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INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION
& ENGAGEMENT

UW&
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
LA CROSSE

OPT INFORMATION PACKET

- **What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?**
  - Temporary employment for practical training & is available at each degree level
  - Employment is directly related to the student's major area of study
  - Requires adjudication (approval) from a USCIS Service Center

- **What types of employment are permitted by OPT?**
  - Regular paid employment
  - Payment by multiple short-term multiple employers
  - Work for hire-a service based on a contractual relationship
  - Self-employed business owner
  - Employment through an agency
  - Volunteers or unpaid interns (must not break labor laws)

- **What must I do to be eligible to apply for OPT?**
  - Maintain valid F-1 status
  - Make normal progress towards degree requirements
  - Must be in F-1 status for at least one academic year (May apply for OPT before one year, but cannot start OPT until after one year is completed)
  - Have not been authorized for 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
  - Have not already used 12 months of full-time OPT at the same degree level

- **What are the benefits of Post Completion OPT?**
  - Can work full-time
  - Can apply for STEM extension (if applicable)
  - Eligible for cap gap extension (if applicable)

- **When should I apply for OPT?**
  - May apply as early as 90 days before and as late as 60 days after your completion date
  - Completion date can be your "graduation" or date of defense
  - Can take up to three months to process application. A job offer is not required to apply.
  - All post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months from your program end date
  - Cancellation of an OPT application is very complicated. Make sure you are ready to apply, and your course work/thesis defense will be completed on time.

- **What are my responsibilities for reporting while on OPT?**
  Since your status does not change while pursuing OPT, you must continue to comply with all F-1 regulations and reporting requirements. Failure to do so can result in termination of your F-1 status. Specifically, you must update your International Student Advisor by email within 10 days of a change to any of the following but not limited to:
  - Change of address (residential or mailing)
  - Legal name
  - Employer name
  - Employer address
  - Loss of employment
  - Change of employment
  - Change status

*** If none of these items change for you, you are still required to email your International Student Advisor every 6 months with the information requested above ***

- **How do I apply for (OPT)?** There are several steps to apply for OPT. You will submit your final application to USCIS (after all the below steps are completed), so it is crucial to accurately follow all steps listed below.
  - **Determine your OPT start date:**
    - The start date requested for post-completion OPT may be up to 60 days after the program completion date listed on your I-20.
    - Please Note: Employment is only authorized for the dates granted on the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card, which **must** be received from USCIS **before** you begin working.
  - **Complete a paper DRAFT I-765 application for review:**
    - To get the most updated version of this form, go to www.uscis.gov
    - In the search box in the upper right-hand corner of the page type I-765
    - At the top of the page, you can download directions for completing the form and the form itself. Please read the instructions carefully
    - On the I-765 Application Question #27 enter (c) (3) (B) for Post Completion OPT
    - The address you list on your I-765 application is where USCIS will mail your EAD card. USCIS will not allow EAD card to be forwarded!
    - If you do not know, where you will be living in the next three months, you could use a friend, family member or IEE's mailing address in the "Your U.S. Mailing Address". If you do this, you must put c/o and then the person's name and address.
      Example: c/o Panzer, 1725 State Street, 1140CN, La Crosse, WI, 54601
  - **Payment to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS):**
    - Be prepared to pay with your credit or debit card the application fee to DHS
  - **Obtain a Digital Passport Photo:**
    - Obtain a digital U.S. passport sized photo that meets USCIS standards - https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html
  - **Digital copies of all previous I-20 documents**
  - **Digital copies of:**
    - Photo ID Page/Expiry Page
    - F-1 Visa
  - **Digital copy of your I-94 -**https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov
  - **Digital copies of any previously issued EAD cards**
- **What Now?**
  - After gathering all your application materials, make an appointment to meet with your International Student & Scholar Advisor to review your application.
  - The International Student & Scholar Advisor will prepare a new I-20 for you with your requested OPT.
  - You need to sign your new I-20 and include a digital copy of your new I-20 with your application.
  - Applications must be received by USCIS within 60 days of your program completion date and within 30 days of your new I-20 generation date.
- **Where do I send my OPT application?** – You will be applying for OPT online with USCIS.

You can track the status of your OPT application processing through your USCIS portal and receipt notice number.

<u>Please contact your International Student Advisor if your application has been pending for 90 days or more!</u>

- **What do I need to know after I receive my EAD card?**
  - Send your International Student & Scholar Advisor a copy of the front and back of your EAD card. Scanned copies are accepted by email.
  - Make a copy of your EAD card and keep it in a safe place
  - Do not start work before receiving your EAD or before the start date on the EAD
  - Do not work after the expiration date
  - Report your employment to your International Student & Scholar Advisor with the following information:
    - Company name and address
    - Job title
    - Supervisor contact information
    - Description of the work and how it is related to your field of study
    - Employment start date and employment end date
    - Employer EIN Number
  - Report the above information to your International Student & Scholar Advisor every 6 months or within 10 days of any changes!
  - You can only accrue/accumulate 90 days of unemployment while on OPT. Please report any unemployment to your International Student & Scholar Advisor immediately. REMEMBER – you can volunteer for 20+ hours per week and that will count as employment if it is a true volunteer experience that does not violate labor laws.

- **What should I do when my OPT ends?**
  - If you change your immigration status prior to the end date on your EAD, please send your International Student & Scholar Advisor copies of your new immigration documents
  - You have 60 days from the end date on your EAD to leave the U.S., apply for a change of status, or to receive admission into another academic program
  - During your 60-day grace period no work is allowed

- **What if I want to travel while on OPT?**
  - Travel outside of the U.S. while your OPT application is pending is not advised
  - Travel once your OPT is approved is allowed; however, in addition to your valid visa, valid passport you must bring your EAD card, and a job offer letter with your or you could be denied re-entry into the United States.
  - Travel signatures are still required from your International Student & Scholar Advisor

- **What is the STEM Extension?**
  - Students completing a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math may be eligible to apply for an additional 24 months of OPT.
  - The list of qualifying degrees can be found at: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension
  - Application for the 24-month extension must be filed before the current EAD expires
  - Employment authorization is automatically extended when extension is timely filed and pending
  - Student's employer must be registered in the E-Verify program
  - Please contact your International Student & Scholar Advisor if you are planning to apply for the STEM extension at least 90 days prior to your OPT EAD end date.

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REQUEST FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) AUTHORIZATION

This form is to request an OPT recommendation from UWL, to apply for Employment Authorization from USCIS.

Part I - To Be Completed by the Student

Today's Date: _____   **UWL ID#:** _____
(MM/DD/YY)

Student's Name (Family Name, First Name): _____

Current Phone Number: (____)_____   **UWL Email Address: _____

Current Academic Level (please check):   ☐ Bachelor's   ☐ Master's

Current Major/Program of Study: _____

Non-UWL Email Address: _____

Graduation Date or Program End Date on I-20: _____

Have you previously had any CPT or OPT authorization? _____YES _____NO (If yes, you must include all copies of any previous I-20's with CPT or OPT Employment Authorization)

Do you currently have a job offer? _____YES _____NO
If yes, you should include a copy of your employment letter. This can help to expedite your OPT application.

If you do not have a job offer, please describe the type of employment you will be seeking on an attached page.

Proposed OPT Start Date: _____ (You may choose a date up to 60 days after your program completion date. Employment Authorization is for a maximum of 12 months)

Part II – Health Insurance Continuation-Post Completion OPT

F-1 students participating in post-completion OPT have the opportunity to continue their UWL student health insurance coverage for an additional 12 months.

Please Check One:

☐ **Yes**, I am interested in continuing my UWL health insurance while on OPT

☐ **No**, I am declining to continue my UWL health insurance

I, _____, understand International Education & Engagement's (IEE) review of my initial post completion OPT application documents and issuance of form I-20 with my OPT request listed on the second page does not guarantee acceptance and/or approval of my application by USCIS. Only USCIS can determine if form I-765 and application documents are accurate and complete. IEE's international student & scholar advisors are not responsible for any OPT applications rejected and/or subject to a Request for Evidence (RFE) by USCIS. Information and instructions for Application for Employment Authorization (form I-765) are available on the USCIS website.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

For Pre-Completion OPT Applications ONLY - To Be Completed by the Student's Academic Advisor, Dean or Program Chair

Immigration regulations require that *Optional Practical Training* be used by students for employment related to the student's field of study. Please return the completed form to the student. Any questions can be directed to the Office of International Education. Thank you for your assistance.

To the best of your knowledge, is the proposed employment noted above related to the student's field of study and appropriate to the student's education level? _____YES   _____NO

To the best of your knowledge, is the stated program completion date accurate?   _____YES   _____NO

Academic Adviser (please print name): _____

Department: _____   **Phone:** _____

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____