Optional Practical Training

OVERVIEW OF POST-COMPLETION OPT

Office of International Services

Updated September 2024

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

Roadmap

1. Overview of Post-Completion OPT

2. Eligibility Requirements

3. Form I-765 Application Process

4. Eligible Employment & Reporting Requirements

5. STEM OPT Extension (basics)

What is Optional Practical Training?

POST-GRADUATION TYPES

- Post-Completion OPT – everyone applies for this first

1. Up to 12-months of OPT

2. Form I-765 category (c) (3) (B)

- *STEM OPT Extension – eligible students can apply later*

1. *24-month extension of already approved OPT*

2. *Form I-765 Category (c) (3) (C)*

What is Post-Completion OPT?

12-MONTH POST-COMPLETION OPT

- Temporary (12-months maximum) off-campus employment authorization for eligible students in F-1 status.

- Post-graduation *benefit* of F-1 student status.
  - (OPT does <u>not</u> change your visa status)

- Allows you to gain real-world experience in your major field of study.

- **Recommended** by the school's Designated School Official (DSO) in SEVIS and **filed** to and **approved** by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

- Employment Authorization Document (**EAD card**) issued by USCIS when application is approved – official proof of authorized employment

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

What is Post-Completion OPT?

12-MONTH POST-COMPLETION OPT

- Employment can begin after completion of program OR after completion of coursework (thesis grad students)

- Students recommended for full-time employment ONLY (more than 20 hours per week)

- An offer of employment and Social Security Number are not required before applying for OPT.

Eligibility Requirements

12-MONTH POST-COMPLETION OPT

- Must be in valid F-1 status and be <u>physically</u> <u>present</u> in the U.S.

- Must have full-time enrollment in U.S. for at least 2 consecutive semesters (fall/spring) prior to the requested OPT start date.

- Cannot exceed 364 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) at current degree level.

- Cannot be previously approved for OPT at current degree level.
    - OPT is authorized once per degree level

When to Apply:

APPLICATION TIMELINE

- USCIS will accept your application:
    - Up to 90 days before your program end date (graduation)
    - Up to 60 days after your program end date (graduation)

        Note: Graduation (completion of program requirements) is different from Commencement (ceremony at which graduates are recognized)

- **Must** submit completed application to USCIS **within 30 days** of the date a DSO recommends OPT in your SEVIS Record and issues OPT I-20.

How to Apply for OPT

Step 1	Complete OPT I-20 Request with advisor and submit for processing.
Step 2	Create USCIS account (use *MSU email*) and start Form I-765 application.
Step 3	Upload required evidence and complete application.
Step 4	Submit application and pay filing fee(s).

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

How to Apply for OPT

STEP 1: REQUEST OPT I-20

- Complete the electronic **OPT I-20 Request** through the <u>International Student Portal</u>.

  - List academic advisor/departmental representative as the "Approver" – they will confirm program information and graduation eligibility.
  - Select a requested start date in 60-day grace period.

- <u>Apply for graduation</u> (Office of the Registrar)

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

How to Apply for OPT: Form I-765

STEP 2: CREATE ACCOUNT & START I-765

- Create <u>online USCIS account</u> and start filing Form I-765 application. Use MSU email.

  - Select category: Post-Completion OPT (**C 3 B**)
  - Indicate reason: "Initial permission to accept employment"
  - Continue answering questions in application
  - Importance of the Mailing Address

How to Apply for OPT: Form I-765

STEP 3: REQUIRED EVIDENCE

- Upload required evidence, which can differ by individual:

  - U.S. Style **Passport Photos**: U.S. passport photo requirements

  - Most recent **I-94 Arrival Record**
    - Class of Admission should be F-1
  - Employment Authorization Document OR **Government ID**
    - upload your passport ID page with name, expiration, and photo; OR previous EAD card
  - Previously Authorized **CPT** (from current degree level) or **OPT**
    - **U**se CPT I-20s and/or previous OPT I-20s + previous EAD cards
  - **Form I-20 with OPT Recommendation**
    - sign in blue ink and upload all 3 pages!

How to Apply for OPT: Form I-765

STEP 3: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- "Additional Information" Section

  - Use this optional section to provide context regarding evidence/information in your application; for example:

    - Previous CPT (indicate dates, degree level, full/part-time, etc.)

    - Previous OPT (indicate dates, degree level, full/part-time, etc.)

    - Changes to your name, SEVIS ID, passport, etc.

      - indicate previous SEVIS IDs you have had (if applicable)

      - indicate if you have renewed your passport and provide old number

How to Apply for OPT: Form I-765

STEP 4: REVIEW & SUBMIT

- **Review** application for accuracy, pay filing fee(s), and submit I-765 application.

  - Required and <u>nonrefundable</u> fee: **$470*** (online filing) or **$520*** (paper filing)
  - Optional $1,685* <u>Premium Processing</u> fee for expedited processing/decision (30 business days)

  Fees accurate as of August 2024

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

After Submission of I-765

- Online applicants automatically receive an electronic Receipt Notice – keep this to check application status.

- Later, you will receive a Form I-797C paper Receipt Notice at your mailing address.

- Processing times vary; USCIS lists estimated times on their website.

- Do not leave the U.S. and do not start working.

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

After OPT Approval

- Email notification on day of approval (if you file online)
  - Create SEVP portal account and submit updates

- I-797 Approval Notice sent to mailing address
  - EAD card will arrive approximately 1-2 business weeks later

- "Valid From" date on EAD is the date employment can begin
  - We recommend that you do not work until you have the physical EAD card in hand
  - The "unemployment clock" begins on the "Valid From" date

- International Travel would now be advisable.

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

Special Situations

- OPT is Approved but you <u>do not graduate</u>

- OPT is Denied
  - Review Denial Notice for reasoning
  - Can re-apply with new I-20 if within application window

- EAD Card is lost, incorrect, or not delivered
  - Apply for replacement EAD

- Withdrawing OPT application

Reporting Requirements

TWO IMPORTANT PORTALS – MAINTAIN ACCESS WHILE ON OPT

- **SEVP Portal** – tool for reporting employer information directly to SEVIS Record

…and…

- **MSU International Student Portal** – report approval, upload EAD card, request updated Form I-20, etc.

Missouri State
UNIVERSITY

Reporting Requirements

WHAT TO REPORT

Any changes to address and phone number

How the employment relates to field of study

Employer's name, address, and taxpayer ID (EIN)

Job title, start and end dates of employment

Full-time (must work more than 20 hours/week)

Supervisor's name, phone #, and email address

All changes must be reported within 10 calendar days.

Types of Employment

ELIGIBLE EMPLOYMENT: *MORE THAN 20 HOURS PER WEEK & DIRECTLY RELATED TO MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY*

- Paid full-time employment
  - Multiple employers (e.g., 2 part-time jobs)
  - Short-term multiple employers (performing artists)
  - Work for hire: contract employment
  - Self-employed business owner
  - Employment through an agency

- Unpaid employment: volunteers or unpaid interns; cannot violate any labor laws

- Unemployment: 90-day limit for Post-Completion OPT

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

After OPT Ends

AFTER COMPLETION OF APPROVED PERIOD FOR OPT

- 60-day grace period begins after the "Valid Until" date on EAD.
  - Must depart the U.S., or
  - Begin new program within 5 months to continue F-1 status at MSU, or
  - Transfer SEVIS Record to another school that begins within 5 months, or
  - Begin STEM OPT (must apply **BEFORE** OPT ends)

What is STEM OPT?

STEM OPT EXTENSION BASICS

- 24-month extension of authorized Post-Completion OPT
  - Must apply <u>before</u> Post-Completion OPT ends – can apply up to 90 days before

- Degree must be in an <u>approved STEM field</u>.

- "Employer Specific" – one at a time; must be E-Verify.

- Vitally important that job position and responsibilities show a **<u>clear</u>** and **<u>robust</u>** connection to your **<u>major field of study</u>**

- Employer must help student complete a formal training plan (Form I-983) and learning objectives.
  - Must be submitted to DSO for review before applying and after any changes are made during STEM period.

Ending OPT Early

CONTACT A DSO FOR ADVISEMENT

01
Change of immigration status (e.g., H-1B)

02
Abandon OPT and F-1 status and depart the United States

03
Begin a new program/transfer out prior to end of OPT period

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

International Services

QUESTIONS?

Contact International Services:

- Walk in hours daily, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

- Phone: 417-836-6618

- Email: internationalservices@missouristate.edu

- Website: international.MissouriState.edu/services

Helpful Links:

- MSU Graduation Checklist

- U.S. Passport Photos

- How to create a USCIS account

- Tips for filing online forms with USCIS

Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y