Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Presented by: Center for International Education-SIU

SIU Southern Illinois University

CARBONDALE

What are the types of OPT?

PRE-Completion

- Full-time, minimum 20 hours per week
  - During summer vacation
  - Must enroll for the spring prior to & fall after your OPT period
- Part-time, maximum 20 hours per week
  - While school is in session
  - Must be enrolled full-time

POST-Completion

- Full-time, minimum 20 hours per week
  - At the end of your academic program
- Grad Students with completed course work:
  - May apply for OPT while working on thesis/dissertation.
  - Continuing Enrollment (601) does not prohibit eligibility

PRE-Completion

Advantages

- May work full-time and/or part-time during appropriate times of the year.
- No unemployment restriction.
- Possible to obtain a program extension.
- Graduate students may use while finishing thesis/dissertation.

Disadvantages

- May not apply for a 24 Month STEM OPT Extension.
- Would NOT be eligible for a cap-gap OPT Extension.
- Time spent in pre-completion OPT is deducted from the time available for post-completion OPT.
- Must maintain a full-course of study.

POST-Completion

Advantages

- May work full-time.
- Do not have to maintain a full-course of study.
- Graduate students may use while finishing thesis/dissertation.
- Eligible for a cap-gap extension.
- If in a STEM field, may apply for 24 Month OPT STEM Extension.

Disadvantages

- Subject to 90-day unemployment limit.
- Not able to receive a program extension.
- Juggling work/completing program.

Things to know about OPT

- Status is dependent upon employment.
  - Must not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment under the initial OPT authorization.
  - STEM OPT students may not exceed 150 days of unemployment, adding 60 additional days to cover the full 36 months of OPT.
- Post-completion OPT and STEM, must work 20 hours or more a week to maintain a full-time workload.
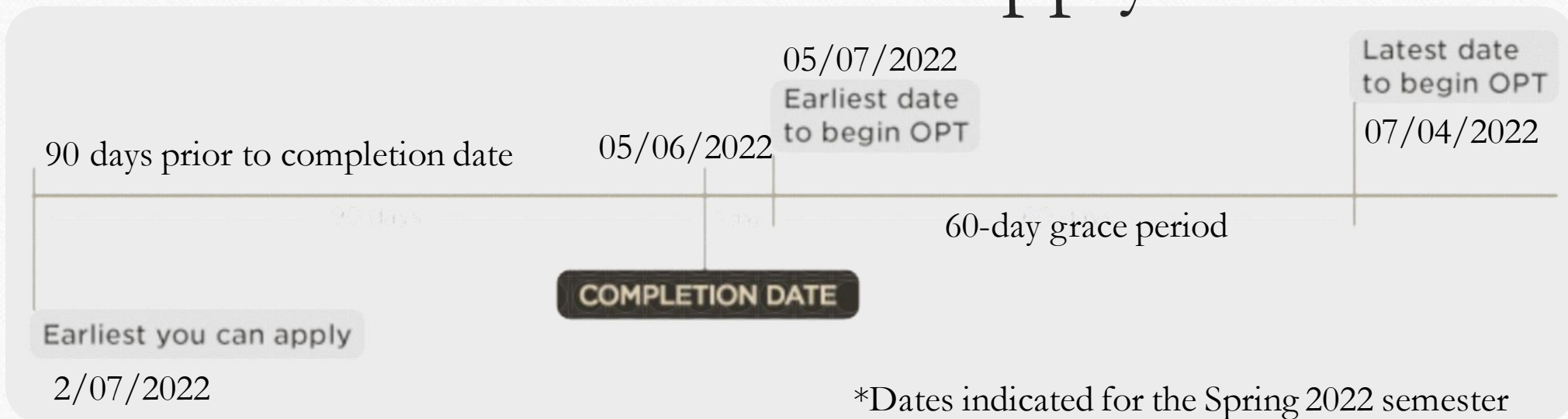- Must work within your current field of study.

So…how do I know if I'm eligible for OPT?

- You must have been a full time student for at least one academic year.
- You must currently be in F-1 status.
- You must be in good academic standing.
- You have satisfied ALL requirements for graduation, or for Graduate Students, the completion of all required coursework.
- You must not have used more than 12 months of OPT in the past at your current degree level.
- You must not have used 12 months of CPT.
- You do <u>NOT</u> need to have a job offer in order to apply for OPT.

How do I know when to apply for OPT?

05/07/2022

Latest date to begin OPT

90 days prior to completion date

05/06/2022

Earliest date to begin OPT

07/04/2022

60-day grace period

COMPLETION DATE

Earliest you can apply

2/07/2022

*Dates indicated for the Spring 2022 semester

- Degree Completion: Refers to the day you complete all your degree requirements. *(Not the date of your graduation ceremony)*
    - Most Students: The last day of the semester for which you are applying.
    - Doctoral/Thesis Students: This could be your dissertation/thesis submission date.
        - This is a very special circumstance that is rarely used.

Steps to apply:

1. Obtain the OPT Application Packet online.
2. OPT Advisor Recommendation Form completed by your Academic Advisor or Graduate Program Coordinator (final page of OPT Application Packet).
3. Complete the OPT Agreement (page 2 of OPT Application Packet).
4. Schedule an appointment to apply for OPT at CIE
   - Call the front desk (618) 453-5774, or email issinfo@siu.edu .
   - Submit the OPT Advisor Recommendation & OPT Agreement to a DSO at CIE for the **REQUIRED** OPT Recommended I-20. You **must** have this new I-20 prior to submitting your application to USCIS.
5. Complete the online I-765 application at myaccount.uscis.gov.
   - Filing Fee (credit or debit card) paid via pay.gov for $410.00.
   - 2 Digital Passport Style Photos - that have never been used before and were taken with the last 30 days (Specifications may be found in the OPT application packet).

Requested Start Date

- Your requested start date must be within your 60-day grace period.
  - It may be as early as the day after your completion date, but no later than the last day of your 60-day grace period.
- This date may depend upon a job offer the student has secured, or a potential offer.
- Some factors to consider:
  - Student may not begin employment before the approved start date on his/her EAD card
  - Student may not begin employment until the EAD card has been received.
- A requested start date must be notated when applying for OPT.
  - We cannot change this date once requested.

DSO Recommendation

- A student needs a recommendation from his/her DSO in order to apply for OPT.
  - USCIS must receive the student's application within 30 days of the DSO recommending him/her in SEVIS.
- When a DSO recommends a student for OPT, the school assumes the added responsibility for updating the SEVIS record of that student for the entire period of authorized OPT.
- **However**, the student **MUST** report any change (*name, address, interruption of employment*, phone number, email, employer, address of employment, employment start/end dates, supervisor etc.) within 10 days.
  - This is done using the OPT Update Form.

What happens after my petition for OPT has been submitted to USCIS?

- The processing may take as long as 30-90 days.
  - It is recommended to expect 90-day processing.
- Once the application is received, USCIS will issue an I-797 Receipt Notice.
  - Notice will include a case number that may be used to check the status of the student's application at uscis.gov
- Both the I-797 Receipt Notice and Employment Authorization Document (EAD), or approval notice, are sent to CIE.
  - The student will be asked to validate personal information at the time the EAD has been Issued. Our office will generate an updated I-20.

I-797 Receipt Notice

SIU
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Illinois·
University
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Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Form I-797C, Notice of Action

THIS NOTICE DOES NOT GRANT ANY IMMIGRATION STATUS OR BENEFIT.

NOTICE TYPE	NOTICE DATE
Receipt	August 22, 2012

CASE TYPE	USCIS ALIEN NUMBER
I-765, Application for Employment Authorization	A12345678

RECEIPT NUMBER	RECEIVED DATE	PAGE
LIN 1234567891	August 20, 2012	1 of 1

	DATE OF BIRTH
	January 1, 1985

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

John Doe
123 Main St
Main City, ST 12345

Application/Petition Fee:	$465.00
Biometrics Fee:	$0.00
Total Amount Received:	$465.00
Total Balance Due:	$0.00

NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS

Full and complete payment has been received on the above application. **Please notify us immediately if any of the above information is incorrect.** If you find it necessary to contact this office in writing, you must include a copy of this receipt notice with your inquiry.

BIOMETRICS -
The next step is to have your biometrics taken at a USCIS Application Support Center (ASC). You will receive a notice in the mail regarding when USCIS has scheduled you for your ASC appointment.

If you have questions about possible immigration benefits and services, filing information, or USCIS forms, please call the USCIS National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at **1-800-375-5283**. If you are hearing impaired, please call the NCSC TDD at **1-800-767-1833**. Please also refer to the USCIS website: www.uscis.gov.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this notice or the status of your case, please contact our customer service number.

You will be notified separately about any other case you may have filed.

USCIS Office Address:
USCIS
Nebraska Service Center
P.O. Box 82521
Lincoln, NE 68501-2521

USCIS Customer Service Number:
(800)375-5283

Form I-797C Lockbox (LB) 01/02/12 Y

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

What is acceptable employment within my field of study?

Unpaid/Volunteer

- Not recommended, however, it is allowed.
- Must not violate any labor laws.
- Must follow the same rules:
  - Full-time (20 hours or more per week)
  - Must be within the field of study
  - Student must obtain evidence from the employer outlining the above mentioned.
    - I recommend requesting letters/keeping a log of hours.

Paid

- May be conducted with the following types of employment:
  - Regular paid employment
  - Payment by multiple short-term employers
  - Work for hire
  - Self-employed business owner
  - Employment through an agency.
    - I recommend letters from the employer (including start/end date(s), job title/duties, location, # of hours worked, and pay rate, etc.)
    - Pay stubs (download/keep print-outs)

24 Month OPT STEM Extension

- The extension will be for an additional 24 months, for a maximum of 36 months of OPT, if all of the following requirements are met:
  - Completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) degree field.
    - Degree must be on DHS' STEM-Designated Degree Program List.
  - Currently engaged in post-completion OPT and apply based on a STEM degree (or making progress toward completing thesis or dissertation).
  - May apply on the basis of a previously conferred degree awarded in a STEM field.
    - When this is used discussion with a DSO is required.
  - Employer must be actively participating in the E-verify program.
  - Must be paid employment.
  - I-983 Training Plan is required to be completed by student and employer.

Applying for the 24 Month OPT STEM Extension

- Process is very similar to the standard OPT application.

- Visit the CIE website to access the application materials and information on the online filing process.

- Send completed STEM OPT Employment Information form and I-983 Training Plan to CIE for recommendation/processing.

- Students may apply for the STEM extension up to 90 days prior to the standard OPT end date, but no later than 30 days before the standard OPT end date.

24 Month STEM OPT Extension Reporting Requirements

- Additional reporting requirements are mandatory of approved STEM extensions.
  - Must report changes of name, address, employer name/address/Employer Identification Number (EIN), and/or loss of employment within 10 days of the change.
  - ALL employers must be E-verified.
  - Student must submit an updated I-983 every 12 months, or when there is a change, with appropriate evaluation portions completed—while on STEM OPT.
  - Student must make a "validation report," or update, with the DSO every six months from the date the extension begins.
    - Both of the above should be done using the OPT Update Form.

Travel and OPT

Status	Travel Recommended?	Travel Risk Level	What You Need
Applied for OPT, application is pending and you are no longer a student (reached completion date)	No	Moderate to high—if OPT application is approved while you are away, you may be denied reentry into the country	Signature on your I-20, Valid passport & visa, and I-797 Receipt Notice
Application for OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, but you do not have a job offer	NO	High—if you decide to travel, you should take proof that you are actively looking for a position (i.e. proof that you submitted resumes, upcoming interviews, etc.) Even if you have this proof you may be denied reentry into the country.	Signature on your I-20, Valid passport & visa, EAD card, and Proof that you are actively looking for a job
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and a job offer, but the position has not started	Somewhat	Moderate to Low—if you decide to travel, make sure that you take a job offer letter on official letterhead which should include your expected start date.	Signature on your I-20, Valid passport & visa, EAD card, and Job offer letter
Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card, and you have begun work	YES	Very Low—if you decide to travel, request a letter from your employer indicating that they approve your travel, your travel dates, and that you will continue employment upon your return.	Signature on your I-20, Valid passport & visa, EAD card, and Letter from employer

Travel and OPT

- What you will need to do:
    1. Obtain a letter from your employer approving your dates of travel.
        - This letter should be written on company letterhead, list your full name, position, statement of continued employment and dates of travel.
        - It should also indicate that you will continue employment with that company upon your return.
    2. You will need to send a copy of the above-mentioned letter with your current I-20 (for an updated signature).
        - Also, a letter from you indicating where you are traveling, the dates of travel.
    3. New I-20 with travel signature will be issued electronically via email unless you prefer to obtain a hard-copy.
        - You will be asked to validate that all information is up to date in your records (SEVP Portal) prior to issuance.
- When traveling you must have an up-to-date signature on your I-20. It is imperative that you carry all of your immigration documents with you (passport, visa, I-20, and I-94 card), the employer letter, EAD card, and any other documentation that is you feel reflects your immigration history

Options after OPT:

- After OPT, students have a 60-day grace-period to decide what's next! They can:
  - Depart the U.S.
  - Apply for a change of status within the U.S.
  - Begin a new academic program.
    - Transfer to another institution, or
    - Apply for a new program at SIU! Go Salukis!
- You cannot work during your 60-day grace-period following your OPT.

My guidance to you…

- Ask the question!
- Plan ahead!
- Do not always listen to your friends!
- Be patient!
- cie.siu.edu is your friend!
- Do **_NOT_** Google!!!!!!
- You must document everything! It's up to you!
  - Letters from the employer (including start/end date(s), job title/duties, location, # of hours worked, and pay rate, etc.)
  - Log of Hours (recommended for unpaid/volunteer work)
  - Pay stubs (download/keep print-outs)

Looking for a position?

- Career Development Center is the place for you!
  - Suite 0110 in the Student Services Building
    - Resume Preparation
    - Interview Preparation
    - Job Search Assistance
    - On-campus Interviews
    - Employer Information Sessions
    - And much more
    - Contact (618) 453-2391, careerdevelopment@siu.edu

- Hire-A-Saluki
  - Interact with CDC staff virtually
  - Browse jobs and internships
  - Apply
  - Register for events

Talk with your Academic Unit

- Your college/department may have an internship placement specialist.
- Your professors may also have contacts for you.

Now, do you need to make an appointment to apply for OPT?

- Email or Call CIE
  - issinfo@siu.edu or call (618) 453-5774
- You are well on your way!