What is OPT?

“temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study.”

8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

Full time work experience in your field of study!
CPT vs. OPT

Curricular Practical Training
- No charge
- 2-4 business days to process
- Must be registered for co-op
- Must have a co-op offer letter
- Cannot be used after coursework is completed
- Authorized by semester
- Authorized by ISS

Optional Practical Training
- $410
- Average 12 week processing
- Coursework must be complete
- No job offer required
- Students are eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per level of study
- Authorized by USCIS
Three Types of OPT:

1. **Pre-completion** OPT
2. **Post-completion** OPT
3. 24-month **STEM* extensions** of post-completion OPT for some degree holders

*STEM fields: Science, Technology, Engineering & Math
Eligibility for OPT

- Valid F-1 status for at least **one academic year** (two consecutive academic semesters) before start date.

- Completed **all required coursework** for degree by OPT start date (except for thesis, dissertation, or equivalent requirement, such as a capstone project)

- **First time applying for OPT at this degree level.**

- Completed **no more than 364 days of full-time CPT** (Curricular Practical Training) for the same degree level.
Application Timeline

#1 Determine your program completion date

- **Undergraduate Students:**
  When will you have completed all of the requirements for your degree?

- **Graduate Students:**
  When will you have completed all of the coursework for your degree excluding a thesis, dissertation, or equivalent?

This date will be listed in the *Program End Date* section of your I-20. If the date is incorrect, an ISS advisor will update your I-20.
Application Timeline

#2 Decide when to apply for OPT

- OPT applications may be submitted to USCIS as early as *but no earlier than* 90 days before a student’s program completion date.

- USCIS may accept applications *up to 60 days after* a student’s program completion date. However, students applying for OPT after their program completion date may not receive the full 12 months of OPT authorization.
Application Timeline

#3 Choose an OPT start date

Applicants must choose a start date when applying for OPT. This date may be:

- As early as one day after your course completion date
- As late as 60 days after your course completion date.
Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period.

Grace period: Students may remain in the U.S. but may not continue to work.

STUDENTS MUST DEPART THE U.S., TRANSFER TO ANOTHER SCHOOL, OR CHANGE VISA STATUS BY THIS DATE.
Calculate Your OPT Dates – 4 Steps

#1 When are you going to graduate, or when will your coursework be complete?

____________ (x)

#2 What is the date 60 days after this date?

____________ (x+ 60 days)

#3 When can you start OPT?

____________ (choose date between questions answered in #1 and #2)

#4 When should you start applying for OPT?

____________ (90 days prior to answer in question #1)
Calculate Your OPT Dates - 4 Steps

#1  When are you going to graduate, or when will your coursework be complete?
May 8, 2018 (x)

#2  What is the date 60 days after this date?
July 7, 2018 (x+ 60 days)

#3  When can you start OPT?
May 9, 2018 – July 7, 2018

#4  When should you start applying for OPT?
February 8, 2018 (90 days prior question #1)
Application Process

Submit completed application and all documents to International Student Services:

- **In person** by scheduling an OPT appointment
  Call 475-6943 or email iss@rit.edu

- **By mail** by sending all application materials to ISS with the *ISS Out of Area OPT Checklist* available on the ISS website

When your application is complete it will be mailed to USCIS by ISS.
Application Process

- Approximately three weeks after your application is received by USCIS, a receipt will arrive through the mail in the ISS office.

- Applicants will receive their EAD (Employment Authorization Document) in approximately 90 days from the “Received Date” on the Receipt notice from USCIS. An email will be sent notifying students that the card has arrived.
Application Materials

- **PLEASE DO NOT STAPLE ANY OF THE MATERIALS**

- I-765 form (please use ISS mailing address)

- G-1145 form

- Application fee of $410 (Check or Money Order) or Form G-1450 Credit Card Authorization Form

- Copy of new I-20 with recommendation for OPT (this will be given to you at your OPT appointment or emailed to you if you are applying by mail).

- Copies of all previous I-20s

- Copy of electronic Form I-94 print-out. You can access and print your electronic Form I-94 at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html)

- Copy of passport picture page

- Copy of passport visa page

- Two passport photos taken within the last six months – (please write your name and I-94 number on the back of the photos)
When can I start working?

- You must have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and the start date indicated on the card must be reached.

- Students with a timely-filed, pending 24-month OPT STEM Extension application or a valid Cap-Gap I-20 may continue working beyond their OPT end date without receiving a new EAD card.

- USCIS Case Status Online https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do
  Students are encouraged to use the “Sign up for an account” feature. There is an option for students to include their email address and request email updates.
Types of OPT Employment

- **Paid employment:** A student may work full time or part time (at least 20 hours per week).

- **Multiple employers:** A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the degree program.

- **Short-term multiple employers:** Often photographers and other types of artists work for multiple short term employers. These students should maintain a list of all employers and the dates of their employment.

- **Work for hire:** Students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the length of the contract and the name and address of the contracting company. Please note this type of employment is NOT allowed on STEM.
Types of Employment

- **Self-employed business owner:** Students on OPT may start a business, but the work must be full time. The student must have the proper business licenses and the business must be directly related to the student’s degree program. Please note this type of employment is NOT allowed on STEM.

- **Unpaid employment:** Students may work as interns or volunteers as long as they work at least 20 hours per week. Please note this type of employment is NOT allowed on STEM.
Unemployment During OPT

- Students on OPT have a total of 90 days (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment during the 12-months of OPT.

- Students with an OPT STEM extension have an additional 60 days of allowed unemployment during the 36-month total OPT period.
Traveling Abroad During OPT

- **ISS does not recommend leaving the U.S. while your OPT application is pending.** The only exception is before your graduation and you will return before the program end date on your I-20. It is important to carry an Enrollment Verification Form from the Registrar’s Office in this situation.

- Carry the following when traveling on OPT after it has been approved:
  - OPT card (EAD)
  - Employment letter (in order to return!)
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - Valid passport
  - All I-20s, and the OPT I-20 must have been signed within the past 6 months
OPT Reporting Requirements

Students on OPT are required to report the following information within 10 days of any change during their OPT period. Please note, failure to update this information may result in the termination of your OPT and SEVIS record:

1. Employment Information
   - Name of Employer
   - Employer’s address and telephone number

2. Your current address

This information is reported using links on the ISS homepage www.rit.edu/iss

3. Legal name change
SEVP Portal

You will receive an email with instructions on creating a portal account. This email will come from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov. If you do not see the email, check your spam or junk mail folder. If you still do not see it, contact your designated school official (DSO) to have the email sent again. (These emails should begin arriving on or shortly after 3/23/18, or, you might not receive it until shortly after your OPT is approved.)

The SEVP Portal will allow you to:

- View details about your post-completion or STEM OPT.
- Report changes to your address, telephone and employer information.
- View and update data on all your employers in one place.
- Any data updates you make in the portal will be sent directly to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. (Therefore, you will not have to report those changes through RIT once you have entered them in the SEVP Portal).
- It will not allow you to add any new STEM employment.
OPT REPORTING

As a student on initial or extended OPT, you are required by US immigration regulations to report the following events to RIT within ten days:

1. A legal name change
2. A change in your residential or mailing address
3. A change in your employer or loss of employment

Please use the links below to report this information to our office. The data will come directly to RIT International Student Services and passed on to USCIS.

- REPORT NAME CHANGE
- REPORT ADDRESS
- REPORT 12 OR 24 MONTH OPT EMPLOYMENT

NOTE: If you have any questions about the information you are submitting to our office please email patricia.dipassio@rit.edu
OPT – STEM Extension

Students with a Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees in certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields may be eligible for a 24-month extension of post-completion OPT, for a total of 36 months of OPT authorization.

- Each major at RIT has a CIP Code. It is listed on the I-20
- Link to STEM Field CIP Codes
Eligibility for OPT STEM Extension

- Maintaining valid F-1 status and pursuing authorized OPT employment in field of study
- Completed a Bachelor’s degree or completed required course-work in a Master’s or Doctoral degree in a USCIS-designated STEM field
- Employed by an eligible employer enrolled in the DHS E-Verify database
E-Verify

- An Internet-based system operated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA).
- Free to employers and available in all 50 states. [http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/about-program/e-verify-employers-search-tool](http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/about-program/e-verify-employers-search-tool)
- Provides a link to federal databases to help employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers.
When to Apply

- You may apply up to 90 days (3 months) before your regular OPT period expires.
- Your application must be received by USCIS before your regular OPT period expires.
- Information about how to apply can be found on the ISS website.
STEM OPT and Travel

- Show an unexpired EAD card when traveling.
  - Travel using the current EAD card while STEM application is pending
  - Once that card expires, do not travel until the new STEM Extension EAD card is received

- Travel with the same documents required for students traveling while on their first year of OPT
What is an H-1B?

- H-1Bs are work permits requiring Labor Certification. (On OPT, you are still in F-1 student status).
- H-1Bs become available at the earliest on **October 1** and can be applied for as early as **April 1**.
- Higher Education Institutions are cap-exempt.
- A company must file on your behalf. There are USCIS and attorney fees.
- H-1Bs are geographic and employer specific.
- Cap-Gap extensions: If you had an H-1B receipt or approval notice, ISS could request an extension of your OPT until September 30.
Please visit www.rit.edu/iss