Overview

As an F-1 visa student, you may only work off campus in the U.S. if you have received written work authorization approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). One type of USCIS-approved off-campus work authorization is called Optional Practical Training, or OPT.

OPT Defined

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined in the federal regulations as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

There are three kinds of OPT:
1. Pre-completion OPT
2. Post-completion OPT
3. 24 -month extensions of post-completion OPT for certain STEM degree holders

OPT at a Glance

- OPT is an off-campus employment benefit associated with the F-1 visa.
- The purpose of post-completion OPT is to allow F-1 students the opportunity to obtain full-time work authorization for 12 months in a position paid or unpaid that is directly related to a student's major.
- Students are eligible to apply for post-completion OPT no earlier than 90 days before completing their final semester and no later than 60 days after completing their final semester.
- Processing time for OPT applications by USCIS can take up to 90 days.
- After receiving "Notice of Action," you can use the receipt number to check the status of your application online: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus
- If USCIS asks you to send additional information, please bring the notice to the DSO immediately.
- If your application is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Please contact the DSO immediately if you do not receive it after 90 days.
- Make sure the information on the EAD is correct and provide the DSO with a copy. If it is not correct, see the DSO.
- You may not begin working before receiving the EAD card.
- You may not begin working before the start date listed on the EAD.
- You may not continue working after the expiration date listed on the EAD.
- You are still required to report changes of address to the DSO within 10 days of moving and request travel signatures when leaving the U.S. Travel signatures on OPT are only valid for 6 months, not 1 year as they were when you were in school.
- If an OPT application is pending, students are not advised to travel outside of the U.S. Leaving the USA while an application is pending can be viewed as cancelling your application.

General Application Steps
1. Gather the required application materials and photocopy each document for your own records.
2. Using a personal check or money order, make $410 payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" (make sure there is a name and address printed on the check)
3. Download and print the Form I-765: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
   a. Note: It *must* be the most current form of I-765- the most recent was published 05/31/2018.

Key Aspects of OPT
- **Pre-conditions**: To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must have been enrolled as a full-time student in legal immigration status for at least one full academic year (two semesters) before your OPT begins.
- **Location**: Students may engage in OPT for any employer anywhere in the U.S. for the duration of OPT authorization; as long as the employment qualifies under OPT standards.
- **Duration:** Standard OPT is available for a cumulative maximum of 12 months per educational level. A one-time extension of 24 months (for a total of 36 months) is available to certain STEM degree recipients, determined by the CIP code of your major (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). STEM extension employers must participate in E-Verify.
- **Hours per week**: For post-completion OPT, a student must be employed for at least 20 hours per week.
- **Field/Level of work**: The work you do must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education.
- **Offer of Employment**:
   o No offer of employment is required to apply for standard OPT, but the student is expected to work during the OPT EAD validity period. Students on post-completion OPT are limited to a maximum of 90 days of unemployment.
   o To apply for a 24-month STEM extension, you must have an offer of employment from an employer registered with E-Verify.
   o Please note: Employment for which you are qualified on the basis of a language you speak is not appropriate unless your studies have been of that language.

   > Example: Amir recently finished a degree in Engineering and speaks Arabic fluently. He sees a job that lists the criteria "Fluency in Arabic required" and wants to work in this position for OPT. Is this job permissible for Amir based on OPT requirements?

   > Answer: Unless it is an engineering position, no! The purpose of Amir's program was not to study Arabic, and therefore, this is not related to his program of study.

- **Approval Process:**
   o Bring all of your completed documentation to the DSO
   o The DSO will then recommend OPT in SEVIS and print a new I-20 document reflecting the OPT recommendation.
   o File the completed I-765 application with supporting documents for EAD with USCIS Lockbox Facility.
   o Work can begin only after receiving EAD issued by USCIS, and on or after the start date on the EAD.
   o Special rules govern applications for the 24-month STEM OPT extension.
- **OPT filing deadlines**: Students can file for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before the program end-date and up to 60 days after the program end date, provided that it is filed within 30

days after the DSO recommends OPT in SEVIS and issues you a new I-20. Applications for the 24 month STEM-extension must be filed before the EAD expires.

- **OPT authorization:** OPT is limited to a total of 12 months per each higher education degree level (12 months for bachelor's degree, 12 months for master's degree, and 12 months for doctoral degree).

- **Start/End Dates**:
    - A student cannot begin OPT employment until the start date indicated on the EAD issued by USCIS. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(A)
    - The effective date of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) issued by USCIS for standard pre-completion or post-completion OPT will be either the start date requested by the DSO when the recommendation was done in SEVIS, or the date USCIS approves the application for work authorization, whichever occurs later. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(11)(i)(D)
    - For standard post-completion OPT, "a student may not *request a start date that is more than 60 days* after the student's program end date." This restriction is related to the requirement that all standard post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months of the completion of study. To enforce this, SEVIS will not accept an OPT recommendation with an employment start date that is more than 61 days beyond the program end date.
    - This "begin/end date" will be put on your new I-20 that will be sent with your documents. The employment start date should be chosen carefully, since the unemployment clock will start counting as of the requested EAD employment start date (or the OPT request approval date, whichever is later).

Important Factors to Remember

- The application process requires a recommendation by the DSO (Immigration Advisor) and approval by the USCIS Service Center. (We file a request via SEVIS and print you a new I-20 document). If USCIS approves the practical training request, the USCIS issues an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- When a student who is authorized to engage in OPT after graduation enters another educational program (for example, begins a master's program before the end date on the EAD card), USCIS terminates the OPT and the student is no longer authorized to work except for on campus employment at the new institution.
- OPT terminates when the student fails to comply with F-1 regulations (e.g. fails to report a change of address); or when you transfer to another visa status (i.e. H1-B)
- **You cannot work off-campus <u>UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES</u> until you have been authorized by Messiah's DSO <u>AND</u> by USCIS.**

Detailed Application Process

Your application must be approved by USCIS before you can begin employment. The process is estimated to take anywhere from 60 to 120 days from the date of receipt by USCIS. Note that the 90 days or more for processing is the norm during busy times of the year. Approval from USCIS comes in the form of a small photo ID card called the "Employment Authorization Document" or EAD card.

To apply for OPT, follow these steps.

1. **Be Informed.** Read this handout thoroughly and carefully. Check with the Immigration Advisor (DSO) if you have any questions or concerns.
2. **Complete and compile all documentation necessary for the USCIS OPT application.** These include:
   o Messiah College OPT Student Request Form (Attachment B)
   o A cover letter/checklist explaining that you are applying for OPT and listing the contents of the mailing (see Attachment A, sample letter at the end of this document). Make two copies.
   o Complete G-1145- e-notifcation of Application Acceptance: Make two copies.
      ▪ Download and print the G-1145: https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145
   o Completed original I-765 form. Make two copies.
      ▪ Download and print the I-765: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
      ▪ Do not submit online. Also, please note that the date on the form in the bottom right corner of the page should read, "Form I-765 05/31/18"
      ▪ You can find the Form I-765 and official instructions to complete the form here: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765. Additional instructions on completing the form can be found at our website.
   o The I-765 filing fee $410 check or money order payable to "U. S. Department of Homeland Security" OR by credit card payment.
      ▪ **Use the following guidelines when you prepare your check or money order for the Form I-765 fee:**
         • The check or money order must be drawn on a bank or other financial institution located in the United States and must be payable in U.S. currency; and
         • Make the check or money order payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
         • NOTE: Spell out U.S. Department of Homeland Security; do not use the initials "USDHS" or "DHS."
      ▪ **To pay by credit card, please complete form G-1450**
         • Download and print the form G-1450: https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450.
         • Make two copies of the completed form
   o Two print outs of your I-94: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov
   o Two COLOR photocopies of the identification page of your current passport which contains the picture, passport number, and expiration date.
   o Two COLOR photocopies of your current U.S.A. visa.
   o Two passport-sized photos. In pencil, print your name and write your SEVIS ID number (Found at the top of your I-20) on the back of each photo. (Passport photos can be obtained through the Intercultural Office in Larsen Student Union for $10 for two photos. To do this, please first pay $10 at the Falcon Exchange, letting them know that this is for passport pictures at the Intercultural Office. Then bring your receipt to the Intercultural Office and schedule a time to take the pictures.)
   o Copy of any previously issued EAD card (if applicable).
   o Your new SEVIS I-20 with the OPT recommendation from the Immigration Advisor (DSO). This will be done during step 4, indicated below.
   o (optional) **Form G-1145**, E-notification of Application/Petition Acceptance. They will text message you when they receive your forms.

3. **Meet with the DSO**. Once you have all of your application materials, make an appointment at the Intercultural Office to meet with a DSO. (Bring your completed packet to this meeting).
4. **Mail the application materials to USCIS**. When you have completed the entire application, organize everything as neatly as possible. Prepare a large envelope and send to the USCIS Lock Box based on the address that is on your I-765 (see I-765 instructions, page 17). (The Intercultural Office can send your packet to the USCIS Lock Box with tracking for you via UPS shipping. Cost: next day air – $7.50; 2-day air - $6.)
5. **Wait for your receipt.** Within one month of sending the application to the USCIS you should get a standard receipt notice stating that the USCIS has received the application and that it is processing it. If you do not get this letter within six (6) weeks, contact your DSO for more information. The 'Receipt Number' in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to check the status of your case on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov or by calling the phone number indicated on the receipt. Also bear in mind that this information may not be regularly updated online.
    a. If you have filled in **Form G-1145**, E-notification of Application/Petition Acceptance, they will text message you when they receive your forms.
6. **Wait for the EAD.** Your permission to begin OPT is not finalized until you receive an EAD from the USCIS. Remember, **it is illegal to work before you receive the card**. Once you receive the card, you are authorized to work only during the dates on the card. Working improperly or without authorization is a serious violation of your status and will lead to deportation from the U.S.

Other Important Information
A. Things to Consider Regarding Participation in OPT

❖ Only one 12-month period of OPT per degree level is available during your U.S. studies. For example, if you complete a bachelor's degree in the U.S. and participate in 12 months of OPT following that degree program, you may receive a new 12-month period of OPT if you go on to complete a master's degree program (but not if you complete a second bachelor's degree).

❖ The completion date of your I-20 needs to accurately reflect your actual completion date of your program. If you are going to finish early or need to extend your date because of a delay in completing your program, you must see your DSO immediately so that your I-20 can be updated. Failure to do so may result in the loss of your F-1 status, including loss of your legal right to enroll and work on-campus as an F-1. Your DSO cannot extent your Program End Date after the date has passed.

❖ You must report address or name changes within 10 days to your DSO. This information will be reported to the Department of Homeland Security as required in immigration regulations.

❖ You must report status changes to the DSO while you are on OPT. For example, if you apply for and are granted a change of status from F-1 (OPT) to H1-B or any other immigration status, you must notify your DSO. Also, if you leave the U.S. permanently before the end date of your EAD you must notify your DSO. If you plan to continue studies elsewhere you must also contact your DSO. Report status changes within ten days of the change by e-mail or in person.

❖ Authorization may not be rescinded. Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted, it may not be rescinded or cancelled. This means after OPT is authorized by USCIS, inability to find an appropriate job, loss of job, or failure to complete requirements for a degree may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work. Once permission to work has begun, it is next to impossible to have it delayed or cancelled and restored at a later date.

❖ Actual start date for OPT authorization: You may not begin work until the following requirements are satisfied: (1) you have obtained an EAD card and (2) the date is reached when the EAD authorizes employment to begin.

❖ Change of employer after OPT has been authorized: You may change employers after beginning authorized employment provided that the new job is (1) directly related to your major field of study and (2) appropriate for someone with your level of education. You must alert the DSO if you change your employer after OPT has been authorized. You must tell the DSO when you stop work at one employer, and if/when you start work at another employer.

B. Period of Unemployment with the EAD card

❖ During any 12-month period of standard post-completion OPT, **no student (including STEM students) may be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 90 days**. If a STEM student receives a 24-month extension, the limit on unemployment is raised to an aggregate of no more than 120 days, applied to the entire 36-month period of post-completion OPT.

❖ Counting of days: "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."

❖ Weekends and holidays are considered unemployed days when a student is not employed. Weekends and holidays that fall during employment dates are not considered unemployed.

> Example: Joseph is approved for OPT for June 1, 2017-May 30, 2018. Joseph is offered a job at a company and starts working for them on June 20, 2017 and works for the same company until May 30, 2018. June 1-19 are considered unemployed days. June 20, 2017-May 30, 2018 are considered employed days.

❖ Unemployment while outside the United States: SEVP also states in its OPT Policy Guidance [7.1.6] that even time spent outside the United States while unemployed will count towards the 90/120 aggregate during the EAD validity period (i.e. a student cannot "stop the unemployment clock" simply by exiting the country). SEVP does clarify, however, that "If a student travels

while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment."

C. Types of work that constitute employment while on OPT
- ❖ Periods of unemployment may put a student's F-1 status at risk. SEVP's OPT Policy Guidance [7.2.1] states that the following activities are considered allowable employment on standard post-completion OPT, provided that the job is related to the student's program of study:
  - **Regular paid employment for at least 20 hours per week in a position directly related to the student's program of study.** Students may work for multiple employers, as long as it is directly related to the student's program of study.
  - **Payment by multiple short-term employers.** SEVP says that "Students, such as musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs."
  - **Work for hire.** SEVP states, "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. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company."
  - **Self-employed business owner.** SEVP states, "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 degree program."
  - **Employment through an agency.** SEVP states, "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."
  - **Volunteers or unpaid interns.** SEVP states, "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."
    - o For the 24-month STEM extension, however, employment must be paid employment, and although volunteering or unpaid activity is permitted, it will not be counted towards the employment requirement as it is for standard post-completion OPT.

D. Responsibility for determining whether a student has exceeded the limit on unemployment
- ❖ Students may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on the student's valid F-1 status if DHS determines that the student exceeded the limitations on unemployment.
- ❖ Additionally, ICE/SEVP may examine SEVIS data for an individual, a selected group, or all students on post-completion OPT and terminate a student's record if it fails to show the student maintained the proper period of employment. In such cases, the student will be given an opportunity to show that he or she complied with all OPT requirements, including maintaining employment.

E. Student documentation of complying with the OPT employment requirement
- ❖ SEVP recommends that students maintain evidence of their post-completion OPT to prove that their employment was directly related to their degree program. The same evidence could also be used to establish that they have not exceeded the limit on unemployment.
- ❖ SEVP recommends that students maintain evidence (for each job) of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for the student's supervisor or manager, and a description of the work.

F. Employment Eligibility Verification.
  ❖ When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form titled "Employment Eligibility Verification" (Form I-9), which your employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. This form requires you to document your identity and work authorization according to directions on the back of the form. The most convenient combinations of the various acceptable items as documentation include your EAD card, a valid passport, and your most recent I-94. Your employer, who keeps Form I-9, may make copies of the documents you submit and return the originals to you.
  ❖ You will also need a Social Security card or number. If you do not already have a Social Security card, or if you have a card which is marked, "not valid for employment" take your passport, I-94, Form I-20, and your EAD card to the office of Social Security Administration, and apply for a new Social Security card. Note that your number will remain the same if you already had one, but the notation on the card should change to indicate that employment is valid with authorization.

G. Social Security and other taxes
  ❖ In general, F-1 students who have been in the US fewer than five years are "non-residents for tax purposes" and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see the Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year, which will determine if any of the withheld taxes can be refunded. If you have been in the USA for five years or more, you will be considered a "resident for tax purposes" but please note that this does not change your immigration status.

H. Special information after you are granted the EAD
  ❖ **Traveling outside the US while on OPT**
    Reentry provisions of the regulations require students who have graduated and are on an authorized OPT to present the following documents to re-enter the U.S.
    1. SEVIS I-20 student copy, signed on the back by the DSO within the last six (6) months.
    2. The EAD. Note that the EAD Card says, "Not Valid for Travel" on the face of the card. This means that you cannot use the EAD alone to re-enter the US, but that you also need to have the signed I-20.
    3. A valid passport.
    4. A valid F-1 visa.
    5. A job offer letter. F-1 regulations allow for travel and re-entry in order to "resume employment." While a job offer letter is not required to obtain OPT, it is recommended that students who travel have a job offer letter with them when they are entering the U.S. Those who do not carry all of these documents may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S.
    Travel at any time while in F-1 status carries some risk. This risk increases for individuals on OPT if the F-1 visa has expired and a new one is required in order to re-enter the US. If you have completed your program and you do not yet have the EAD, you should not travel out of the country or you risk not being able to re-enter to participate in OPT. Be sure to consult with the DSO when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and re-enter to continue OPT.

I. Requirement to report changes of name, address, or employment during OPT
  ❖ An F-1 student authorized by USCIS to engage in OPT is **required to report WITHIN 10 DAYS** any change of name or address, or interruption of such employment to the DSO for the duration of the authorized training. A DSO who recommends a student for OPT is responsible for updating the student's record in SEVIS to reflect these reported changes for the duration of the time that training is authorized.

J. STEM Extension (Post-Completion OPT in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math fields)
  ❖ There is a 24-month post-completion OPT extension available for graduates with specific STEM degrees. This rule makes recipients of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields eligible for a one-time 24-month extension

of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 36 months). To be eligible for the extension, the student's employer must be registered in E-Verify, and agree to report to the DSO when the student is terminated or leaves employment. The student must agree to make 6-month reports to the DSO.

❖ STEM CIP codes eligible for 24-month extension (STEM Designated Degree Program List) are:
  • Actuarial Science – CIP Code 52.1304
  • Computer Science Applications – CIP Codes 11.xxxx (except Data Entry/Microcomputer Applications, which are CIP Codes 11.06xx)
  • Engineering – CIP Codes 14.xxxx
  • Engineering Technologies – CIP Codes 15.xxxx
  • Biological and Biomedical Sciences – CIP Codes 26.xxxx
  • Mathematics and Statistics – CIP Codes 27.xxxx
  • Military Technologies – CIP Codes 29.xxxx.
  • Physical Sciences – CIP Codes 40.xxxx.
  • Science Technologies – CIP Codes 41.xxxx.
  • Medical Scientist (MS, PhD) – CIP Code 51.1401

Note that CIP Codes ending in xx99 not eligible. The supplementary information to the interim final rule states that CIP codes ending in xx99 are excluded from this list. Degrees associated with CIP codes ending in xx99 would not be eligible for the 24-month STEM OPT extension according to that statement.

K. H1-B Cap Gap: Qualifications

❖ **H-1B Cap-Gap extension of D/S (Duration of Status) and OPT work authorization until October 1.** Duration of status and any OPT work authorization will be automatically extended for an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year.
  • The regulations specify that duration of status (D/S), and any post-completion OPT work authorization will be automatically extended for an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 (the first day of the following fiscal year). This applies to all qualified students on OPT, not just STEM students. An automatic Cap-Gap extension of an F-1 student's duration of status also applies to the duration of status of the students dependents in F-2 status.

❖ To qualify for an H-1B Cap-Gap extension: 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(5)(vi)
  • The student must be the beneficiary of an H-1B petition that …
    ➢ has been timely filed. This means that it was filed during the H-1B acceptance period, while the student's authorized duration of status (D/S) admission was still in effect ("including any period of time during the academic course of study, any authorized periods of post-completion OPT, and the 60-day departure preparation period, commonly known as the grace period.")
    ➢ requests an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year;
    ➢ requests a change of status; and
  • The student must not have violated the terms or conditions of his or her F-1 status.

L. Students participating in an approved, off-campus study-abroad program during their last semester

❖ Students who are studying abroad in a third country during their final semester of study will be faced with logistical issues that could make them ineligible to apply for post-completion OPT. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10) states that practical training "may be authorized to an F-1 student." This requires a student to be in F-1 status to receive OPT, and a student outside the U.S. is not in any nonimmigrant status while abroad (even though their SEVIS record is active). Also, the questions on Form I-765 assume that the applicant is residing in the U.S., with an I-94. The fact of being outside the U.S. in the final semester complicates things even further, since there might not be a

basis for the student to return to the U.S. after the program end date.**Reminders for Maintaining F-1 Status While on OPT**

❖ **Employment is related to your major**: OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing an opportunity to gain experience in your field of study. The USCIS considers working in a job that is not related to your major a violation of F-1 status.

❖ **Periods of Employment**: You may only work off-campus in a field related to your major when you have received your EAD card and the start date has arrived.

❖ **Periods of Unemployment**: During post-completion OPT, students may not accrue an aggregate total of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT authorization.

❖ **Reporting Changes of Name, Address, or Employment**: An F-1 student approved for OPT is required to report of any change in the following within 10 days to the DSO:

➢ Legal name
➢ Residential or Mailing address
➢ Employer Name
➢ Employer Address and/or
➢ Dates of employment/ unemployment

❖ **Avoid all criminal activities. Arrest (even without conviction) can result in revocation of your F-1 visa.**

Reminders for Traveling While on OPT

Re-entry during post-completion OPT when an EAD card has already been issued:

❖ Regulations allow for re-entry to the U.S. "to resume employment after a temporary absence." You are cautioned to not travel outside of the U.S. while on post-completion OPT if you have not yet secured a job.

❖ Students will be questioned at the Port of Entry on whether or not they are returning to the U.S. to continue or start a job.

❖ The longer a student has had an EAD card but has not been working, the greater the likelihood he or she will encounter difficulties at re-entry.

❖ In all cases, if you are not employed, you should be prepared to explain the substantial steps you have been taking to secure employment.

❖ SEVP has further clarified that the student need not have already commenced actual employment before leaving the U.S., as long as the student has a job offer to return to.

❖ This policy concerns eligibility to re-enter the U.S. It does not mean that not having a job offer at the time the EAD is approved is a status violation. It is assumed, though, that a student with approved OPT who does not depart the U.S. must be engaged in a diligent search for employment.

❖ The best general guidance is for you to have both an EAD card for post-completion OPT and a job or job offer in order to avoid experiencing difficulty re-entering the U.S. If either of these two conditions is missing, then you are assuming risk.

If you absolutely need to travel outside of the U.S. during OPT, follow the check list below:

❖ Provide the DSO with a legible copy of your Employment Authorization card (EAD).

❖ Make sure the DSO signature is current on your original I-20. During OPT, travel signatures must be less than six months old at the time of reentry.

❖ Obtain a visa if your visa has expired or will expire before your return to the U.S., or if you changed your status within the U.S. **Realize that it may be very difficult to obtain a new visa while outside the U.S. on OPT.**

❖ We strongly advise you to carry with you the original letter of employment offer or proof of job interviews when you travel**.**

USCIS

Attn: AOS

2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business

Suite 400

Lewisville, TX 75067

Dear USCIS Officer:

I am writing to submit my application for the Optional Practical Training. The following documents are enclosed to support my application:

- Original I-765 Form
- $410 check/ money order/ credit-card payment (made payable to Homeland Security)
- Two passport-size photos
- Copy of my identification page from my passport
- Copy of my USA visa stamp from my passport
- Copy of my I-94 Form
- Copy of most recent I-20 form

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my application. If you have any questions, you can reach me in the following ways:

PHONE: X-XXX-XXX-XXXX

EMAIL: XXXX@XXXXXX.XXX

Sincerely,

Your full name

Student Request (students should complete this portion)

Family Name	Given Name
Messiah College ID #	SEVIS ID #
E-mail Address	Cell Phone Number
Degree Program: BA or BS	Date of Degree Completion
Field of study on your I-20	I-20 Expiration Date

Requested OPT Start Date: _____ Requested OPT End Date: _____
** Note: These dates cannot be changed once your application is sent to USCIS.

Employer Name (if known) _____

Employer Mailing Address (if known) _____

STATEMENT: I have read the information contained in the Optional Practical Training packet and below and fully understand the implications of the authorization during and after my program of study. The information I have provided is true and correct.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Regulations for Maintaining F-1 Status While on OPT

✓ **Employment is directly related to your major**: OPT is intended to enhance your academic program by providing an opportunity to gain experience in your field of study. The USCIS considers working in a job that is not related to your major a violation of F-1 status.
✓ **Periods of Employment**: You may only work off-campus in a field related to your major when you have received your Employment Authorization Document card and the start date has arrived.
✓ **Periods of Unemployment**: During post-completion OPT, students may not accrue an aggregate total of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT authorization.
✓ **Reporting Changes of Name, Address, or Employment**: An F-1 student approved for OPT is required to report (via "immigration" on Messiah's website) of any change in the following within 10 days:
  ➢ Legal name
  ➢ Residential or Mailing address
  ➢ Employer Name
  ➢ Employer Address and/or
  ➢ Dates of employment/ unemployment
- **Avoid all criminal activities**