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 **NOT** need to have a job offer in order to apply for OPT.
How do I know when to apply for OPT?

90 days prior to completion date 12/11/2020 Earliest date to begin OPT 60-day grace period

Earliest you can apply 09/14/2020

*Dates indicated for the Fall 2020 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.
3. Email scans of the full OPT Application Packet to ipsupdates@siu.edu to schedule an appointment to apply for OPT with a CIE advisor.
   - Email ipsupdates@siu.edu.
4. Complete all application forms/requirements.
   - Proof of Payment (check or money order) paid to U.S. Department of Homeland Security for $410.00.
   - 2 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).
What do I need to email CIE for the OPT appointment?

- OPT Advisor Recommendation Form completed by the academic advisor/graduate program coordinator.
- Copy of Immigration Documents (I-94, Passport, Visa, and ALL I-20s).
- Completed OPT Agreement, G-1145, I-765.
  - If you are unsure of a question, please, leave it blank.
- Previous Employment Authorization Documents (EADs).
  - (If applicable) from previous employment authorization.
- Employment Offer Letter (If applicable).
- $410.00 Proof of Payment and 2 New/Recent Passport Style Photos do not need to be scanned.
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 noted 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 60-90 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 required to submit an OPT Update Form at the time the EAD has been issued.
I-797 Receipt Notice
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, and complete the 24 Month OPT STEM Application Packet.
• Send completed packet 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.
• Additional items needed for the STEM application include: I-983 Training Plan, copy of EAD card, letter(s) from employers, paystubs/bank statements, diploma/transcripts.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Travel Recommended?</th>
<th>Travel Risk Level</th>
<th>What You Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied for OPT, application is pending and you are no longer a student (reached completion date)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate to high—if OPT application is approved while you are away, you may be denied reentry into the country</td>
<td>Signature on your I-20, Valid passport &amp; visa, and I-797 Receipt Notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application for OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, but you do not have a job offer</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Signature on your I-20, Valid passport &amp; visa, EAD card, and Proof that you are actively looking for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and a job offer, but the position has not started</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Signature on your I-20, Valid passport &amp; visa, EAD card, and Job offer letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card, and you have begun work</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Signature on your I-20, Valid passport &amp; visa, EAD card, and Letter from employer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, and the address to which you would like the I-20 sent.
   • You may also indicate how you are wanting the I-20 sent back, UPS/FedEx or USPS?

3. Also, submit an updated [OPT Update Form](#).

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