



POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

What is OPT? Optional Practical Training is one year of full-time work permission while in F-1 status, in a student's field of study or major after completion of studies. It is available at each degree level. OPT is not always granted, but usually, if a student is eligible then OPT is approved; however OPT should be viewed as a BENEFIT of maintaining your F-1 status, rather than a RIGHT.

Field of Study: The work MUST BE directly related to the field of study on your I-20. Think about it this way – if an employer was advertising for an employee, would they want someone with your degree? If so, then that job is right for OPT. If the job only requires a high-school education, then it is probably not right for OPT.

Completion of Studies: Students can now apply for OPT 90 days before or up to 60 days after their program completion date. We strongly recommend that you apply before your program completion date because filing later will cause delays in processing your OPT card. It is common for the application to take 90 days to be processed by our government.

How do I choose my OPT start date? The start date on OPT must be within the 60 days after the program completion date or the date OPT is approved by USCIS. Generally speaking, if you are certain of a job, and they want you to start soon, you may pick a start date very close to graduation. If you do not have a job lined-up and you will need to do some job-hunting, you may wish to pick a date closer to the 60th day after your graduation. If you begin the application process after graduation, you will probably want to select a date closer to the 60th day due to the length of time it takes for the OPT application to be processed by the USCIS.

Employment on OPT: Like F-1 status is dependent upon being a full-time student during studies, during post-completion OPT F-1 status is dependent upon employment. If student has accumulated 90 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT, the student loses his/her F-1 status. Volunteer work counts as "paid" employment for standard OPT but *must be in your field of study*.

Students must report to DSO through iStart within 10 days of any changes of:

Student's legal name
Student's Residential Address
Employer's name
Employer's address
Student's Loss of employment

You must also make any address changes on Topnet.

After OPT: OPT must still be completed within a period of 14 months after program completion date. However, if employer files for an H1B for the student in a timely manner for the next fiscal year, the student is granted an automatic extension of Duration of Status and Employment Authorization until the H1B is approved, denied, rejected or revoked.

If the H1B is denied, the student will have the standard 60-day period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition) before they have to leave the U.S. (or change status to B-2 or begin a new F-1 program of study).

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Submit your completed OPT application (see checklist) at ISO.
2. Submit your e-form request for OPT through iStart (<http://istart.wku.edu>)
3. Your advisor reviews the application and issues your OPT I-20. You will receive an email to return to ISO to sign/pick up your new I-20 and application packet. ISO will mail your packet to the USCIS (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services) Service Center in Texas or if you choose the option of mailing the application yourself, ISO can provide the envelope and address.
4. You will receive a receipt notice approximately 3 weeks after you apply. You may use this notice to check your case status on-line.
5. You will receive your EAD card in approximately 3 months from application.

If you choose to use the ISO address to receive your Receipt Notice and EAD card, you will need to sign a waiver of liability. Once ISO receives your documents, we will send you an email. If you have moved out of the Bowling Green area, we can mail the receipt notice and card to you or release the card to a friend. You must let us know via handwritten permission or an e-mail from your WKU account.

You are not eligible to work in the United States until you have received your EAD card AND the start date on the EAD card has arrived. If you work at WKU on OPT, you MUST let ISO know so we can update your I-9.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- You are in F-1 status for the entire duration of your OPT period.
- Your I-20 will appear to be expired because you have a new end date/graduation date. The “extension” for OPT will be printed on page 2 of your I-20.
- To renew your KY driver’s license while on OPT, get a DHS/INS Compliance letter signed at ISO. If you move to another state, they may have different requirements. Please contact your new local Driver’s License office when you move there!
- You may also still access the Glacier Tax prep software from ISO. F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than 5 years are not required to have Social Security/FICA deducted from their pay. If your employer takes it from your salary, you can reclaim it by applying to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov) by completing Form 8233.

Travel and OPT

Travel while on OPT is a complicated issue! First ask, "Is my visa valid?" It is extremely difficult for a student on OPT to convince the Dept. of State to extend or renew an F-1 visa for OPT alone. Our office suggests that students with expired visas **DO NOT** travel outside the U.S. while on OPT.

There are 3 scenarios in which a student might travel. Two of these scenarios are advisable and one is not! Please read on:



Travel BEFORE graduation and BEFORE OPT is approved: Travel prior to graduation while the I-765 is pending doesn't cancel the OPT application. It is reasonable that a student would be allowed to re-enter the U.S. prior to the end date on their I-20 to complete their course work. In order to re-enter the U.S. in this scenario, a student will need:

- Valid passport.
- Valid visa stamp.
- Valid I-20 (that has been signed less than six months prior to the day you plan to re-enter the U.S.).
- Proof of enrollment at WKU.
- I-797 (SRC Receipt Notice) to show proof that you have filed for OPT.



Travel outside the U.S. AFTER graduation and AFTER OPT has been approved and AFTER EAD card has been received (Most Advisable**):** In order to re-enter the U.S. in this scenario, a student will need:

- Valid passport.
- Valid visa stamp.
- Valid I-20 (that has been signed less than six months prior to the day you plan to enter the U.S.).
- EAD/OPT card
- Proof of employment in the U.S. (job offer letter from employer, pay stub, etc.)



Travel outside the U.S. AFTER graduation but BEFORE OPT has been approved: While this scenario is allowable under the law, it is not advisable! http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm

ISO's RECOMMENDATION FOR TRAVEL:

If you know you need to travel soon after graduation, apply for OPT early enough to have a chance of having your EAD/OPT card and job offer by graduation.

Once you have the following documents, please take to ISO so that your OPT I-20 can be issued.



OPT Application Checklist

Please submit the following items to ISO for your I-765 filing:

- ___ FORM I-765 **NOTE:** we will work on this together in the ISO office
- ___ Student Request for OPT. Submitted via iSTART. When your academic advisor approves this E-Form, ISO will generate the OPT I-20.
- ___ 2 photos (see sample and specifications in this packet). These photos can be purchased at Walgreen's or on-campus at the post office in the DSU. Please write your name in pencil on the back of both pictures.
- ___ Personal check made out to the "Department of Homeland Security" for **\$410**. If there is a chance of insufficient funds in your account, you may use a money order. Do not use a temporary check and please make sure that your name is somewhere on any check or money order that is submitted.
- ___ photocopy of your visa.
- ___ print a copy of your I-94 electronic record (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html>)
- ___ Photocopy of the passport stamp from your most recent entry.
- ___ Photocopy of your Passport ID pages with expiration date. If you have had a passport extension, please include copies of any pages that show the new expiration date.
- ___ Photocopy of any previous EAD card (s) if applicable.

Student Request for OPT via iSTART

Access iSTART at this link:

<http://istart.wku.edu/>

Welcome to the iStart Services Login Page

Full Client Services for Students & Scholars



Click on the login button.

You will need to enter your WKU NetID. Use this link for the instructions on how to access your NetID.

<http://www.wku.edu/it/accounts/netid/lookup.php>

NetID Lookup

To find your Net ID, fill in the requested information and click *Lookup*. If you do not know this information, please view the [WKU ID Lookup link](#).

WKU ID

TopNet PIN

Lookup

Once you have logged in to iSTART, Click on the OPT Request Form. Complete and submit this form. This E-form will be sent to your academic advisor for approval.

Once your academic advisor has approved your OPT Request, the E-form will be sent to ISO.

At this point, ISO will issue your OPT I-20.

Composition Checklist for Photos

7 Steps to Successful Photos

You must submit two identical color photographs of yourself **taken within 30 days of filing your application**. (If you use your old visa application photos or passport photos your application will be rejected). The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched. The passport-style photos must be 2" by 2". The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background. Head height should measure 1" to 1 3/8" from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8" to 1 3/8" from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member. Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and Alien Receipt Number on the back of the photo.

- ☑ 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](#)
Remove eyeglasses.

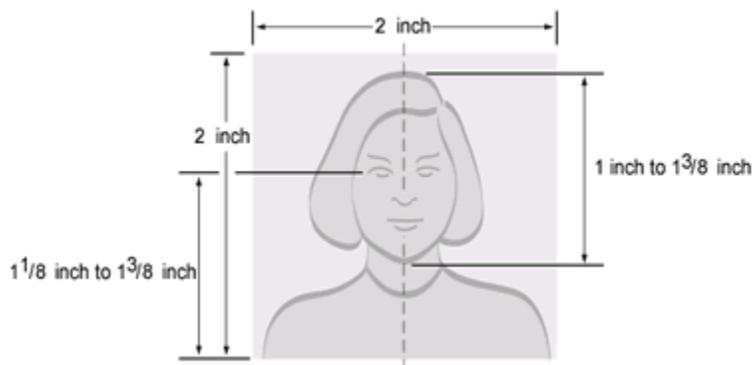


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-Composed Photos

