

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Frequently Asked Questions & Application Packet *(Revised September 2020)*

- Step 1: Attend an online OPT Workshop (Schedule posted at www.uwb.edu/cie/events)**
We will discuss the application process, learn job hunting tips, and answer your questions.
- Step 2: Email Your Academic Advisor so that they can complete the online OPT Recommendation Form**
Your Academic Advisor will complete the form to confirm which quarter you are graduating. In your email, you need to include: your name, your student ID #, state that you need their help to complete the OPT Recommendation Form, and include the link for the form (www.uwb.edu/cie/forms)
- Step 3: Put together all OPT Application Materials: Use our Helpful Checklist in the Packet to Guide You**
- Step 4: Email your primary International Student Advisor (www.uwb.edu/cie/meet-your-advisor)**
Send your completed I-765 form and let your advisor know what OPT start date you want to request. Your advisor will review your I-765 form, review your Academic Advisor's OPT recommendation form, and give you a new I-20 that includes an OPT endorsement.
- Step 5: Mail your OPT application to USCIS via FedEx or UPS (not the post office)**
The OPT application must be **received by USCIS within 30 days from the date your OPT I-20 is issued**; otherwise your application will be automatically denied. The mailing address is:

USCIS, Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S., Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

- Step 6: Track your OPT application**
Within 3-4 weeks, USCIS will send you a notice of receipt document, called Form I-797. The notification will include a receipt number and provide information on how to check the status of your application. If your application is missing information, a "Request for Evidence (RFE)" letter will be mailed to the address provided in your application.
- **If you move while your OPT application is processing, you MUST inform immigration with your new address. To do this, complete the USCIS's online Change of Address Form @ www.uscis.gov/addresschange**
- Step 7: Job Hunting! Connect with Career Services & Writing and Communication Center**
- Career Services has great resources and can help you in many aspects of job hunting, such as writing your resume/cover letter, practicing interviewing, or using the job-search database called Handshake. www.uwb.edu/careers and www.uwb.edu/careers/international
 - The WaCC can review your resume and cover letter, www.uwb.edu/wacc. (via remote service)
- Step 8: About 3 months after your OPT application receipt date, you should receive a decision from USCIS.**
You can check the status of your application at www.uscis.gov You cannot begin employment until your application is approved, you received your card in the mail, and you reach the OPT start date.
- Step 9: Notify Immigration that you are working.**
Directions about how to do are discussed in this packet and online are at www.uwb.edu/cie/alumni/opt .

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

APPLYING FOR OPT

Am I eligible to apply for OPT?

- 1) You are currently in F-1 status; **AND**
- 2) You have been studied full-time for at least 3 quarters (time spent in another visa status counts); **AND**
- 3) You are on track to graduate from UWB; **AND**
- 4) You have not exceeded 12 months of full-time CPT; **AND**
- 5) You are not in an English Language Program.

When should I apply?

- CIE encourages you to apply around the beginning of your graduation quarter.
- Earliest you can apply: 90 days before the last day of your graduation quarter.

Do I need to have a job when I apply for OPT?

- Nope, your application is simply asking for the chance to be able to work in the U.S.

When will I know if my OPT application is approved?

- After 3 months from the date immigration receives your OPT application.

How long is the OPT work authorization for?

- You can ask for up to 12 months (1 year) of work authorization.

When can I start working?

- After your I-20 expires, you are not legally allowed to work until:
 - You received your OPT card; **AND**
 - Reached the OPT start date (as indicated on the OPT card)
- Since it takes 3 months for the OPT application to be approved, you can expect that the earliest you could work will be 3 months after you apply.

What should I put as my OPT start date?

- When you apply, immigration requires that you pick when you want your OPT to start.
- After you apply, you can't change the start date.
- It is OK if you don't have a job when your OPT begins.
- See the OPT Planning Workshop in the packet to outline your specific dates.
- CIE's tips for choosing a start date:
 - Make sure the date is at least 3 months from the time you are applying.
 - Make sure the date is within your 60-day grace period range.
 - Make sure that you do not choose a start date that isn't on a Saturday, Sunday or holiday.
 - If you want to maximize your job hunting time or your stay in the U.S., you will want to pick the latest possible OPT start date. This date is the day your 60-day grace period ends.
 - If you want your OPT to start as soon as possible, you will want to pick a date that is approximately 3 months from the day you apply for OPT.

OPT EMPLOYMENT

What are the minimum requirements for any work that I do during my OPT?

- All work that you do while on OPT must be:
 - Related to your UWB degree (your major, NOT minor); **AND**
 - At least 20 hours per week (part-time)
- *Employment that is not related to the major is a status violation.*

Does my employment have to be paid?

- No, it can be paid or unpaid/volunteer.

Do I have to be working when my OPT starts?

- No, you have 90 days of unemployment that you can use throughout your OPT period. This is really common.

How long do I have find a job?

- You can start to find a job even before you graduate!
- For students who apply at the start of their graduation quarter, you could have up to 6 months to find a job.
3 months while you wait for your OPT application to get approved
+ 3 months of unemployment that you are allowed to have during your OPT
6 months!
- **After 90 days are accrued, immigration will automatically terminate your OPT authorization, and you must depart the U.S. **You must contact CIE once you receive a job offer, because we must inform immigration for you (see page 5)**.**

What Types of Employment are Acceptable for OPT?

The following are acceptable forms of employment as long as the work is related to your major:

- **Regular paid employment:** You can work for multiple employers.
- **Internships:** Sometimes internships are a great way for you to obtain a full-time job with that company.
- **Volunteers or unpaid opportunities:** You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. You need be able to provide evidence about your volunteer work, such as how it is related to your major and that you worked at least part-time.
- **Payment by multiple short-term multiple employers:** You should keep a list of all short-term employment, dates, and duration.
- **Work for hire:** Employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, you should be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner:** While on OPT, you may start a business and be self-employed. You should be able to prove that you have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to your major.
- **Employment through an agency:** You must be able to provide evidence showing that you worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

FINDING A JOB

- **UWB Int'l Student LinkedIn** page for current students and alumni! This is a great way to connect with students who have similar degrees from UWB or cultural backgrounds as you, which you can use as a networking tool.
- **GoinGlobal:** Use your NET ID to unlock these great recourses to see companies that are looking to hire international students!
- **Career Services** provides students with valuable resources and guidance ranging from preparing your resume and cover letter to interview tips.
 - Handshake @ <https://www.uwb.edu/careers/jobs-and-internships/what-is-handshake>
 - www.uwb.edu/careers
 - www.uwb.edu/careers/international
- **MyVisaJobs.com** provides data if you are looking for companies that have sponsored H1B work visas before.

Connect and ask questions with current and alum international students from UWB!

www.linkedin.com/groups/6793822

<https://careers.uw.edu/resources>

GoinGlobal™
Jobs here, there, everywhere.

Career Guides Jobs Internships H1B Visas

#OPT Dream Job!
UWB international students are doing amazing work on OPT! These are just a sample of where they are working....

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING IN THE U.S.

1. **Make a good first impression!** Arrive early to your interview appointment (at least 10-15 minutes). Arriving late is considered rude.
2. Treat everyone you meet with **respect**, regardless of their title or level in the company.
3. Be mindful of your non-verbal communication:
 - Give a **firm, yet short, handshake** to show confidence.
 - Keep a **positive, friendly attitude** throughout the interview, even if you are feeling stressed or tired.
 - **Don't fidget** – this means making small movements, especially with your hands or feet, when we are nervous. Often this is when we play with our hair, shake our leg, or move around in a chair.
 - Maintain good **eye contact**. Keeping eye contact shows that you are listening, while not looking at others is disrespectful. But be aware not to stare! 😊
 - Respect other people's **personal space**. Personal space is important and people do not like to get too close.
 - **Dress professionally** and appropriate for your career field.
4. Be **confident and enthusiastic** in marketing your qualifications for the position. Self-promotion may not be natural for you, but U.S. culture is highly individualistic and direct.
5. **Prepare questions to ask the employers:** The employer will expect you to ask questions that show you have done research on the company and the position.
6. **Emphasize your unique skill sets that you bring as an international student.** You have more than just your education and language skills to share! Your experience of studying in the U.S. has allowed you to develop a skill set that is highly sought after by employers, such as: international perspective, self-confidence, ability to cope with ambiguous situations, adaptable, learns quickly and tolerance for other opinions.
7. **Be aware of illegal questions** employers can't ask you. In the U.S., it is illegal for employers to ask questions about your immigration status, age, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, marital status or disability. See the back of this handout for more information (referenced from uwb.edu/careers/job-search-tools/interviews).
8. Ensure that you fully understand your **work authorization options** under your immigration status and respond accurately. If you are unsure, come ask CIE! Employers are allowed to ask you:
 - *Are you authorized to work in the US?* : If you are on CPT or OPT, you can answer “yes”.
 - *Do you need visa sponsorship in the future?* This question is about H1B work visa. You answer “yes”.
 - Attend one of our CPT or OPT Workshops to learn more! uwb.edu/cie/employment
9. Practice, practice, practice!
 - **Practice with a Career Advisor** at UWB Career Services: uwb.edu/careers. You can also practice with your friends or classmates that you feel comfortable with.
 - Practice your public speaking skills through class projects and student organizations.
 - The more you talk about your experiences, the more confident and articulate you will be in interviews.
10. **Send a Thank You message after your interview!** This can be a handwritten card, or if it is time sensitive you can send by email. See a sample at uwb.edu/careers/job-search-tools/coverletters/sample-thankyou

Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An employer may not require an applicant to state his/her age, date of birth, or ask that he/she produce records to prove his/her age An employer is also prohibited from restricting its application process to “young, college age, or recent college graduate “ applicants Asking for the applicant’s year of graduation from high school is illegal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An employer may ask whether an individual meets the minimum age requirement set by law. “Are you over the age of 18?” is an appropriate question Employers may also ask questions that relate to a bona fide occupation qualification.
National Origin/Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your “native tongue”? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (This question is legal only if this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)
Race/Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All questions regarding an individual’s race/color will be deemed illegal under state and federal laws. 	None!
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any question regarding an applicant’s religious beliefs, denomination, or any questions about religious customs or holidays observed are illegal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After an individual is hired, an employer may inquire about religious accommodations. It should be noted that there are some exceptions to the general rule for religious institutions and organizations
Marital/Family Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What’s your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child-care arrangements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? (This question is legal if it is asked of all applicants for the job.) Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?
Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An employer should not inquire with respect to an individual’s sexual orientation. 	None!
Affiliations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What clubs or social organizations do you belong to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How tall are you? How much do you weigh? (Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list them and give dates when these occurred. What was the date of your last physical exam? How’s your family’s health? When did you lose your eyesight? How? Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? (this question can be asked only after a job offer has been made.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? (This question is legal if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.) Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions? As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results.)
Arrest Record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you ever been arrested? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you ever been convicted of__? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
Pregnancy- Generally Illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All questions specifically regarding pregnancy, future child plans, or the number of children an applicant has are illegal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions as to duration of stay on job or anticipated absences if made to both men and women.
Photograph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is illegal to request a photograph prior to hiring an individual. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After hiring an individual, a photograph may be requested for identification purposes only.
Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally, an employer should not inquire as to the citizenship of an individual or require that an individual present proof of citizenship prior to the interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An employer may inquire as to whether an applicant is authorized to work in the United States
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you’ve been in the military, were you honorably discharged? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

From: <https://www.uwb.edu/careers/job-search-tools/interviews>

I got a job – what do I do next?

- **Notify immigration that you are working.** This is important so that immigration doesn't think you are accumulating days of unemployment. By using your online SEVP Portal Account, you will keep your personal and employment information updated directly to immigration. After your OPT is approved and the OPT work authorization begins, you will receive an email from do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov with set up directions for your account. You must activate your account within 30 days of receiving the email. More information about this is @ www.uwb.edu/cie/alumni/opt

What are my reporting requirements to CIE (see <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/opt-student-reporting-requirements>)?

- Immigration regulations require you to notify CIE at uwbintl@uw.edu **within 10 days** after there is a:
 - **Change in your residential address** (include apartment number, if applicable)
 - **Change in your legal name**

How do I document what jobs I do while on OPT?

- *Employment that is not related to the major is a status violation.*
- The best is to get an updated from CIE that includes your OPT employment information.
- For each job you do, immigration recommends that you maintain evidence of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, job title, supervisor or manager's contact information, and a work description.
- If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, we highly recommend that you obtain a signed letter from your supervisor stating how your degree is related to the work performed.

Can I travel outside the U.S.?

- You should stay in the U.S. until you receive your OPT card.
- **After your OPT begins, you must carry documentation of your employment when re-entering the U.S.**
- You can be denied entry if you can't prove you are working or if have more than 90 days of unemployment.
- A list of the documents you must have when you re-enter the U.S. is at www.uwb.edu/cie/travel

Can I study during my OPT?

- Yes, but only recreational courses; you can't pursue a degree during OPT.
- If you want to do a degree program, CIE will help you transfer your I20 to the new school.

How can I purchase health insurance while on OPT?

- CIE strongly encourages you to have health insurance coverage while on OPT.
- Check out ISO (www.isoa.org) and International Student Insurance (www.internationalstudentinsurance.com)

I earned a STEM degree, when can I apply for the STEM OPT extension?

- In general, you can apply up to 3 months before your current 12-month OPT ends.
- Visit www.uwb.edu/cie/employment for more information about the STEM OPT application process.

What happens after my OPT ends?

- You have a 60-day grace period which begins the day after your OPT ends. You must either:
 - 1) Depart the United States.
 - 2) Transfer your I-20 to another school.
 - 3) Initiate the change of level to begin a new degree program at UWB.
 - 4) Change your immigration status to remain lawfully in the U.S., such as H1-B work visa.

OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

CIE strongly encourages you to keep copies of all documents that you send to USCIS. These copies can be helpful if there is a problem with your application. After you complete #1 – 7, email your primary Int'l Student Advisor (www.uwb.edu/cie/meet-your-advisor).

1. **OPT Recommendation Form completed online by your Academic/Major Advisor (not Int'l Advisor)**
 - Email your Academic Advisor asking them to complete the online OPT Recommendation Form, and include:
 - Your name, your student ID #, state that you need their help to complete the OPT Recommendation Form, and provide the online form link at www.uwb.edu/cie/forms
2. **Form G-1145: E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance** (at www.uscis.gov)
Attach this to the top of your application. You will receive text/emails on the status of your application.
3. **Form I-765: Application for Employment Authorization** (at www.uscis.gov)
 - Type in your answers and print out the form.** Handwritten answers have led to card mistakes/delays.
 - Part 1: Choose “Initial permission to accept employment”
 - Item #1: Provide your name as shown in your passport.
 - Item #2-4: If you have had other official names, then you would include them here – Do not put nicknames.
 - Item #5: Provide your mailing address. You will receive the OPT card after 3 months at this address. If you move while your OPT card is processing, you must inform immigration with your new address. You must complete the USCIS’s online Change of Address Form @ <https://www.uscis.gov/addresschange>
 - Item #6: If you put the CIE address you will answer “no” and answer item #7.
 - Item #7: Provide the U.S. address where you are currently living (if different than info in item #6)
 - Item #8: You would have this number if you have done OPT before. The A# is on your previous OPT card.
 - Item #9: Leave blank, unless you know if you have a USCIS online account number.
 - Item #12: Select “yes” only if you have applied for OPT or other employment authorization before.
 - Item #13-17: If you want to apply for SSN, you must answer these questions. If you have a SSN, skip to #18.
 - Item #21-23: This information is from your current I-94 record, available at www.cbp.gov/I94.
 - Item #24: Provide “F1 Student”, unless you entered the U.S. the last time using a different visa, such as H4.
 - Item #25: Provide “Student”.
 - Item #26: This number is at the top, right corner on your UW Bothell I-20.
 - Item #27: Enter **(c)(3)(B)** since you are applying for Post-Completion OPT
 - Item #28-31: Leave blank.
 - Part 3: #1 & #7: Select “I can read and understand English...” and sign/date the form.
4. **Photocopy of your:**
 - Passport ID page** (including extension page, if applicable)
 - Most recent F-1 visa** (even if it is expired). If you don’t have a F1 visa, you may have a I-797 Form instead.
 - Current I-94 Arrival/Departure Record** (access your I-94 record at www.cbp.gov/I94)
 - All UW Bothell I-20s** (include page 1 & the travel signature page)
 - Previous EAD card(s); front and back** (if applicable)
5. **Two passport size photographs: U.S. standard size 2”x 2” and taken within the last 6 months**
 - Write your name and I-94 record number on the back of each photo.
 - Photo cannot be the same as in your passport or visa. Visit Bartell Drugs, Walgreens, CVS, Costco, etc.
6. **Application Fee: \$550 (fee is non-refundable; applications before Oct 2 are \$410)**
 - Payment must be made by credit card, check or money order and payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”. For credit card payments, you must complete **and sign** the G-1450 Form, at www.uscis.gov .
7. **Set-up UW email forwarding to receive important messages from immigration about your OPT employment and status updates.** After you graduate, you won’t have direct access to your UW email.
<https://itconnect.uw.edu/connect/email/modernization-overview/timeline-resources/move-uw-email-to-personal-email/>
8. **Photocopy of your updated OPT I-20** (CIE will provide this to you and it will include your requested OPT dates.)

OPT Planning Worksheet

I'm graduating in...	First Eligible Day to Submit OPT Application	I-20 End Date (Official Last Day of the Quarter)	60-Day Grace Period Start Date	60-Day Grace Period End Date	I want my OPT to start as soon as possible. CIE suggests your OPT start date as:	I want as much time as possible for job hunting and/or time in the U.S. CIE suggests your OPT start date as:
Fall 2020	Sept 20, 2020	Dec 18, 2020	Dec 19, 2020	Feb 18, 2021	3 months from the day you plan to mail your application to USCIS AND is during your Grace Period.	The Grace Period End Date.
Winter 2021	Dec 20, 2020	March 19, 2021	March 20, 2021	May 19, 2021		
Spring 2021	March 14, 2021	June 11, 2021	June 12, 2021	August 11, 2021		
Summer 2021	May 23, 2021	August 20, 2021	August 21, 2021	Oct 19, 2021		

TIP #1:
Apply early for OPT.
 It takes USCIS 3 months to make a decision on your application.

TIP #2:
If you apply early, you can receive your OPT card even before your work authorization begins. This gives you flexibility to travel if you want.

TIP #3:
It is OK if you aren't working when your OPT work authorization begins. You have 90-days of unemployment to use while you job hunt.

TIP #4:
How long do I have to find a job?
 You must start employment before you use all of your 90-days of unemployment. Your OPT expires early after 90 days are accumulated.

I-20 End Date:
 (Official last day of the quarter in which you will graduate)

____/____/____

OPT Start Date:
 This date must be within the Grace Period.

____/____/____

**60-day
 Grace Period**

Grace Period Ends:

____/____/____

**1 year of work authorization ;
 90 days of unemployment is allowed.**

TIP #4:
STEM OPT Extension
 Applications must be received by USCIS before your current OPT expires.

OPT End Date*:

____/____/____

*The end date is 1 year from the OPT start date. Example: OPT starts on June 24, 2019 ; OPT ends on June 23, 2020.

**60-day
 Grace Period**

GRACE PERIOD

In general, during the 60-day period, a student must take one of these actions:

- 1) OPT Work Authorization Begins *(this is what you are interested to do).*
- 2) Depart the U.S.
- 3) Pursue More Education in the U.S.. The program must start within 5 months from your I-20/OPT end date.
- 4) Change your immigration status to remain lawfully in the U.S. (H-1B work visa, green card, etc.)