

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a program for F-1 students wishing to obtain work experience directly related to their course work with a U.S. employer. Eligible students may work for up to one year and may apply for pre-degree completion OPT (before completing course requirements for your program) or post-completion OPT (after completing course requirements for graduation).

Who can apply for OPT?

In order to be eligible for either pre or post-completion OPT, you must fulfill the following requirements:

- ✓ be an F-1 Student
- ✓ have maintained status for a minimum of one year
- ✓ have a position directly related to your program of study

Additionally, to be eligible for post-completion OPT you must:

- ✓ apply no sooner than 90 days before your graduation date
- ✓ apply no later than 60 days after your graduation date

How do I apply for OPT?

The adjudication process may take up to 90 days. Bring the following to the International Student Services (ISS) during OPT Training:

1. Obtain a check or money order for \$380 USD made payable to (no abbreviations):
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
2. Obtain two passport-sized color photos in a small envelope. Your name and admission number (I-94) must be printed in pencil or felt tip pen on the back of the photos. Must have been taken with the last 30 days.
3. Complete **optional** e-mail notification form G-1145 (on the [USCIS](#) website)
4. Complete form I-765 (on the [USCIS](#) website)
5. Letter of Certification from your department chair or academic advisor **on letterhead** supporting OPT. See link for [sample](#).
6. The International Student Services Office must issue you an OPT Recommendation I-20. **The Form I-20 must be sent to the USCIS within 30 days of issue.**
7. Bring all copies of the Form I-20 that you possess; **valid** passport; Form I-94 <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html> ; Copies of all previous Employment Authorization Cards; and copy of Social Security Card if you have one.

What are my responsibilities after I receive approval?

Do **not** work prior to receiving the actual Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.

You must send all of the following by mail, fax, or email to the BGSU International Student Services (ISS):

1. Copy of the front and back of the EAD card after you receive it from DHS
2. Obtain a position related to your program within 90 days of receipt of your EAD
3. Work a minimum of 20 hours per week, paid or unpaid
4. Name and address of your employer within 10 days of employment
5. Current mailing address
6. Notify ISS within 48 hours if you have left employment or have moved

If you are not employed, you must be actively seeking a job. Once a total of **90 days of unemployment** is accumulated during the 12-month OPT, you are considered out of status.

SAMPLE OPT RECOMMENDATION LETTER

PRINTED ON BGSU LETTERHEAD

Date:

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that (student's name) started his/her studied in (major) at Bowling Green State University in the (semester and year). He/she is expected to receive the (degree title) on (date of satisfactory completion of degree requirements OR graduation date). I recommend that (student's name) be given the opportunity for receiving a practical training experience in the United States that is directly related to his/her academic program.

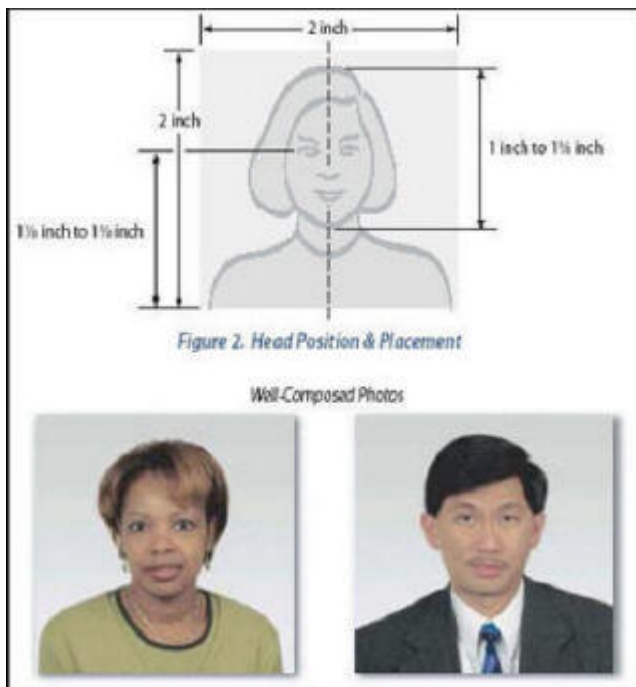
Signature

Name of Advisor or Chair of the Department

USCIS PHOTO REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

7 Steps to Successful Photos

- 1) Frame subject with full face, front view, and eyes open.
- 2) 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).
- 3) Center head within frame.
- 4) Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm to 35 mm) from bottom of photo.
- 5) Photograph subject again a plain white or off-white background.
- 6) Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face of background.
- 7) Encourage the subject to have a natural expression.



Many students ask if they are allowed to travel outside of the United States while waiting for their OPT to be approved. If you are traveling outside of the US while waiting for your OPT to be approved AND after your degree completion, this is somewhat risky. If you decide to take this risk, you will need to take the following items with you:

- passport (valid for six months from the date of your re-entry)
- signed I-20 (remember that each travel signature is valid for only 6 months during the period of OPT)
- valid F-1 visa stamp
- I-797C (receipt notice from USCIS for the OPT application)

*According to DHS, traveling back to the US while your OPT is pending is permitted in order to search for employment (more information under 2.O. and 2.P. on the SEVP FAQ page). However, it is still the discretion of the authorities at the border as to whether they actually allow you to re-enter.