Optional Practical Training (OPT) enables international students to gain valuable work experience related to their fields of study. F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of full-time employment authorization for each higher level of education completed. While the Office of International Student and Scholar Services makes a recommendation for OPT, it is the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service office which reviews the applications and decides on that recommendation. OPT grants employment authorization for any employer in the U.S., but all employment completed during a student’s OPT period must be directly related to the field of study listed on the I-20.

Eligibility: International students who wish to apply for OPT authorization must demonstrate that they are in valid F-1 status. They must have complete at least one academic year (three consecutive quarters, excluding vacation terms) of full-time study and subsequently maintain valid F-1 status through their OPT start date.

Pre-completion vs. Post-completion OPT: While students may apply for OPT prior to the completion of their programs of study, timing issues prevent this from being a realistic option in many cases. OPT applications are reviewed by the USCIS Service Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, which can take up to 3 months to process the applications. For this reason, most students wait until their final term of study before applying for OPT, which will then take place after the completion of their studies. Graduate students who are engaged in thesis/dissertation-option programs are eligible to apply for OPT upon completion of their required coursework (core as well as minor and elective coursework).

Extensions: Some Science, Technology, Engineering and Math students may apply for a 24-month extension. See OPT Extension Instructions handout for more information.

Application timing: Because OPT is authorized by the USCIS Service Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, students must pay careful attention to when they file. OPT applications must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the end of a student’s program of study, according to the official academic calendar of the University. We therefore require that students submit their OPT applications to the OISSS office at least 10 business days prior to the end of that period. Students may apply up to 90 days before their program end date (the last day of classes in the term in which the student completes the coursework required for his or her degree). The application must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the recommendation for OPT being made by an advisor in ISSS or the application will be denied.

Starting OPT: Students may specify the date they wish to begin OPT. That start date must fall within the 60 days following the completion of their courses of study. For example, in a term which ends June 16, the start date of OPT may be any time between June 17 and August 15. Once students have specified a preferred start date and the application has been sent, the start date is not easily altered. It is an immigration status violation to begin working until students have received their Employment Authorization Document from USCIS.

Travel while on OPT: When students have been approved for OPT they are still in F1 visa status and therefore require a valid travel signature and a valid F1 visa in addition to their valid EAD to re-enter the United States. Because the regulatory language states that students who have been approved for OPT are only eligible to re-enter to “resume” employment, proof that a student has secured employment may be required when the student is re-entering the U.S. We urge students to be cautious if traveling before employment has been secured. If an emergency requires you to leave the U.S. while your OPT is pending or before you’ve found a job, a status letter from our office can be helpful.

Unemployment during OPT period: Current regulations prohibit students from being unemployed for more than 90 days during the initial 12-month period of OPT. Students must report (to psuopt@pdx.edu) when they begin working for an employer AND when they stop working for that employer to OISSS. If unemployed for more than 90 days total, a student is considered to be in violation of their status.
OPT FILING PROCEDURE

To apply for OPT, please bring the following documents to OISSS. We will review your application and check your status maintenance then issue the I-20 on which your OPT will be recommended. Once you sign this new I-20, we will mail your application to USCIS. The process of receiving your application, recommending OPT, and sending the application to USCIS takes approximately 5-7 business days, so please plan ahead!

- USCIS form I-765. Please complete the form (Items 1-16). You may download the form from the USCIS website at http://www.uscis.gov/ (click on Forms and scroll down to the I-765). If you think there is any chance that you will move in the 3 months it may take USCIS to process your OPT application, please consider using our office address (we have a mailing label you can use). Your EAD is Federal mail which is NOT forwarded by the post office. If you use your home address and move while awaiting the approval of your OPT, you will need to update your address online with USCIS directly, in addition to reporting the change to our office.

- Check or money order for $410.00 made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS will not accept cash. (Be sure to check the USCIS website for the most current fees: http://www.uscis.gov/ click on Forms and scroll to I-765).

- USCIS form G-1145. You may submit this optional form with your OPT application to receive electronic notification that your form has been accepted at the USCIS lockbox facility to which it was sent. Blank forms are available from the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) or you can download one from the web: www.uscis.gov (click on Forms, then scroll down or search for G-1145).

- 2 RECENT (taken within the last 15 days) passport photos. If you use old photos your application may be returned or you may receive a “request for evidence”, either of which will slow the process of receiving approval. Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo.

- Photocopies of the following pages of your passport: identity pages (including photo, personal information, and expiration date), and US visa.

- Proof of lawful admission. This might be a copy of your paper I-94 card, your I-797 evidencing a change of status to F-1, or your electronic I-94 card, which can be retrieved at: www.cbp.gov/I94.

- Photocopies of all CPT authorizations during your current degree program (including those from previous schools, if applicable).

- Advisor Verification Form (attached). This form must be signed by your academic advisor.

- Photocopies of previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD). If you have received an EAD card in the past for any reason, please bring a photocopy of both sides of the card. If the EAD was issued for an F-1 employment benefit, please provide the I-20 associated with that EAD.

- Upon submitting all the required documentation, a new I-20 will be created, which you will need to sign before the application can be sent. You will be contacted when the new I-20 is ready to be signed. The OPT application must be submitted to USCIS with a copy of this I-20, and no more than 30 days after the recommendation has been made, so it is imperative to come to sign the new I-20 as soon as possible once it is prepared.

If you have any questions about OPT, please attend one of the many OPT/CPT workshops offered by OISSS throughout the academic year. Once you’ve done that, feel free to contact your international student advisor either by phone (503-725-4094) or by e-mail: igartac@pdx.edu, jndavis@pdx.edu, harrisp@pdx.edu, jmehrens@pdx.edu, eskaar@pdx.edu, or montejom@pdx.edu.
To: Academic Advisors or Authorized Department Personnel

The international student named below is applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is 12 months of employment authorization granted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) which allows international students to gain practical work experience in their fields of study, usually upon completion of their degree programs. An international student advisor recommends this type of work authorization but USCIS actually authorizes it.

Before this authorization can be granted, the Office of International Student & Scholar Services must receive verification from you, the student's academic advisor, of the date the student is EXPECTED to complete his or her degree requirements. The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date but the date all the requirements for the degree are fulfilled. Undergraduate students must have a signature from their academic adviser (http://www.pdx.edu/advising/advising-locations) verifying that the student will meet all requirements for his or her degree (general education, major and degree) by the end of the quarter in which OPT is being recommended. Graduate students must obtain a signature from their academic adviser verifying that the student a) will meet all requirements for his or her degree (core and elective coursework and thesis/dissertation) by the end of the quarter in which OPT is being recommended or b) that the student has completed all coursework requirements (core and elective) and will complete the required thesis/dissertation within 14 months of the end of the quarter in which OPT is being recommended.

Please complete the form below and return it to us so that we may process this student's request. Should you have any questions, please contact our office at oia@pdx.edu or by phone 503-725-4094.

To: International Student and Scholar Services (OISSS),

This is to certify that __________________________ (______________) is being recommended for Optional Practical Training based on the following information:

☐ S/he will complete all requirements for an undergraduate level degree in __________________ by the end of ______ term 20_____.

☐ S/he will complete all requirements for a graduate level degree in __________________ by the end of _________ term 20______.

☐ S/he will complete all required coursework for a graduate level degree in ______________ by the end of ___________ term 20______, but will continue working on her/his thesis or dissertation during post-completion OPT.*

________________________________________
Academic Advisor’s signature

________________________________________
Printed Name

________________________________________
Date

________________________________________
Telephone number and/or email address

If student has coursework remaining in his/her final term of study, please tell us which classes must be completed. Please feel free share any information of which you think we should be aware.

*If the student is recommended for post-completion OPT while working on the thesis or dissertation, the paper MUST be completed by the end of the authorized OPT period or the student is considered to have violated her/his immigration status.
Checklist for OPT application

Please include this checklist with your OPT Application

☐ Will the address you gave on this form be valid for at least 5 months? If you think you will move, you may ask to use our office address; if you use your home address, please note that you will be required to update your address with USCIS directly to ensure that further correspondence regarding your application is sent to the appropriate address.

☐ $410.00 check or money order made out to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

☐ Photocopies of: the identity page in your passport, your F-1 visa, and your arrival record. This might be a copy of your paper I-94 card, your I-797 evidencing a change of status to F-1, or your electronic I-94 card, which can be retrieved at: www.cbp.gov/I94.

☐ 2 RECENT photos. Please put your name and I-94 number on the back (see above re: I-94 arrival record).

☐ Completed Adviser Verification Form—Optional Practical Training.

☐ Copies of all I-20s showing authorization for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) issued for your current degree level (including CPT authorizations granted at other schools if study was at the same degree level).

☐ Copies of any EADs issued for previous periods of OPT, as well as the I-20s issued to recommend those periods of OPT.

Desired Start Date: ____________ Desired End Date: ____________ (Dates must fall within the 60-day grace period following completion of studies)

Current Address: ____________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Phone Number: __________________________ Personal E-mail: __________________________

Student Name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________ Date: ______