


# Optional Practical Training

SUNY Potsdam  
International Education  
& Programs (IEP)



# OPT – What is OPT?

- OPT allows you to live and work in the U.S. for a maximum of 12 months AFTER graduating (EXCEPT for qualifying STEM majors who may be granted an additional 17 months of OPT)
- OPT is a way to gain hands-on experience in your field (applying the theories you have learned in class in a practical manner)
- OPT is the first step in gaining Permanent Residence status in the U.S. (may lead to H1-B, then to PR status, IF employer is willing to sponsor you in each phase)

# Am I eligible for OPT?

- You must have maintained F1 student status for one full academic year (two semesters at SUNY Potsdam) before applying for OPT.
- You must be graduating in the semester in which you are applying (verify with your academic advisor that you are indeed going to graduate at the end of the semester)

# Where can I work while on OPT?

- You may work anywhere in the U.S. as long as the job is directly related to your major/degree and job duties must be appropriate with level of education.  
Example: If you have an education degree, you may NOT work as the janitor in a school or as a bus driver. Working as a teacher or teaching assistant would be appropriate.

# When can I apply for OPT?

- It is best to apply for OPT at the beginning of your last semester at SUNY Potsdam (normal processing time is 60-90 days, sometimes longer)
- You should apply around 90 days **BEFORE** your official graduation date and you may apply during your 60 day grace period **AFTER** graduation

# What are the conditions of OPT?

- The job must be directly related to your major and appropriate for your level of study.
- You do not need a job to apply for OPT but during any 12-month period of standard post-completion OPT, no student may be unemployed for a total of more than 90 days.
- You must work a minimum average of 20+ hours per week (over the entire 365-day OPT period)
- Must notify IEP regarding changes of address and employer within **10 days of the change.**

# What are the conditions of OPT? (cont'd)

Every six months from your OPT start date you **must** submit a report to International Education & Programs containing the following information:

- Legal Name
- Residential and/or mailing address
- Name of current employer
- Address of employer

# When can I begin working while on OPT?

- You must plan carefully and should apply for OPT well in advance of your official graduation date. (Approval process generally takes 60-90 days).
- You must receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD or OPT card) **BEFORE** you begin working and only on the day of or after the official start date on the EAD

# Can I travel during OPT?

- Traveling out of North America while your OPT application is pending is NOT recommended. (Travel to Canada or Mexico is allowed but is a risk. Consult IEP before traveling.)
- You may not reenter the U.S. if you left AFTER receiving your OPT card and have no job to return to (OPT status will be automatically terminated)
- Best advice: travel only after receiving the OPT card, be sure to have a job to return to before leaving the U.S.

# OPT Factoids

- OPT Start Dates: After your official graduation date and before the 60<sup>th</sup> day of your 60-day grace period. Pick a start date that begins on a Monday and not on a U.S. holiday
- **Be sure to give the following address on Form I-765:**

3. Address in the United States (Number and Street)      (Apt. Number)

44 Pierrepont Ave INTL ED C/O SUNY

(Town or City)

(State/Country)

(Zip Code)

Potsdam

NY

13676

Once EAD is received, the International Education staff will contact the student and forward the OPT card to the appropriate address.

# OPT Factoids continued

- Wages earned while on OPT are not subject to Social Security, Medicare, or unemployment taxes – consult with employer's payroll office regarding tax treaties
- Begin applying for master's, second master's, PhD program, or change of status (ex. H1-B) well before official end date of OPT
- You have 60 days after official end date of OPT to finalize travel plans, pack, say goodbye. You must leave the country, have a change of status application pending, or have a valid I-20 from another school before the 61 day.

# Thank you for attending!

Please feel free to contact:

**International Education & Programs**

Sisson Hall

Monday – Friday; 8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Tel: (315) 267-2507

Email: [international@potdam.edu](mailto:international@potdam.edu)

Web: [www.potsdam.edu/academics/international](http://www.potsdam.edu/academics/international)