OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

You should have already attended the Work Authorization Session to fully understand the OPT regulations.

We are happy to review your application for completeness. However, please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that you mail a complete application to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We strongly urge you to copy the entire application for your own records. The International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) will be unable to provide you with a copy of your final petition. It is advisable that you always keep copies of all your immigration paperwork. You will need it if you apply for H-1B status, permanent residency, or U.S. citizenship.

STEP 1: As part of the OPT application process, you will be issued a NEW OPT I-20 Form by the International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) upon receipt of the following:

- Completed and Signed Optional Practical Training Handout
- Copy of I-94 (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94)
- Copy of your school transcript printed from SIS (no need to be “official” copy from Registrar)
- Copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Card(s) (EAC)

Return the above to: The ISSO Front Desk, Wannalancit Business Center, 600 Suffolk St., Suite 354, East Campus. An ISSO Advisor will review your documents and process your OPT I-20 Form. We will contact you once your OPT I-20 has been processed (within 3-5 business days) to pick up your OPT I-20 form. During Advising Hours, you may bring in the above listed items to be reviewed for completeness. (Please make any necessary copies at the library or your department.)

STEP 2: AFTER you have received your new OPT I-20 Form, you must mail the following to USCIS:

USCIS must receive your complete application PRIOR to the end of your grace period and within 30 days of the issuance date listed on your OPT I-20 Form from ISSO.

- Completed Form G-1145 (should be clipped to the top of first page of your forms) (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) This form will allow you to track your application’s receipt and approval status online. Please note that your application status online will remain in “initial review” for the full 6+ weeks of processing time.
- $380 fee (personal check or money order), made payable to “US Department of Homeland Security” Be sure to date and sign the check
- Two color “passport” photos, taken within 30 days of the date application is filed. Write your full name, date of birth and SEVIS # in pencil or pen on the back of the photos and place in a labeled envelope. Photos must have a white background. Photos must show the entire face of the person in full frontal view. Specific photo details: http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html Typically photos taken at CVS or Walgreens will suffice.
- A COPY of the OPT I-20 Form which will be provided to you by ISSO (pgs 1&2 may be double-sided). Please keep the original OPT I-20 Form for yourself. You will need it the next time you have to leave the U.S. Remember to keep all previous I-20s for your historical records. Only copies of signed I-20’s are sent with OPT petition
- A copy of I-94 record printout, or both sides (even if blank) of your current I-94 card
- A copy of all of your previous I-20 forms
- A copy of the Passport Identification and expiration date Page(s)
- A copy of the F-1 Visa Stamp Page (or copy of approval notice of change of status to F-1) (note that Canadian citizens will not have this stamp)
- A copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Card(s) (EAC)
ALL of the materials on the checklist should be mailed to a lockbox address. We advise you to send your documents to the USCIS via overnight courier service such as FedEx.

Please remember that USCIS must receive your complete application PRIOR to the end of your grace period and within 30 days of the issuance date listed on your OPT I-20.

Where to Mail Your Pre or Post OPT Petition or STEM Extension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in:</th>
<th>Mail your application to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia</td>
<td>The ISSO advises that students only use FedEx to send their OPT applications:</td>
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<td>USCIS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Attn: AOS</td>
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<td>2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suite 400</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
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<td>Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands</td>
<td>The ISSO advises that students only use FedEx to send their OPT applications:</td>
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<td>USCIS</td>
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<td>Attn: AOS</td>
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<td>Suite 100</td>
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<td>Phoenix, AZ 85034</td>
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</table>

**FEDEX** — 61 Drum Hill Road, Chelmsford, MA 01824 (978-275-0575)

**Hours of Operation:** M – F, 7:30AM – 9:00PM; Saturday, 7:30AM – 6:00PM; Closed Sunday

**Latest Express Dropoff:** M – F, 6:30PM; Saturday, 1:00PM; Sunday, No Pickup

**Latest Ground Dropoff:** M – T, Th – F, 6:00PM; W, 4:00PM; Sa – Su, No Pickup

**STEP 3: USCIS PROCESSING**

Within two weeks of the date that you submit the application to USCIS, you should receive a receipt notice. Four to eight weeks after you receive your receipt notice, you should receive your Employment Authorization Card. *(Please note that these are estimated processing times and that on occasion it can take up to eight to twelve weeks.)* If you do not receive your EAC card by the 75th day of mailing, please contact our office for assistance. We are legally unable to follow up before the 75th day.

When you meet with an ISSO Advisor to pick up your completed OPT I-20, we will alert you to any corrections that need to be made or missing paperwork. **It will be your responsibility to complete any missing requirements before submitting your OPT Petition to USCIS. Failure to do so will result in your petition being returned to you by USCIS for additional information and will cause a delay to your processing.**
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) INFORMATION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study”. A student is permitted a total of 12 months of Optional Practical Training per Higher Educational Level. A student can use a chosen amount of the 12-month allotment of OPT time before graduation (Pre Completion Optional Practical Training – Pre OPT) and a chosen amount after graduation (Post Completion Optional Practical Training – Post OPT), so long as the aggregate does not exceed the 12 months per educational level. Any time authorized as PRE-completion optional practical training is deducted from the 12-month allotment. If a student has used 12 months or more of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) in same academic level, he/she will lose eligibility for Optional Practical Training. The information listed below refers to the OPT application process. Anyone interested in applying for work authorization, should attend Work Authorization Info session at least three months prior to their intended start date.

The “Post” OPT application can be submitted to USCIS up to 90 days PRIOR to completion of degree and within the 60-day period following the completion date. Therefore, an approved Employment Authorization Card (EAC) for Post OPT is related to the completion date. For this reason, it is crucial to choose an accurate completion date. USCIS determines completion based on student’s actual completion of degree requirements, which is not necessarily the same as the school’s Commencement or Degree Conferral date(s).

If you are unable to complete by the Completion Date listed below, *IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to inform us PRIOR to the completion date.* If you notify us prior to the completion date, it provides some flexibility to cancel your Post OPT Request/Extend I-20/protect your legal status. Failure to inform us that you did not complete as expected below will create problems to your immigration record and in some cases jeopardize your Post OPT authorization.

If you work using your Post OPT, EAC card before having completed your program, you will be considered to be working illegally. Working without legal status is a very serious offense. Requests for Reinstatement of your student status based on illegal work are usually denied by USCIS. Denial of a Reinstatement application means that USCIS will revoke your OPT work authorization and request that you depart the country within a designated limited period of time. Working on “Post” OPT without having completed your program may also jeopardize a future H-1B petition.

*Anticipated Completion Date at UMass Lowell:       Month ___ Day ___ Year ______

*The Completion Date on page one of your Form I-20 will be shortened to above-mentioned Completion date. You will NOT be able to continue working at UMass Lowell past above date.* Any current CPT or on-campus employment also ends on the above mentioned date.

Students cannot complete their program with registration in online courses exclusively; you MUST complete your program with at least one on-campus course. OPT requests will be terminated within SEVIS if ISSO comes to learn that student is completing their program through online courses exclusively. This is a legal requirement that must be adhered to.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE STATEMENT ABOVE (please initial) ______________

Requested Start Date for OPT Card: *       Month ___ Day ___ Year ______

*The Effective Date for a POST OPT can be any day from within the 60-day period beyond your completion date mentioned above.

Requested End Date for OPT Card:       Month ___ Day ___ Year ______ (max of 12 months)

If USCIS delays processing of the card, OPT time can never be granted beyond 14 months from Completion Date. By Law, the latest that a Post-OPT, EAD card can expire is 14 months from Completion Date.

Are you Applying for:

POST COMPLETION OPT  
Part-Time PRE Completion OPT (up to 20 hours/week)  
Full-Time PRE Completion OPT  
(During the academic year, this option is only available for thesis students upon completion of ALL requirements except for Thesis)
Work History (Within Same Academic Level ONLY)

1. Have you worked on **FULL-TIME, CPT** within Current Academic Level either at UMass Lowell and/or another school?   Yes ☐  No ☐
   If Yes, please provide copies of related I-20 forms & number of months of Full-Time CPT used within current level. ____________

2. Have you worked on **PRE-OPT** within Current Academic Level?   Yes ☐  No ☐
   If Yes, please be sure to include a copy of your previous Employment Authorization Card (EAC).

3. Have you ever been issued an Employment Authorization Card (EAC)? Yes ☐  No ☐
   If Yes, please provide a copy of all previously issued EAC card(s).

**Post OPT Regulatory Requirements**

You are only permitted to work in your field of study and the job should be commensurate with the level of your degree. Employment needs to be for a minimum of 20 hours per week. You can have concurrent employment while on Post OPT, but each position needs to comply with above minimum requirements.

Post OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any POST-Completion OPT carried out under the initial Post OPT authorization. Students granted a 17-month OPT STEM Extension* may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month OPT period. The Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requires that the student’s school report employer information for students who are on Post OPT. **Be sure to inform our office when you find employment and also report any subsequent employment changes within 10 days.** SEVIS will only be aware of your employment if you have notified our office to permit us to record it on SEVIS. A student must work at least 20 hours per week in a qualifying position in their field of study to be considered employed. If a student has a variable schedule, within a month, it should average out to at least 20 hours per week. **USCIS currently acknowledges volunteer or unpaid internships in the student's field of study, to comply with the Post OPT employment requirement.** The law is intended for positions that are recognized by the sponsoring employer as "volunteer" or "unpaid internship" positions. In order to comply with USCIS and Department of Labor laws these must be “true” volunteer or unpaid internships and not those that would otherwise be paid. The position would need to fulfill the following requirements: 1) be in your field and level of study; 2) minimum of 20 hours per week; 3) be a true volunteer or unpaid internship as mentioned above. **Please note that volunteering is not permitted at UMass Lowell.**

You may not continue in your CPT employment beyond your completion date unless you have received an approved EAC and until the effective date of the card has been reached. Your SEVIS employer information begins empty from the date of your EAC card. If you are to continue with your CPT employer as your Post OPT employer, you must inform us of this at the time you receive your EAC card. This will permit us to change your employment status with your employer from CPT to Post OPT employment. (Again, do not continue CPT employment beyond completion date until you have received EAC card and until the EAC card’s effective date has been reached.)

You have a 60-day grace period beyond the completion date of your EAC. You may not work during this 60-day grace period. Also, if you depart the U.S. during this period, you will not be able to re-enter in F-1 status. You may, however, use this time to transfer your F-1 program to another school or to apply to USCIS for a change of status to another non-immigrant classification.

You are not permitted to be a full-time student or be enrolled in a degree program

In order to be enrolled in a degree program, either part-time or full-time, you will need to return to a student visa and your Post OPT will terminate. **If you are accepted as a student during your Post OPT period, you will need to inform our office. You will also need to inform your new school of your Post OPT Status** They will need to issue you a new Form I-20. Your Post OPT status will terminate on the effective date of your new Student Visa Document (i.e. start date as listed on Page 1 of the Form I-20), or on the Release Date from our school to your new institution, whichever comes first. Your new school will request that we release/transfer your SEVIS record from UMass Lowell to their institution’s SEVIS program.
You will not be permitted to work at UMass Lowell after your completion date as listed on page 1 of your post-OPT I-20, unless ALL of the following conditions apply:

1. You have received the EAC
2. The start date on the EAC is current
3. The work at UMass Lowell is in your field
4. The work is commensurate with your degree level
5. The work MUST be paid… volunteering is not permitted at UMass Lowell, and we will need to have a copy of your contract before we can update SEVIS with this information
6. You must update the I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification Form, at the Human Resources office. (They will need to see your EAC when updating this form.)

For those students planning to apply for H-1B status, please be aware that USCIS has a cap on the number of H-1B visas issued per year. The USCIS fiscal year starts on October 1st of every year. The deadline to apply for an H-1B petition to start on October 1st is six months prior (i.e., April 1st). The cap is usually reached every year in early April/May, so plan accordingly.

Cap Gap Extension of “D/S” (i.e. Duration of Status)/work authorization until October 1st.

- Effective April 8, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security authorized an H-1B cap-gap extension of D/S (i.e. Duration of Status) and in some cases it also includes extension of work authorization until October 1st.
- Cap Gap Extension applies only to H-1B Change of Status Petitions (not Consular Processing). You must be in valid F-1 status at the time that you apply for the Cap Gap. You must also remain in the U.S. during your Cap Gap period and cannot travel until you are in H-1B status. The Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) strongly recommends that students do not travel outside the United States during the Cap-Gap Extension, as USCIS will consider a change-of-status application to be abandoned if the applicant leaves the country while the application remains pending. A change-of-status petition from F-1 to H-1B filed on behalf of a student with a Cap-Gap Extension who departs the U.S. before the application is adjudicated could be denied.
- In order for a student to have employment authorization during the Cap-Gap Extension, the student must be in an approved period of Post Completion Optional Practical Training (i.e., your card must be valid at the time your H-1B is filed.) If your Post OPT Employment Authorization Card is still valid at the time the H-1B Petition is filed, your Cap Gap Extension will not only extend your F-1/Duration of Status, but it will ALSO extend your work authorization once until September 30th.
- If, however, you are in the 60-day grace period beyond the expiration date of your Post OPT Employment Authorization Card, you are legally permitted to remain in the U.S. until September 30th, but are not authorized to work until the effective date of your H-1B Petition Approval.
- The application for the Cap-Gap Extension is processed through our office and SEVIS.
- A student can apply for the 17-month STEM Extension during the Cap-Gap Extension of OPT. The student will need to have his or her employer request withdrawal of the approved or pending H-1B petition in time for USCIS to effectively accept the withdrawal prior to October 1st.
- Please note that the 17month STEM extension is scheduled to terminate on 2/16/2016. Our office will notify students if it gets extended.
- The 90-day limitation on unemployment continues during the Cap-Gap Extension.

Be sure to continue to maintain health insurance coverage throughout your Practical Training period. If you have questions about your UMass Lowell health insurance coverage as it pertains to your UMass Lowell completion, please contact Health Services at http://www.uml.edu/student-services/health/ (or call 978 934-4992).

TRAVEL outside of the U.S while on Post OPT Status:
If you plan on traveling after submitting your Post OPT petition and before your EAC is received, please contact our office for advice, as travel is NOT recommended during this time period. It is risky and may jeopardize your application. Post OPT is considered to be the final phase of your F-1 student status. For this reason, you will need to have the following documentation in order to re-enter in proper Post OPT status:

1) A passport (valid 6 months beyond your EAC expiration date);
2) A valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport;
3) Your Post OPT, Form I-20, with a travel signature on page 2 that is not older than 6 months;
4) A letter from your Post OPT Employer.
5) A valid Employment Authorization Card (EAC)

Do not Re-Enter with a Tourist Visa while on Post OPT, as it will cancel your OPT authorization. Time spent outside the U.S. during an approved period of post-completion OPT counts as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits, unless the student is either: 1) Employed during a period of leave authorized by an employer; 2) Traveling as part of his or her employment.
You are required to report the following to our office within a 10-day period:
(Changes will be recorded by our office on your SEVIS record to maintain your legal F-1/OPT status)

1) ALL employment changes: new employment, interruption of employment, concurrent employment, unpaid internship volunteer work, change in employer name, change in employer address and/or loss of employment, etc.
2) Change of Name
3) Change of address (U.S. or Home Country)
4) Change in Citizenship
5) Change in non-immigrant visa status

NOTE: **If you are applying for Post OPT based on a “Graduate Certificate” program, you will NOT be eligible for the STEM Extension even if your graduate certificate is from a STEM acceptable field. Currently the STEM work authorization extension is only permitted for students who were issued the 12 months of Post OPT work based on Bachelor’s Master’s or Doctoral level work Post OPT.**

A recent DC Federal District Court ruling vacated the 2008 Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) addition of a 17-month work extension for Post Completion Optional Practical Training STEM students. The Court granted DHS a six-month period to rectify the situation.

USCIS will continue to accept and adjudicate STEM applications until February 12, 2016. We will keep you posted to any regulatory changes to the OPT/STEM regulations.

Please initial to acknowledge your understanding this _______.


**SIGNATURE AND CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Current U.S. Address: ________________________________ Current Telephone: ________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Personal Email Address: ________________________________
(to permit us to correspond with you during your Post OPT period and inform you of important immigration regulatory changes).

Print Last Name: ________________________________ First Name: ________________________________ Middle: ________________________________

“I understand that USCIS must receive my complete application PRIOR to the end of my grace period and within 30 days of the issuance date listed on page 1 of my OPT I-20 Form. I understand that failing to submit the application in a timely manner will result in denial of my OPT application.”

Student Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________________________

Your signature also indicates that you have read and understand your legal requirements to maintain legal status while on Post OPT, and that you have read and understood all seven (7) pages of this handout. Always feel free to contact our office with any questions pertaining to your status at isso@uml.edu
VERIFICATION OF ANTICIPATED COMPLETION DATE

Part I: Completed by Student

Student’s Last Name: _______________________________ First Name: _______________________________

UML ID#: ______________________ Email: ___________________________ Phone#: _____________________

Part II: Completed by FACULTY Advisor (not by student)

International Students are eligible to apply for a 12-month period of work authorization within their field of study, referred to as “Optional Practical Training” (OPT). The student has a limited window of time to apply for this work authorization. Given the processing delays from the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS), students will usually choose to apply two-three months prior to having completed their degree.

USCIS places great importance on a graduate student’s completion date. The completion date for a graduate international student is NOT necessarily a school’s Commencement or Degree Conferral Date, but rather when the student is expected to have completed all their degree requirements. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact isso@uml.edu or at 978-934-2383.

1. Level of Degree to be Completed:
   - Doctorate [ ]
   - Master’s [ ]
   - Bachelor’s [ ]
   - Certificate [ ] (* certificate level doesn’t qualify for STEM)

2. Number of credits required for Degree [ ] and # of credits remaining [ ]

3. What is student in the process of completing?
   - Thesis [ ]
   - Dissertation [ ]
   - Capstone Project [ ]
   - Required Coursework [ ]
   - Incomplete [ ]

4. If student is completing thesis/dissertation, please indicate specific defense date Month_____Day_____Year____

5. If applicable, Completion Date of Capstone Project: Month_____Day_____Year____

6. Please confirm student’s anticipated Completion Date, as per above statement: Month_____Day_____Year_____.
   * Completion date should not be more than 2 weeks past the defense date as per Graduate policy.
   * Please note that Student may not work on-campus past this date *

Faculty Name: ________________________ Sign/Print: ________________________ Date: ______________________

Thesis, Dissertation, or Project Advisor should complete and sign when applicable.

Other students should have their Academic Advisor complete and sign.

Dept. Chair: ________________________ Sign/Print: ________________________ Date: ______________________

Students with a Teaching or Research Assistantship must also obtain the approval of Department Chair. Department Chair may work with Hilary Clark, Director of Payroll Services, so that last paycheck coincides with completion date above.