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## Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a 12-month practical work experience in a paid position located on- or off-campus. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization takes an estimated 90 days or less to process. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status is 12 months.

**Qualifications:** You must be enrolled in 12 undergraduate or 9 graduate units (or an approved combination) for a minimum one academic year (two semesters).

**How to Apply:** To participate in OPT you must apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS and a Social Security Card from the Social Security Administration. The ALI Immigration Advisor (IA) can assist you with this process. Please contact Michael Dietz at (619) 594-1972 or [mdietz@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:mdietz@mail.sdsu.edu) to make an appointment.

### Step One

- Read through the entire application packet.
- Fill out the "IA information sheet" and Form I-765.
- Make copies of your immigration documents.

### Step Two

- Meet with the IA and submit your application (all items in "Step One"). The IA **will print out a new I-20** for you. You will send a copy of this new I-20 with your application (make sure you sign and date the new I-20 form prior to mailing).

### Step Three

- Make a photocopy of your complete application for your records.

### Step Four

- Mail your application to:

**U.S.C.I.S. Service Center**  
**P.O. Box 10765**  
**Laguna Niguel, CA 92607-1076**

USCIS will send a receipt confirming that they received your application within 7-10 business days

### Pending Application

You can check the status of your EAD application at the USCIS Web site. You will need to enter the WAC number on your USCIS receipt. Go to: <http://www.uscis.gov>

### Receiving Your EAD Card

Once you have your EAD, you can work in the United States. Please provide ALI with a copy of your card (front and back) when you receive it.

# OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Form I-765. Download here: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf>
- A photocopy of page 1 and page 3 of the new I-20 with the IA's recommendation for Optional Practical Training on page 3.
- A photocopy of both sides of your I-94 Card
- A copy of photo page (identification page) of your passport also include any extra pages that record extensions of the validity of your passport).
- A copy of the F1 visa page of your passport (even if expired)
- A copy of ALL previous I-20s that have been issued to you (if you still have them)
- A copy of your previous OPT card or other work card (EAD) if you have had one
- Two passport type photographs (See attached sample). Print your name and I-94 card number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of I-765. **DO NOT CUT THE PHOTOS!**
- \$340** payable to the Department of Homeland Security. You may send a money order or a personal check, NO CASH. Attach to the front of the I-765.

## **APPLYING FOR A SOCIAL SECURITY CARD**

Students must have a Social Security card to work in the U.S. This is NOT the Student ID number that was given to you by the ALI. To apply for a Social Security card, you must bring the following to any Social Security Office:

- Valid Passport
- Original I-94 card
- Original I-20
- Job Offer letter from Employer
- EAD

You should receive your Social Security card in 2- 8 weeks. They will mail it to your local mailing address.

The nearest office to ALI is located at 7961 University Avenue. You may find other offices at [www.socialsecurity.gov/locator](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/locator)

**Directions by car:** From Campanile Road make a left on Montezuma, then a left on El Cajon, right onto Maple Avenue, and left on University Avenue.

**Directions by bus:** See <http://www.sdcommute.com> for transit options.

**Hours:** Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm

## TIPS FOR COMPLETING FORM I-765

- Check first box “permission to accept employment”;** fill out lines 1 through 15; sign and date under “certification”:
- #2 Other Names Used:** Put other names you might use or have used such as an American name or a maiden name.
- #3 Return Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 3 ½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address—the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the card is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your card will be returned to the immigration service and destroyed.
- #3 Return Address:** Additionally, the address you use as your return address must be in one of the following states for you to send the application to the Vermont Service Center: Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, U.S. Virgin Islands, Vermont, Virginia or West Virginia. **If your address is NOT** in one of those states, talk to the advisor at the ISSO about where to send your application.
- #10 Alien Registration Number:** in most cases you will use your I-94 number found on the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport)
- #11 Previous employment authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an OPT card at this or any other institution. If your answer is yes to #11, and the application was granted, write “Granted”, the name of the USCIS office, and the date it was issued. If denied, write “Denied”.
- #12 & 13:** This information is listed on the red stamp on your I-94 form.
- #14 Manner of Last Entry:** It is the status you had when you last entered the US. It is only different from #15 if you changed your status after entering the US.
- #16 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 OPT, fill out as follows: (c) (3) (B)
- Certification:** Remember to sign and date the I-765. Make sure to keep your signature within the space provided. Do not sign outside of the box. Otherwise, your application will be returned to you.

### **REMINDERS**

#### **MAINTAINING YOUR IMMIGRATION STATUS WHILE YOU ARE ON "OPT"**

- UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS WITH THE IA.** Immigration regulations REQUIRE that while you are on OPT, you **MUST** notify the immigration service within 10 days of changing your address. You may do this by filling out our form on the web, calling or emailing the IA to give us your new address as soon as you move.

#### **TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON PRACTICAL TRAINING:**

- In order to re-enter the U.S. while you are on Optional Practical Training, you must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last 12 months, and your EAD (OPT work card) or receipt from USCIS. It is recommended that you bring proof that you are employed to present upon your return to the U.S. Proof may include a letter from your employer (on letterhead) and/or stubs from your paychecks to show that you have been working. Students who have had OPT for several months and still do not have a job may have difficulty passing through customs and immigration at the port of entry.
- If your F-1 visa stamp in your passport has expired, please be sure to speak to an adviser at the IA before you finalize your travel plans. It is extremely difficult for students from certain countries to obtain another F-1 visa stamp once they are on practical training and the consulates often change the list of documents they require for visa applications.
- NEVER ENTER IN ANY STATUS OTHER THAN F-1** if you plan on continuing to work on your OPT

## **OPT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 Optional Practical Training?**

To be eligible to apply for optional practical training, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one academic year, and (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

### **2. If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?**

Yes, as of January 1, 2003 the new regulations governing F-1 students state that you are eligible to apply for another 12 month period of Optional Practical Training after changing to a **higher degree level**. This does not apply to a second master's degree.

### **3. How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply?**

Authorization for OPT is granted by U.S.C.I.S. and can take 3 months to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization early. You may submit your application 90 days before your requested start date and you **MUST** apply **before** the completion of your course of study.

### **4. Do I need to have a job to apply for optional practical training?**

You do not need to have a job offer before applying for optional practical training. If you exceed 90 days of unemployment you will be considered out of status. You must report all employment information to your IA.

### **5. How will I know if the practical training application has been approved?**

You will receive from the U.S.C.I.S. a small photo identification card, called an Employment Authorization Document. This card will state the type and length of the period of employment authorized. When you receive this card, check to make certain all the information is correct.

### **6. Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?**

You may **NOT** begin employment before you receive your EAD from U.S.C.I.S.; working before practical training has been authorized by the U.S.C.I.S. constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

### **7. Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training?**

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than five calendar years are exempt from social security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax law. You will be subject to all other taxes that may apply: federal, state and local. You should check to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the U.S. allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

### **8. Now that I've turned in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while my application is pending?**

Yes. You must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last 12 months, and your EAD (OPT work card) or receipt from USCIS to reenter the U.S. You may encounter problems without a job offer letter or proof of employment.

### **9. The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for less than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with your I-94 card, a valid passport, your EAD card or receipt from USCIS, an I-20 that has been signed by the IA within the last 12 months. and you are **NOT** a national of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Cuba or North Korea. **If you are traveling elsewhere**, you will need to go to a U.S. embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp. **Please come see the IA** to discuss your visa application as the consulates often change the requirements for visa applications for students on OPT.

### **10. In what ways is my application to the embassy for a new visa stamp affected by being on OPT?**

The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for Optional Practical Training is higher than while you are in your active student program, as it may be seen as an avenue for adjustment of status to permanent residence. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. If you need to apply for a new visa, please see an advisor at the ALI to make sure you have the most up to date information about what documents are required.

# IA Information Sheet for OPT Application

We will enter the IA recommendation of your OPT in to the SEVIS database and print out a new I-20 for you which will have our recommendation and your requested dates printed on page 3.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

OPT START DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ \* OPT END DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Please read section below on choosing your start date.

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

MAJOR FIELD: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ TODAY'S DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Choosing your Start Date

You are allowed to pick a start date any time within the 60 days following the date of your program completion.

There are many overlapping time constraints which effect your OPT application:

- 1) You can apply up to 90 days prior to graduation, and up to 60 days after.
- 2) The card can takes an estimated 45 days to arrive in the mail
- 3) You may NOT begin working until you get the card and the date on the card has started
- 4.) You should have the OPT card and job offer letter along with your usual F-1 documents (including a current F-1 visa stamp) in order to re-enter the U.S. after graduation

When choosing your start date, the most important priorities to weigh are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working.** What if someone offers you a job with the stipulation that you start the day after graduation? Plan for any possibility.
2. **If you want to travel out of the U.S. before you start working,** choose a day that is at least early enough to allow you to apply as soon as possible. This will give you the best chance of receiving the card before you need to leave the U.S.
3. **If you want the latest possible day to start working** (you will not start working right away), the latest day is 60 days after your program end date or I-20 form expiration (whichever is earlier).

**REMEMBER: You may not change these dates after you apply for OPT**

## Passport Photographs: Composition Checklist

### 7 Steps to Successful Photos

- ☑ Frame subject with **full face, front view, eyes open**
- ☑ Make sure photo presents **full head** from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm)
- ☑ **Center head** within frame (see Figure 2 below)
- ☑ Make sure **eye height** is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
- ☑ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white **background**
- ☑ **Position subject** and **lighting** so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- ☑ Encourage subject to have a **natural expression**

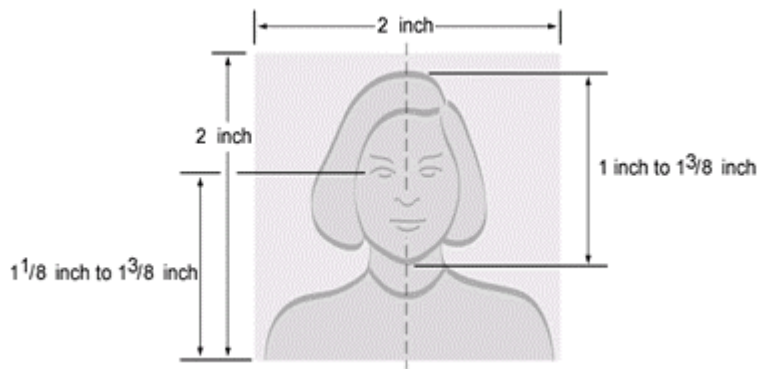
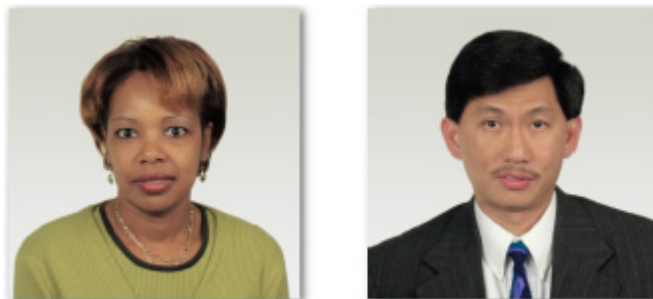


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

### Well-Composed Photos



(from <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html>)



# U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

## USCIS Is Making Photos Simpler



**Old Three-Quarter  
Style Photo**



**New Passport  
Style Photo**

**Photos Must Be in Color**

**Washington, DC** — In accordance with language specified in the Border Security Act of 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) today announced a change in the photo requirements for all applicants from a three-quarter face position to a standard, full-frontal face position to take effect **August 2, 2004**.

USCIS will accept both three-quarter and full-frontal color photographs until **September 1, 2004**, after which only full-frontal color will be accepted.

The application process of customers who have already submitted materials that include color photos with the three-quarter standard **will not** be affected by this change.

All photos must be of just the person. Where more than one photo is required, all photos of the person must be identical. All photos must meet the specifications for full-frontal/passport photos and must not be more than 30 days old when an application is filed.

For more information on photo standards, visit the Department of State website at <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html>, or contact the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1 800 375 5283.

[List of forms that require photos is on the back](#)