An F-1 student may be eligible to engage in temporary employment for practical training in her/his field of study after completion of studies. The following conditions must be met to be eligible for OPT:

- Student must have been in lawful status for one academic year.
- Employment must be directly related to your major field of study and degree.
- Student must have a valid passport.
- It is strongly recommended that you submit the OPT application to US Citizenship and Immigration Services 90 days prior to your completion date.

Optional Practical Training is limited to a maximum of 12 months for students submitting an initial application for post-degree completion employment. Students in certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) fields of study may be eligible for a 17 month OPT extension after the initial 12 month approval. (NOTE: A student who completes a degree and engages in 12 months of OPT may become eligible for an additional 12 months only if he/she completes a degree program at the next higher level: ex: BS→MS).

Students majoring in STEM fields may be eligible for an additional 17 month extension: http://www.nafsa.org/_/Document/_/opt_29_month_rule_compiled.pdf

PROCEDURE TO APPLY FOR INITIAL OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (12 MONTHS)

1. Before you may apply for OPT, you MUST meet with staff at the Office of International Education (OIE), Walb Union 145 to pick up an OPT application.
2. ATTEND THE OPT WORKSHOP and schedule an appointment with the Director of International Student Services and bring the following items with you to the appointment:
   - Completed IPFW OPT application form (attached)
   - A completed I-765 form (attached)
   - Two passport-size photographs (white background, size 2"X2")
   - Photocopies of all I-20 forms that were previously issued to you
   - A photocopy of your passport, visa, and I-94
   - Photocopies of any previously issued EAD cards (copy front and back sides)
   - A check or money order ($380) made payable to the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security. NO CASH
   - Form G-1145: E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

A new SEVIS I-20 will be issued to you to reflect the international student advisor’s recommendation. Submit photocopies of the above listed documents to complete the OPT packet. OIE will mail the OPT packet to U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY U.S. CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Form I-765, line 3, Use the following address:
   c/o IPFW Office of Int’l Education
   2101 E Coliseum Blvd, WU 145
   Fort Wayne, IN 46805

   Form I-765, line 16, Enter:   ( c ) ( 3 ) ( B ) for post-completion OPT
   (c) (3) (C) for OPT STEM extensions
Please print the I-765 form after you have completed filling it in online and include it with your other OPT application documents when completed and include with your other OPT application documents.

International Student Services will issue a new form I-20 with the OPT recommendation after all documents have been submitted. A copy of the new I-20 will be sent with the I-765 employment authorization application and all supporting documents to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services Nebraska Service Center (NSC) for adjudication. A receipt notice will be sent after NSC receives the application. If approved, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be issued valid for the employment start and end dates that you requested. OPT employment authorization CANNOT be canceled or changed after it has been approved.

After completion of all graduate coursework, but prior to completion of your thesis or dissertation, permission may be granted at the half-time or full-time rate. However, you must continue to make good progress toward completion of your thesis or dissertation while engaging in practical training. If you have an assistantship, check with the person in your department who coordinates assistantships to determine if this may have an impact on your eligibility for assistantship or tuition remission awards.

You MUST apply for post-completion OPT within three months BEFORE graduation.

You may choose to split your practical training periods in a variety of ways. Some students use all of their 12 months while pursuing a degree; others save all 12 months to use after graduation. Still others use some months before graduation and the remainder upon completion of the degree. USCIS takes anywhere from 90 to 120 days to process and issue your Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Can I extend my OPT?

As of April 2008, F-1 students who are currently authorized for a 12-month of OPT, who earned a bachelor’s, master’s or PhD degree in a field that is listed on the DHS STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math)* Designated Degree Program list from a US college or university, and have a job-offer or employed by an employer registered with the “E-Verify”** federal employment verification system, may apply for a 17-month extension to their OPT.

NEW OPT Reporting Requirements (VERY IMPORTANT)

As of spring 2008, students on post-completion OPT may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment under the initial 12-month period of OPT. 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. IPFW international students MUST report employment by providing ISS with the name and address of the employer upon start of employment. Therefore, ALL IPFW international students on OPT MUST report the following information to ISS:
--Any change in your name or address
--Any change of employment and or the name and address of the employer
--Any interruption of such employment (unemployed, termination)
--Students with an approved 17 month extension must also make a validation report every six months starting on the date the extension begins and ending when the OPT ends. The validation is a confirmation that the student’s name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment is current and accurate.

Reporting Requirements While On OPT

There are reporting requirements for students who are pursuing Optional Practical Training in the US.

All students on OPT must report to the Office of International Services within 10 days of any change in the following:

- Any change in name or address
- Any change in immigration
- Any interruption of employment, including a return to studies

Students who plan to begin a new academic program at IPFW will need to apply for a new degree program in the ISS Office.
Note: OPT will automatically terminate when a new I-20 is created for a new program of study (at IPFW or at another institution).

**Employment Tracking and Reporting**

It is the responsibility of each F-1 student on OPT to keep track of employment-related information for the duration of the OPT authorization. ICE regulations require that students pursuing OPT report interruptions in employment to the ISS within 10 business days to avoid situations where a DHS official may determine the student is out of status.

You will need to keep very careful track of your employment—dates, employer names, addresses, supervisor’s contact information.

It will be very important for you to track your days of unemployment, and also to retain supporting documentation of the periods of time when you are employed (including offer letters, pay stubs, etc.).

**Unemployment Issues**

- As of April 8, 2008, students granted post-completion OPT can accrue up to 90 days of unemployment.
- Students whose employers filed a timely H-1B petition and were granted cap-gap coverage are permitted a total of 90 days of unemployment for the entire period of OPT.
- Days spent outside of the US while unemployed count towards the 90 days of unemployment permitted.
- If a student on OPT nears the 90th day of unemployment, it would be best to make plans to depart the US, apply for a change of status to a different status or make preparations to begin a new degree program. Action would need to be taken early enough so that by the end of the 90th day of unemployment, the student would have another option already in progress. DHS has stated that an F-1 student who is unemployed for more than 90 days will be considered to be out of status.
- ISS will not take any adverse action on a student’s SEVIS record regarding unemployment. ISS’s responsibility is to report interruptions in employment that the F-1 student reports to ISS. Failure to report that information or accruing more than 90 days of unemployment may result in DHS not approving future benefits or requests.

One strategy for maintaining your status while on OPT: Unpaid Employment

Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. This unpaid work must also be in the student’s major field of study. Students on post completion OPT must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

Students engaged in OPT should be careful not to “volunteer” without pay in positions that US citizens would be paid for. This is designed to protect you, the employer and other workers. Click here for more information on the US Department of Labor’s Fair Labor Standards Act.

**Traveling while Employed**

Dates of travel outside of the US while employed do not count as days of unemployment. If a student on OPT is traveling outside of the US for a vacation or for business while continuing to be employed in the major field of study, those dates outside of the US do not need to be tracked or reported as days of unemployment.

While traveling on OPT, students are advised to carry the following:

- I-20, signed for travel (remember that each travel signature is valid for only six months during the period of OPT)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp
- Passport valid for at least six months into the future from the date of re-entry to the US
- Valid OPT card
- Job offer or confirmation letter
  
+ If traveling for business or on a vacation from the job, ensure that the letter clarifies this.
If you are:

* Traveling outside of the US while waiting for your OPT to be approved and before you complete your degree, take the following items with you:
  - passport (valid for six months from the date of your re-entry);
  - signed I-20 (remember that each travel signature is valid for only 6 months during the period of OPT);
  - valid F-1 visa stamp.

* Traveling outside of the US while waiting for your OPT to be approved and after your degree completion, be advised that this option is somewhat riskier. You will need to take the following items with you:
  - passport (valid for six months from the date of your re-entry);
  - signed I-20 (remember that each travel signature is valid for only 6 months during the period of OPT);
  - valid F-1 visa stamp;
  - It is also recommended that you bring your I-797C (receipt notice from USCIS).

ISS recommends particular caution in this situation. Your US immigration status is determined by the I-94 card that is placed in your passport and because the I-94 is taken each time you depart from the US, establishing your F-1 status while outside the US will be difficult if USCIS has questions about your application. If USCIS sends a request for additional information about an aspect of your application and if it is not resolved in a timely fashion, your application will be denied.

According to DHS, traveling back to the US while your OPT is pending is permitted in order to search for employment.

* Traveling outside of the US after your OPT has been approved and after the completion date on your I-20 (check item 5 on your I-20), you must have the following documents to re-enter the United States:

  - Passport (valid for six months from the date of your re-entry);
  - Valid F-1 visa stamp;
  - OPT A-20 with a valid travel signature (given within the last six months);
  - job offer or employment confirmation letter (Immigration regulations state that you can re-enter the US to resume employment while on OPT);
  - If traveling for business or on a vacation from the job, ensure that the letter clarifies this.

It can be very difficult to apply for an F-1 visa stamp while you are on OPT. If your visa stamp is expired, or will soon expire, keep this in mind. Please remember that anytime you leave the US there is never a guarantee that the immigration official at the port of entry will allow you to re-enter. Please speak with an advisor at OIS if you have questions.

(For more information about traveling during periods of cap-gap OPT authorization, please click here.)
IPFW OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
Application for Optional Practical Training (OPT)

**GENERAL INFORMATION** (PLEASE ENTER YOUR NAME EXACTLY AS IT APPEARS ON YOUR PASSPORT)

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<th>Family Name (in CAPS)</th>
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**Undergraduate Students - Expected graduation date:**

**Graduate Students - Expected completion of all Degree requirements:**

Do you have a thesis option? Yes ☐ No ☐

**Requested OPT Employment Dates:**

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