

# Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Understanding OPT Basics & Your Role



*Join the Pride!*

MSSU International Admissions  
([international@mssu.edu](mailto:international@mssu.edu))

# Who is this Presentation for?

- This PowerPoint Presentation is required for **ALL** F-1 students wanting to apply for Practical Training.
- Completion of the entire PowerPoint Presentation is *required* to request an OPT I-20 from the International Student Advisor.
- The **OPT I-20 is required for the OPT application** (Form I-765) submitted to USCIS.
- You can reference this PowerPoint at anytime during the Practical Training process.

So...

## What is Practical Training?

If you are an F student, you have the option of *working* in the US by engaging in practical training *during* your program or *after it ends*. This is a period of time known as “Practical Training”.

# Types of Practical Training: CPT vs. OPT

## Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

- For internships and other off-campus work opportunities that are *integral* to your degree program

## Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- An *optional* benefit for F-1 students that allows you to work in a **non-student** and/or **off-campus** job.
  - **Extends** F-1 student immigration status
  - **Temporary** work authorization (up to 12 months)
  - Employment must be in a position *related* to your field of study
  - **NOT** employer specific.

# Most Students Will Choose OPT...

Therefore, this presentation will focus on  
post-completion OPT.

# Types of OPT Employment

Part-time = NO minimum;  
20 hrs maximum

Full-time = 20 hrs  
minimum; NO maximum

- Paid Employment
- Short-term multiple employers  
(i.e. performing artists)
- Work for hire (i.e.  
contractor/consultant)
- Self-employed business owner
- Employment through an agency
- Unpaid employment

# Eligibility for OPT

To be eligible for OPT, a student must:

- Be in legal F-1 immigration status at the time of application
- Have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year
- Have used less than 12 months full-time CPT
- Not have been previously approved for 12 months of OPT at the same degree level

# Length of OPT

- Maximum
  - 12 months of full-time OPT per degree level
- Some STEM students may be eligible for extensions
  - 17 Month STEM extension
  - Cap Gap extension



# How to Apply for OPT

- Meet with your Academic Advisor to request an OPT recommendation letter
- Finish this PowerPoint Presentation (print final slide to bring to the OPT appointment)
- Schedule an appointment with the International Student Advisor—this appointment will last an hour (go to [www.mssu.edu/international-admissions](http://www.mssu.edu/international-admissions) and click “Make an appointment”)
- During the OPT appointment, the International Student Advisor will electronically request the OPT in SEVIS and print the new form I-20
- After you receive your new form I-20, complete the I-765 form ([USCIS.gov](http://USCIS.gov))
- Send the completed application to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox
- USCIS will notify you when they have received your application
- Check the status of your case online with your Receipt Number
- **You can only begin to work *after* your Employment Authorization Documentation (EAD) has arrived**

# Checking Your Status Online

- USCIS will send you a receipt notice (I-797 Notice of Action) confirming receipt of your OPT application, assigning a "receipt date," and assigning a case number. Carefully review the notice to make sure your name is spelled correctly. If it is not, contact the International Student Advisor immediately.
- You may use the case number on your receipt notice to check the status of your application online. It is normal for your case status to say "initial review" for most of the 3 month processing period.
- **You may not begin employment until USCIS approves the OPT application and you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Authorized OPT dates will be on your EAD.**

# While Your OPT is “Pending”

- While your OPT application is pending you may travel and re-enter the US
- Travel only on a necessary basis, however
- Travel with documentation of the pending OPT request.
- Check your case status regularly online and opt to receive the electronic updates

# Common Questions While OPT is “Pending” ...

- **Q: I have been waiting for over 3 months since I filed the EAD application, and I need an EAD badly. What can I do?**

A: You may request an interim Employment Authorization Document. You must go to your local USCIS district office and bring with you proof of identity along with any other documents that USCIS might have sent you regarding your employment authorization application.

**Q: How quickly can I obtain my interim EAD?**

A: For national security purposes, the USCIS will not issue interim EADs immediately after the applicant's request. It may take some time for the USCIS to perform a background check on applicants before issuing interim EADs.

# What if more evidence is required?

- Biometric collection, interview, and requests for more information may be required.
- USCIS may also request you submit originals of any copy. Originals will be returned.
- If biometrics are required, USCIS will send you a notice scheduling you for an Application Support Center (ASC ) appointment. This will be a requirement. Missing the appointment will result in an OPT denial.

# If your OPT is “Approved”

- If approved, your EAD will either be mailed to you or you may be required to visit your local USCIS office to pick it up.
- You can begin employment once you have received your “Approval” notice and EAD.

# Limits on Periods of Unemployment

- Between the start and end date of your post-completion OPT authorization (the dates on your EAD), you cannot be unemployed for more than 90 accumulated days.
- If you received a 17-month STEM extension, you are allowed an additional 30 days of unemployment for a total of 120 days.
- Each day (including weekends) that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- There is no grace period after 90/120 days of unemployment.
- To avoid violating status, Immigration recommends that prior to reaching the unemployment limit, you should prepare to transfer to another school, change education level, depart the U.S., or change to a different immigration status.

# Reporting Requirements to MSSU

- Address changes and legal name changes must be reported to the International Student Advisor by email within 10 days.
- Once you are employed, employment information must be reported to the International Student Advisor.
- Email the International Student Advisor with the following information:
  - Name of employer
  - Start date of employment
  - Mailing address of employer
  - Change of employer, with end and start dates of employment
  - Decision to exit the U.S. and complete F-1 status prior to OPT expiration date (if applicable)
  - Your current residential address
  - Your email address
- Keep documentation of your OPT employment history for your own records. You may need it for future benefits applications.
- If you are currently approved for a STEM extension, these updates must be reported within 10 days of the change.



# When Your OPT is “Approved”

## Travel Requirements (Part 1)

- Once the approved period of OPT has begun, time spent outside the U.S. *will count as unemployment* against the 90/120-day limits.
- However, travel while employed either during a vacation authorized by an employer or as part of your employment will not count as unemployment.
- **Please keep the International Student Advisor informed of any travel plans while on OPT that may affect your status.**
- If you have dependents in F-2 status who will travel without you, be sure they carry a photocopy of your EAD card and proof of your employment along with their updated F-2 I-20 that is properly signed for travel.

# Your OPT is “Approved”, now what?

## Travel Requirements (Part 2)

- After graduation, if your OPT has been approved and your EAD issued, **you cannot re-enter the US without evidence of employment**
- If you desire to travel after graduation and with an approved EAD, travel with the following evidence:
  - OPT I-20 signed for travel by the International Student Advisor within the past 6 months
  - EAD card. The EAD card will state “Not Valid for Reentry” which means that it is not the sole document used to prove your legal status in the US. You must carry all other forms of immigration documentation as well as your EAD.
  - Valid Passport
  - Unexpired F-1 VISA (except for Canadians)
  - Evidence of employment in your field of study (letter of employment, written job offer)

# Studying While on OPT

- While approved for OPT you may take *recreational* courses, but if you begin a new degree program, your OPT is automatically terminated.
- Exchange students are not eligible to take courses at MSSU while on post-completion OPT.

# Health Insurance

- Medical insurance is an extremely important consideration while you are on OPT.
- If you are not insured through your employer, you should purchase an individual plan.
- You are no longer covered by LewerMark if you were before as a student.

# Taxes

- You will need a Social Security number in order to receive payment from your employer.
- In general, as an F-1 student you will be exempt from Social Security (FICA) taxes for your *first five years in the U.S.*, as long as you continue to declare **nonresident status** for tax purposes.
- Unless you qualify under a tax treaty between the U.S. and your home government, your earnings as an F-1 student **will be subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes, and employers are required to withhold those taxes from your paychecks.**
- For more information on taxes, consult the *Internal Revenue Service (IRS)*.

# OPT Completion – The “Grace Period”

- Students who do not exceed 90/120 days of unemployment and report employment to the International Student Advisor as required are *automatically granted a 60-day grace period after the end date listed on the EAD* (Employment Authorization Document).
- Within this 60-day grace period, you have the following options:
  - Depart the U.S. Once you leave the U.S. (including trips to Canada and Mexico) after completing your studies and OPT period, you are not eligible to reenter with your current I-20. The grace period is meant for travel within the states and preparation to depart the U.S.
  - Request a new I-20 if you will continue at MSSU.
  - Transfer your SEVIS record to a new school.
  - Apply to change status to another visa category.

# If Your OPT is “Denied”

- If your application for an EAD is denied, you will receive a letter that will explain the reasons for the denial. You will *not* be allowed to appeal a negative decision to a higher authority.
- However, you may submit a **motion to reopen** or a **motion to reconsider** with the office that made the unfavorable decision.
- If you will not appeal the decision, you must return home as your I-20 has been completed.

# Making A “Motion”

- By filing these motions, you may ask the office to reexamine or reconsider their decision.
- A **motion to reopen** must state new facts that are to be provided in the reopened proceeding and must be accompanied by affidavits or other documentary evidence.
- A **motion to reconsider** must establish that the decision was based on an incorrect application of law or policy, and further establish that the decision was incorrect based on the evidence in the file at the time the decision was made.

# Review Questions

*Print, answer, and bring this slide to your OPT appointment.*

1. Can you travel after your OPT is approved? What are the additional requirements for travel documentation?
2. Do you need to report employment information to the International Student Advisor?
3. For how long can you be unemployed after OPT is approved? Do weekends count against this total?
4. Can you apply for OPT (Form I-765) without the updated OPT I-20 from the International Student Advisor?
5. Is there a difference between pre-completion OPT and post-completion OPT?



# Signed and Dated

*Print, answer, and bring this slide to your OPT appointment.*

- I have read and understand basic information concerning practical training and my role in the process. I understand that my approval or denial for practical training is not determined by the International Student Advisor but by USCIS. The majority of the responsibility for applying, obtaining, and maintaining any practical training is mine.
- Signature: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date: \_\_\_\_\_