 am – 8:00 pm Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11:00 am – 5:00 pm Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.C. Penney Photo</td>
<td>883-7351</td>
<td>9:30 am – 8:00 pm Monday – Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlefield Mall</td>
<td></td>
<td>11:00 pm – 5:00 pm Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed 2:00-3:00 pm for lunch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walgreen Drug Stores</td>
<td>862-5782</td>
<td>8:00 am – 10:00 pm Monday - Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1155 E. St. Louis</td>
<td>885-1274</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2640 E. Sunshine</td>
<td>890-7924</td>
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<tr>
<td>2951 S. Campbell</td>
<td>869-5657</td>
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<tr>
<td>1140 E. Kearney</td>
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</tbody>
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As of 2004, “Immigration Style” means the same as “Passport Style” photos (full front view). You are welcome to use any of these or any other business that is familiar with “Passport” or “Immigration Style” photos. If you have trouble writing your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in pencil, ask ISS for a special pencil for writing on photo paper.