Optional Practical Training (OPT)

International Student Programs (ISP)
Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Approval to work full time in the US for up to 12-months in a position directly related to your field of study.

- An extension of your F-1 status:
  - When you are on OPT, you are in F-1 status
  - Allows you to remain in the US until end of OPT + additional 60 day grace period
  - When you travel and re-enter the US on OPT, you re-enter in F-1 status

- Basic Eligibility:
  - Maintained F-1 status during the past year
  - Timely filed application with US Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)
  - (Graduate Students) – have advanced to candidacy
  - (Undergraduate Students) – complete program of study
  - Job offer is **Not** required
Timing of Application

- Apply as early as **90-days** before “Program Completion”
- Apply as late as **60-days** after “Program Completion”

- How to define “**Program Completion**?”
  - Undergrad Students
    - Commencement Day (06/16/2017)
    - Last Day of the Term if Winter or Fall
  - Graduate Students
    - Defense date or the last date of term in which you defend
No Employment “Gap”

GRADUATE STUDENTS

- From TA/ RA to Post-Doc at Caltech without missing a paycheck
- Start your new job the day after your program completion date

Best Practices
- Apply 90-days \textit{BEFORE} your program completion date
- Request the \textit{EARLIEST} start date

03/16/2017 = OPT Application Mailed
06/16/2017 = Program Completion Date
06/17/2017 = Requested OPT Start Date
Employment “Gap”

ALL STUDENTS

- From student – to job seeker – to hopeful employee
- Give yourself extra time to find the job you want

Process

- Apply 90-days BEFORE you want to START working
- Request the LATEST allowable start date (within 60-days of completion)

06/16/2017 = Program Completion Date

* (03/16/2017 - 08/08/2017) = OPT Application Mailed *

08/15/2017 = Requested OPT Start Date

Remember – CANNOT work during this 2-month gap
Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
Completing the Application at ISP

Visit ISP during walk-in hours 1:00 – 4:00 PM
Schedule an appointment with an ISP advisor outside of walk-in hours
   – A typical appointment takes 20 minutes

Bring the following to your OPT application appointment:
   – Check for $410, made payable to “Department of Homeland Security”
   – Valid Passport
   – I-94 (print online record or is stapled to your passport)
   – Any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EAD)
   – Any previous I-20s if participated in Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
   – 2 Recent and identical U.S. passport photos
   – ISP mails the application to USCIS
Application Process

• U.S. Passport Photo Guidelines
  – Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
  – Make sure photo presents full head
  – White or off-white background
  – No shadows on the face or background

Examples of correct passport photos
USCIS Receives Your Application

• Receipt Notice from USCIS
  – Arrives at ISP within 2 - 3 weeks after application is mailed to USCIS
    • ISP will notify you by email
    • ISP will retain the Receipt Notice
  – Contains the Receipt Date – the date on which USCIS began processing your application
  – Contains a Receipt Number, or “WAC” number, specific to your application
    • Track your case status online: https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do
EAD Mailed to ISP

- Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
  - Issued within 90-days of Receipt Date
    - ISP will notify you by email
    - ISP will keep EAD until you collect it
  - Contains the authorized employment start date/end date
    - You may only be employed on OPT during the dates listed on your EAD
  - EAD states “Not Valid for Re-Entry” – this means that the EAD alone does not grant you authorization to re-enter the U.S. (I-20, F-1 visa, and passport are still needed)
  - Should be kept safe with your passport (not in your wallet)
    - Only need to present the EAD on your first day of employment and at the U.S. border
Request to Expedite OPT Processing

• If you have a job offer that requires you to begin before the standard 90-day processing time and you can demonstrate significant hardship to you or your employer, you may qualify for expedited processing by USCIS.

• To Request an Expedite
  – Need Employment Offer Letter
  • Company Letterhead
  • Requested Start date
  • USCIS OPT Receipt Notice

Contact USCIS National Customer Service Center: 1-800-375-5283
Your Responsibilities During OPT

Employment:
• Cannot accrue more than **90 days** of unemployment during approved OPT period
• Full-time employment, which is at least 20 hours/ week
• Employment related to student’s degree program

Reporting Requirements:
• Must report employer name and address to ISP
• Must report any changes in employment to ISP
• Must report your local address to ISP

Email all updates to: isp@caltech.edu
Allowed Employment

- Multiple Employers
- Single Employer
- 1099 Employment (contractor)
- Self-Employed Business Owner *
- Employment through a Temp Agency or Consulting Firm

- Unpaid Employment
  - Can “work” as a volunteer or in unpaid intern positions related to your field
  - Positions need to be truly unpaid/ volunteer positions
  - At least 20 hours/ week
Travel & OPT

- **BEFORE** OPT is approved:
  - I-20
  - Passport
  - Valid F-1 Visa *
  - OPT Receipt Notice

- **AFTER** OPT is approved:
  - I-20 (signed for travel w/in the last 6 months)
  - EAD
  - Passport
  - Valid F-1 Visa *
  - Proof of employment (employer offer letter)
Going Back to School

Transferring to another school or starting a new degree at Caltech during OPT?

Starting a new program of study **during** your authorized OPT period

- Requires ISP to transfer/ level change to your I-20 record in SEVIS
- Ends your OPT & permission to work
- Any remaining OPT time is lost

Consult an ISP advisor before beginning a new program of study
24-Month STEM Extension of OPT

24-month STEM extension of OPT is available for students:
• Qualifying major that is included on the U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement List of eligible “STEM” majors.

Caltech majors that currently do not qualify for the 24-month extension are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Full Name (Caltech/ FSA)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEM</td>
<td>HSS</td>
<td>Business Economics and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ec</td>
<td>HSS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>En</td>
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<td>History</td>
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<td>HPS</td>
<td>HSS</td>
<td>History and Philosophy of Science</td>
</tr>
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<td>ISP</td>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Independent Studies Program</td>
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<td>HSS</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>HSS</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Overview of STEM extension of OPT:

- **New Benefits**
  - Now 24-months
  - Two lifetime STEM OPT extensions
  - Can accrue 60 days of unemployment on STEM OPT (cumulative total for post-completion OPT (90) + STEM OPT (60) = 150 days)
  - Travel + Employment automatically extended 180-days upon STEM OPT filing (require STEM application receipt from USCIS + expired OPT EAD)

- **New Responsibilities**
  - Form I-983 Training Plan Required
  - Form I-983 submitted to ISP within 10 days of any change of employer or any “material change”
  - Self evaluation of employment training reported (every 12 months) or at change of employer
  - Report Unemployment
STEM Extension
Employment

Allowed:
- Sequential Employers
- At least 20 hours per week (maximum of two employers concurrently)
- E-Verified participant

Not Allowed:
- Volunteering
- 1099 or “independent contractor” or “consulting”
- Temporary agencies (3rd party employers)*
STEM Extension of OPT

Application Process

- Can apply up to 90-days BEFORE your OPT ends
- **MUST** apply prior to the end of your OPT
- Submit Completed Form I-983 Training Plan to ISP to receive new I-20 for STEM OPT extension application process. Template available at [https://international.caltech.edu/employment/f1/STEMprocedures](https://international.caltech.edu/employment/f1/STEMprocedures)
- Prepare new Form I-765 (1-page application form available at [www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis))
- $410 application fee
- 2 Recent and identical passport photos
- Diploma or transcripts showing completion of all coursework
- **MUST** have an employer enrolled in E-Verify. Enter the employer name as listed in E-Verify and the E-Verify Company Identification Number
- **Student submits application directly to USCIS**
Talking with Employers about OPT

Before you go to an interview:

• Know your immigration responsibilities and options
• Know what you need from the employer
• Be ready to offer solutions
• Be ready to talk about immigration issues in a general way
Questions?

Still have questions? Please contact an ISP advisor.

ISP is open for Walk-In Hours
Monday – Friday
1:00 – 4:00 PM

ISP is also available by appointment
Please contact ISP if you need to schedule an appointment

isp@caltech.edu
626-395-6330

international.caltech.edu