OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

This handout will provide information on a type of employment opportunity available to F-1 status students, which the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) refers to as Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession for a maximum of one year. This is not an entitled benefit. A student may be authorized for 12 months of OPT employment after you complete your studies. A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following graduation. Also available is a 17-month STEM OPT extension for only those students in one of the authorized STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. To find out if you qualify or for more information regarding the STEM extension, please see an International Student Advisor.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS
To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must have been in lawful F-1 status for at least one academic year. An application for OPT can be filed up to 90 days before the program end-date (the end date listed on your I-20) and up to 60 days after this date. You must be approved for graduation before you can apply for OPT. If the International Student Advisor recommends that you be allowed to participate in OPT, you must then submit an application for an “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD card) to the USCIS office.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES
The following deadlines are recommended if you are applying for OPT:
- Graduation in December (Fall Semester): the middle of September
- Graduation in May (Spring Semester): the first week of March
- Graduation in August (Summer Term): the first week of May

JOB ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS
The work must be directly related to your major field of study, and it must be appropriate for someone with your level of education. You do not need to have a specific job offer to apply for OPT, but be aware that you cannot recover portions of the OPT period that you may spend searching for employment. For example, if you spend two months out of your allowed 12 months of OPT searching for a job, you will only be able to work for the remaining 10 months. During OPT, you must be employed for at least 20 hours per week, and this employment may occur anywhere in the United States. During the 12-month period of OPT, no student may be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 90 days.

HOW TO APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
To apply for OPT, submit the following documents to the International Center:
1. I-765 Application for Employment Authorization – available from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov); don’t forget to sign the I-765 and keep your signature within the two lines, but not touching the lines (USCIS will scan your signature electronically for the EAD card); for #16 on the application enter (c) (3) (B) to apply for OPT
2. Copy of passport (make sure it’s not expired)
3. Copy of most recent F-1 visa page
4. Copy of front and back of most recent I-94 card
5. Copies of all previous I-20’s
6. If you have previously been authorized to work and have received an EAD card, include a copy of that card
7. Two identical 2x2” color photos taken within 30 days (white background, thin paper with glossy finish); print your name and current I-94 admission number on the back of each photo
9. USCIS Form G-1145 (for notification when your application has been received)

The International Center provides advising and counseling regarding your responsibilities. If you fail to meet your responsibilities, you may not be eligible for benefits available to F-1 students, and you may lose your F-1 status.
If you plan to travel inside the U.S. while your application is pending, please put the Diversity and International Center’s address on your OPT application as your address (your EAD card will not be forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service). If you are unsure of where you will live or if you will be traveling, use the Center’s address. Sara or I will contact you when your EAD card or any other correspondence from USCIS arrives.

Address: Westminster College, c/o Sara Demko
1840 South 1300 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84105

Upon receipt of all of the above documents, the International Student Advisor will evaluate your eligibility. If you qualify for OPT, you will be recommended for OPT and a new I-20 with this recommendation will be printed. **Please remember to sign this new I-20 on page 1.**

To mail your application, place your documents in this order and clip them together:

1. Money order and photos on top
2. Form G-1145
3. Form I-765
4. New I-20 (OPT is requested on page 3)
5. Photocopies of all previous I-20s
6. Photocopies of previous EAD cards (if you have this)
7. Copy of both sides of your current I-94 card
8. Photocopy of your passport identification page
9. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa page

**It is the student’s responsibility to mail the documents to the USCIS Service Center.** Mail all documents together within 30 days via express or courier mail (make sure you get a tracking number):

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: For Express mail and courier deliveries:
USCIS USCIS
PO Box 21281 Attn: AOS
Phoenix, AZ 85036 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

You may not take any classes while your OPT is pending or during OPT. You will receive a paper receipt by mail from USCIS once they receive your application, and you can then check the status of your application on-line here by entering your receipt number (LIN###): [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do). You may not begin working until the OPT is approved, you get your EAD card, AND you are within the employment authorization dates listed on the EAD card. When you get your EAD card, provide the International Center with a copy of this card. An F-1 student authorized to engage in OPT is required to report any name or address changes, changes of employer, and any interruption of employment (unemployment) to the International Center for the duration of the authorized training.

**LEAVING THE US DURING OPT**

Do not plan to leave the United States while your OPT application is pending. Once your OPT is approved, you must have a job to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT. In order to re-enter the U.S. you must have an I-20 which has been signed by the International Center staff in the past six months, your EAD card, and a letter from your employer stating you need to re-enter the U.S. to resume your employment. You cannot travel without your EAD card. **Note:** there is never a guarantee that you will granted re-admission into the U.S.

**EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION**

When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (Form I-9), which the employer retains. Your employer should also make a copy of your SEVIS I-20 and EAD card. If you do not already have a Social Security number you must obtain a written offer of employment and apply for a Social Security number. It usually takes 2-4 weeks to get the number.