OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
INFORMATION FOR F-1 STUDENTS

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?
OPT is employment authorization for international students in F-1 status
for work experience that is directly related to your major field of study. You
may use OPT for paid or unpaid work experience, and it is typically done for
a period of 12 months. There are three types of OPT:
- Pre-completion: Start and finish before program end date
- Post-completion: Start and finish after program end date
- 24-month STEM extension: Certain circumstances allow for you to apply
to extend OPT for an additional 24 months

Who is eligible?
To be eligible for OPT, you must:
- Be in lawful F-1 status for one
  academic year prior to applying
  for OPT
- Have a passport valid for at least
  six months after you apply for OPT
- Not have used more than 364
days of full-time CPT

If I had CPT, can I still have OPT?
Yes, if you did not have CPT full time
for 12 months or more. Part-time
CPT has no effect on OPT eligibility.

What are post-completion OPT requirements?
- Maintain F-1 status by being
  employed (instead of enrolled)
- Report employment to the
  International Center (tracks your
  unemployment period)
- Work full-time (21+ hours per
  week)
- Maintain paid or unpaid
  employment with one or multiple
  employers (can switch employers)
- Part-time, incidental course work
  is allowed, but not required

24-month stem extension
To be eligible, you must:
- Have a degree in certain STEM
  fields (science, technology,
  engineering, mathematics)
- Have a job related to your
  major and an employer that
  is registered with the E-verify
  employment verification
  system
- Apply before initial OPT ends
To apply for the 24-month
STEM extension, apply through
myStatus (mystatus.missouri.
edu).

- Maximum authorization is for 12
  months (with exceptions)
- Accrue up to 90 days of
  unemployment during the
  12-month period

APPLYING FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
Before applying for OPT, you
should review the International
Center website and attend an OPT
workshop. Then submit the following:
- OPT online document request
- OPT workshop review
- USCIS form I-765 — use (c)(3)(b)
as the eligibility code
- OPT adviser verification form
- Copies of immigration
  documents: previous I-20s, I-94,
  visa, passport biographical page
- Copy of job offer letter (if you
  have one)
- Previous off-campus employment
  history documentation
- $75 OPT processing fee

International Center’s role
While an international student
adviser can recommend OPT in
SEVIS, USCIS must approve your
application. After you submit your
documents to the International
Center, your adviser will:
- Verify you are in lawful F-1 status
- Create a new I-20 with OPT
  recommendation
- Review the rest of your OPT
  application materials and return
  the application to you with
  mailing instructions

Mailing the application to USCIS is
your responsibility.

Items to submit to USCIS
- Check or money order for $410
  payable to U.S. Department of
  Homeland Security
- Two passport-style photos,
taken recently (available from
  the International Center)
- Original I-765
- Copy of new OPT I-20
- Copies of previous I-20s
- Copies of I-94, visa, previous
  EADs, passport page
- Job offer letter (if you have one)
- G-1145 (optional)
OPT TIMELINE

OPT APPLICATION PERIOD

- 90 DAYS
  - Can start applying up to 90 days before program end date

OPT PERIOD

- 12 MONTHS
  - Work authorization for maximum of 12 months from OPT start date, or 14 months from program end date, whichever is earlier

GRACE PERIOD

- 60 DAYS
  - Time to transfer, start a new program, change status or exit the U.S.

OPT timing tips
- Application must be received by USCIS before the grace period ends
- OPT will end no less than 14 months after program end date, regardless of processing time
- OPT typically takes three months to be approved
- Can only begin working once you have your EAD card in-hand
- Cannot cancel OPT after your application is approved
- OPT will be ended by USCIS if you begin a new academic program or transfer to a new school

After mailing your application to USCIS
In two to three weeks, you will get a receipt from USCIS to let you know they have received your application and are processing it. You can check the status of your application through the USCIS website using your receipt number (in the upper left-hand corner of receipt notice). Your application will be in initial review for most of the processing time — this is a good sign. Once your EAD card arrives and your start date has passed, you may begin working somewhere in your field of study. If your EAD card is approved after your program start date, the start and end dates will be adjusted to give you the full benefit of your authorized period of employment.

WHEN APPROVED FOR OPT
- You are still in F-1 student status and using a benefit of that status
- Your I-20 is still valid — the third page shows OPT dates even though date on first page has passed
- F-1 status is now dependent on employment — up to 90 days allowed for unemployment or you are out of status
- Report employment information to the International Center within 10 days of starting or ending a job or changing employers
- Use myStatus (mystatus.missouri.edu) to report employer’s name and address (any and every time you are employed or switch employers)

TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Traveling before graduation
If you leave, carry with you a letter from your department stating that you have not yet graduated. You will also need the usual travel documents (I-20 with travel signature, passport, visa).

Traveling after graduation with OPT
You may re-enter the U.S. while your OPT application is pending in order to resume searching for a job. You will need:
- Valid passport and visa
- I-20 signed for travel within the past six months
- OPT receipt notice (proof of pending OPT)

Traveling after graduation with OPT approval
You may re-enter the U.S. if you have proof of employment. You will need:
- Valid passport and visa
- I-20 signed for travel within the past six months
- EAD card (it will say “Not valid for re-entry” — but don’t worry)
- Letter from employer stating that you need to return to the U.S. to resume working