

Information and Instructions for OPT Application

NOTE: Please contact Luyen with questions about any form of employment – paid or unpaid. You must make an appointment with Luyen to discuss things in detail, changes in regulations, and before you submit your application.

International students who have been enrolled at Carleton on a full-time basis for a full academic year (or 9 months) prior to completion of your studies or graduation may be eligible for Optional Practical Training. OPT is an extension of F-1 student status and provides temporary employment related your academic major(s). Although OPT can be utilized during your studies (referred to as pre-completion OPT), most students elect to use this employment authorization after they graduate. If doing pre-completion OPT, you must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment (unless done during school breaks).

OPT allows you to work in a position related to your field of study for up to 12 months, but has to be completed within 14 months of program completion. You must work at least 20 hours a week part-time but no more than 40 hours a week full-time. If you previously used *full-time* CPT for more than one year, you are ineligible for OPT. You may be eligible 12 months of OPT for each subsequent higher level degree completed, and you may attend school part-time during OPT.

In order to qualify, you must maintain lawful F-1 status (full course of study, good academic standing) for an entire academic year before you can apply for OPT. Unlike CPT, you do not need a job offer in order to apply for OPT. If you are offered a job that starts after graduation and your employer has agreed to sponsor your H-1B visa, you still need to apply for OPT as H-1B visas are not valid until Oct 1.

Carleton students should file for OPT at the beginning of their last term and no more than 120 days before their proposed employment start date. You cannot apply more than 60 days after your program end date, usually end of your Fall or Winter Term or June graduation date. Unless you are enrolled to begin graduate school in the subsequent term (or within 5 months, whichever is earlier) you must return home before the 60-day grace period ends.

It takes 3-4 months (or possibly longer) to process an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), the OPT employment card. You are strongly advised to apply for your OPT before you graduate and to remain in the U.S. while your application is pending.

If you depart the U.S. after submitting your application but before OPT is granted or leave while you are unemployed and on OPT, you may face difficulties when you re-enter as Port of Entry Officers at airports and border crossings could refuse you entry. You should bring copies of documents that demonstrate you are actively seeking employment, your EAD application receipt notice (Form I-797) and/or written job offer. If you travel while on OPT, you should also bring a letter confirming your employment. When you travel you should have a valid passport (for at least 6 months), current visa (you can apply for a new visa during OPT but it may be difficult to prove ties to your home country), and a signed I-20 (within the preceding 6 months). While under F-1 status and OPT, never enter the U.S. under any other visa, including tourist, as it will invalidate your OPT application or/and EAD card.

During OPT, you should not be unemployed for more than 90 days from the OPT start date or you will be out of status and must leave the U.S. You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern related to your studies with a minimum of 20 hours a week to meet the employment requirement. You may be employed with more than one employer or volunteer organization at a time but total employment should not exceed

40 hours. You may have a series of part or full-time positions (or “gigs” as an artist/performer). You may be self-employed but you should provide proof of your business registration, your active involvement in it, and how it is related to your studies. *At all times you should maintain documentation of your employment, e.g., position held/job title, proof of the duration of that position, contact information for your supervisor or manager and a description of the work.*

You are required to keep your SEVIS information updated during OPT. You should report the following within 10 days of the event occurring: a) changes to your legal name; b) every address change and changes in employment (including unemployment); c) if you will enroll in graduate school; d) if you will be granted H-1B or other Change of Status (COS); e) if you will be departing the U.S. before your OPT ends.

You can only extend OPT under the following situations:

- 1) “H-1B Cap Gap Extension” if your employer has applied for H-1B visa and requests a change of status as part of the application, your employment is extended until Oct 1 when that visa starts. You should send Carleton a copy of your H-1B receipt or approval notice by fax or email to verify you qualify for the “Cap Gap Extension”. If your H-1B petition is rejected, denied, or revoked, employment and F-1 status ends. You then have 60 days to prepare for departure, change degree level, transfer, change status, etc.
- 2) If you are a student who has received a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM), that appears on the STEM designated Degree Program List published on the SEVP website, <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>, you may be eligible for a one (1) time 17-month extension of your OPT. You must submit a copy of your transcript reflecting your major field of study. In addition, the employer with whom you are seeking the 17-month OPT extension must be registered in E-Verify. Accordingly, you must list the employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in Item 17 of the Form I-765. Please refer to the Form I-765 instructions for Foreign Students, and Carleton’s Extensions of OPT for further information.

STEM Extension Requirements:

- 1) You must submit STEM extension application within 120 days of the first 12-month OPT period end date;
- 2) You should not travel while your STEM extension is being adjudicated or decided upon;
- 3) You cannot be unemployed more than 120 days (including the 90 days from the first 12-month period) during the 29-month period;
- 4) You must submit updated personal address and employment information every 6 months;
- 5) Employment during the 17 month STEM extension **MUST BE PAID**;
- 6) Employment continues until a decision is made on your STEM extension application or for 180 days, whichever comes first;
- 7) Employer needs to report within 48 hours to Carleton or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) if your employment has been terminated or you departed before the end of the STEM extension period.

OPT Suggested Timeline

<i>(For example only, your actual dates may be different than illustrated.)</i>	
90 days Before	Apply for OPT – You can apply no more than 120 days before your chosen start date.
Program End or Graduation Date March 14 or June 11, 2011 for most of you.	
60 days After	You have a 60-day grace period during which time you should do one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to depart the U.S. within 60 days – NO WORK or STUDY • Apply for OPT if you have not • If accepted to graduate program, have your SEVIS record transferred – releasing SEVIS record to a new school cancels OPT/EAD on the release date. • Change status to another nonimmigrant status if eligible
12 months	Maximum length of your OPT & during OPT keep these numbers in mind: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 days – maximum unemployment length (120 days maximum with STEM extension) • 10 days – maximum length between ending one job and beginning another • 10 days – You MUST REPORT to the office within 10 days if any of the following changes: legal name, residential or mailing address, employer name, employer address and/or unemployment • 90 days before end of 12-month OPT – apply for STEM extension if you are eligible.
60-day grace period (see above)	
<i>17 months</i>	<i>If you qualify, apply for 17-month STEM extension 120 days before the initial 12-month OPT expires.</i>
60 days After STEM Extension OPT Everything above except cannot apply for another OPT.	

F-1 Student Non-STEM OPT Application Checklist

Please complete as much of this checklist before your appointment with Luyen and bring any questions with you.

Step	Action	Completed		
1.	Complete the OPT Application Information Sheet – Decide on your OPT start and end dates .			
2.	Secure the recommendation letter from your academic adviser(s) and bring with.			
3.	<p>Complete Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, and photocopy. Available from www.uscis.gov under FORMS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will not forward mail, you are encouraged to list the office as your mailing address in Question 3: c/o Luyen Phan, OIIL, One N College St, Northfield, MN 55057. • The office will make a copy of OPT your employment documents and send it to. You may list another U.S. address but that address should be valid for 4+ months and you need to send the office a copy of your employment card once it is issued. • In Question 16, enter the correct Eligibility Code: (c) (3) (A) – Pre-completion OPT; (c) (3) (B) – Post-completion OPT; (c) (3) (C) – 17-month STEM extension. 			
4.	<p>Gather all documents and supporting material to submit with your Form I-765. Make three (3) copies of everything except photos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form I-94 – photocopy both sides • Valid passport (should have more than 6 months validity remaining) – photocopy of photo page, renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc. • Visa (if applicable) – photocopy of visa page • Photocopies of all I-20s you have been issued (pages 1 & 3) • Photocopies of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (if applicable) • 2 recent identical photographs (see instructions on the Form I-765 under Required Documentation) – You can do this at Walgreens for \$7.99. Write your name and I-94 number on back in pencil. • \$380 fee (check or Money Order payable to U.S. Dept of Homeland Security) – confirm current cost on I-765 application. 			
5.	Schedule an appointment with Luyen to review your application and obtain your new I-20 (new I-20 must be submitted within 30 days of its issuance).			
6.	<p>File Form I-765, new I-20 supporting documents listed in Step 4 & 5 with the appropriate USCIS Service Center.</p> <p>When filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, you may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying that your application has been accepted. You must complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145), and attach it to the first page of your application. See www.uscis.gov and Forms section.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p><u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p><u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><u>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</u> USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036</p>	<p><u>For Express mail and courier delivers:</u> USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034</p>	
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7.	<p>A Receipt Notice Form I-797 should be received 2-3 weeks after submission of your I-765. Use the 13-character receipt number, which starts with 3 letters such as LIN, to check your application status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do. If after 90 days you do not hear anything from USCIS, contact Carleton International Students Program.</p>			

