OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) CHECKLIST & GUIDELINES

Graduation: December, 2017

Mid-October: meet with ISSS to review materials for OPT application.

Mid-November: Gather materials and meet with ISSS again to confirm and submit application (submission will be done on your own; ISSS office will simply look over your documents and comment on necessary changes)

Early January: anticipated arrival of EAD card (generally takes approximately 6 weeks from date of OPT application submissions)

Mid-February: OPT begins

Mid-May: 90-day unemployment period ends. At this point, if you have not found work, you must leave the U.S., or you remain out of status & can face major immigration issues in the future. (ISSS office does not recommend expending all 90 days of unemployment, if can be helped.)

April: H1-B application due. (please consult with your company of hire and/or a lawyer to pursue an H1-B. The ISSS office cannot advise on this, but will help to make sure your SEVIS record is maintained). Apply for a Cap-Gap Extension for your OPT to remain in status between July & October. Please note: H1-B applications for December graduates are extremely difficult, given the time-frame.

February, 2019: OPT ends. You have 60 days to depart the U.S.

Graduation: May, 2018

Early February: meet with ISSS to review materials for OPT application.

Early March: Gather materials and meet with ISSS again to confirm and submit application

Mid-June: anticipated arrival of EAD card (generally takes approximately 6 weeks from date of OPT application)

Mid-July: OPT begins

Mid-October: 90-day unemployment period ends. At this point, if you have not found work, you must leave the U.S., or you remain out of status & can face major immigration issues in the future. (ISSS office does not recommend expending all 90 days of unemployment, if can be helped.)

April, 2019: H1-B application due, (please consult with your company of hire and/or a lawyer to pursue an H1-B. The ISSS office cannot advise on this, but will help to make sure your SEVIS record is maintained). Apply for a Cap-Gap Extension for your OPT to remain in status between July & October.

July: OPT ends. You have 60 days to depart the U.S.. Cap-Gap, if approved, goes into effect.

October: F-1 visa ends and H1-B begins.
STEPS & CHECKLIST

1) Meet with the ISSS to review necessary documents and discuss OPT dates and employment options.

2) Gather the following application materials:

CHECKLIST FOR OPT APPLICATION SUBMISSION

☐ Completed OPT application signed by your academic advisor
☐ Completed I-765: Application for Employment Authorization
  ▪ Application & Instructions can be found here: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
☐ (1) Photocopy of the following:
  ▪ Passport Identification Page (full page spread)
  ▪ F-1 visa page (in passport) – with entry stamp (full page spread)
  ▪ All previous I-20s (only pages 1 and 2)
☐ Recent I-94 (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/)
☐ Previous EAD card (if applicable)
☐ (2) U.S. Passport-style photos
  ▪ Must be taken within 30 days; old photographs cannot be used
  ▪ 2in x 2in
  ▪ White or off-white background
  ▪ Specific requirements can be found in the I-765 instructions; ISSS recommends providing these exact instructions to the photo department at Walgreen or CVS to ensure accuracy.
  ▪ In pencil or felt pen, write your name & I-94 number on the back of each photo
☐ Pay I-765 fee: $410
  ▪ Check, Money Order, or Credit Card (ISSS recommends money order)
    ▪ If using a check, make sure to keep enough money in the account; if the check bounces (doesn’t go through), your application can be automatically denied.
    ▪ Credit card payment instructions can be found at via https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
      ○ Filing Fee: G-1450; please double check to confirm accuracy. If the credit card does not process, your application can be automatically denied
  ▪ Address check or money order to: "U.S. Department of Homeland Security"
  ▪ Make sure to date the check/money order the actual date you got the check; date should be listed as Month/Day/Year
☐ G-1145 (will provide you with electronic notification of the status of your application; can be accessed via https://www.uscis.gov/i-765)
☐ (2) Mailing labels for shipping (see instructions on next page)
  ▪ Buy & Print a mailing label: https://study.eshipglobal.com/
Student sign-up > Registration > Send Documents, OPT Application > Select Receiver’s Address > USCIS Phoenix Lockbox: either choose USPS or non-USPS (FedEx/UPS) – address automatically populates > Choose carrier and shipment time* > Pay > Print out mailing label(s)
*don’t waste money on overnight shipping unless really necessary

It’s time to start shipping your OPT!

Ship expedited at a lower cost with UEMS
UEMS allows students to send their OPT applications to the USCIS office. Students can choose their carrier (UPS, FedEx, or USPS), what type of delivery (next day, 2-day, etc.), and ship at discounted rates.

01 UEMS System
Sign in to your UEMS account or create one if you do not already have one.

02 Select Receiver
Select the “OPT Application” or “Send Documents to USCIS” option.

03 Fill Out The Form
Fill out the form information, making sure to select the proper USCIS location.

04 Select, Print & Ship
Select the carrier you want to use, pay for the shipment, and print the label. Then all you need to do is ship the documents.

eShipGlobal
Start shipping with UEMS at: http://study.eshipglobal.com
3) Schedule a follow-up appointment with the ISSS office to review & approve documents.
   - You may need to make changes and/or provide additional documents or information
   - ISSS office will provide an updated I-20 with OPT requested status, as well as an updated travel signature; a copy of this I-20 will need to be included with your application.
   - You will provide the shipping labels for the ISSS office. The office will provide the envelopes and your application will be shipped during your follow-up appointment.

4) Notice of Receipt: If you filled out a G-1145, you will receive a text/email within 48 hours of the receipt of your documents; otherwise, USCIS will send you a receipt notice (I-797). This will confirm the receipt of your OPT application.
   - This text or email does not provide any benefits of employment; it does not yet authorize you to work.
   - I-797 will provide you with a link and receipt number so you can check your status online.
   - Please confirm your name and other details provided on the receipt are correct; if you notice errors, contact ISSS immediately.
   - If you receive any other letters or requests from USCIS during this time, please come to our office immediately; process requests are often time sensitive.
   - **I-539 (Request for Evidence) is extremely time-sensitive and requires immediate action**
   - **ISSS cannot provide any additional information about your case**

5) Approval
   - You will receive an Employment Authorization Document in the mail (EAD card)
   - Even if your OPT has been approved, **YOU CANNOT WORK UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR EAD CARD**
   - Once you have received your EAD card, please come to the ISSS office office to make a copy for our records. Confirm that all details are correct; any issues should be brought to the ISSS office immediately.
   - The dates listed on your EAD card are the official start and end dates of your OPT
   - You have 90 days of unemployment from the OPT start date, according to USCIS regulations
   - Once your OPT is approved, you will receive an email to create a **SEVP Portal Account**. You can find more information here.
     - The SEVP Portal is where you will update your employment or address information **within 10 days**. All updates MUST be made through the Portal; the ISSS office cannot update.
   - **Failure to find and document employment within 90 days of the OPT start date printed on your EAD card can result in termination of your F-1 SEVIS record. You will be required to depart the U.S. immediately.**
OTHER IMPORTANT OPT INFORMATION:

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE WHILE ON OPT

As your time at Columbia College Chicago is complete, you will no longer be eligible for the Columbia insurance policy. You have a few alternative options:

- Your employer may provide insurance
  - This is the best-case scenario, but worth asking a potential employer during or after an interview
- LewerMark student insurance
- iNext Student Insurance
  - [https://www.inext.com/plans/travel-to-usa/academic/](https://www.inext.com/plans/travel-to-usa/academic/) [iNext Scholar is recommended]
- ISO
  - [https://www.isoa.org/](https://www.isoa.org/) [OPTima]

- For all insurance plans, make sure to do your research as to the coverage it will provide; this is especially important if you have specific medical needs.
- The ISSS office is happy to help you review and choose a plan; please make an appointment to do so.

TRAVEL BEFORE & DURING OPT

While OPT application is still pending:

- The ISSS office does not recommend traveling until you have received your Receipt Notification of Application (I-797/I-797C)
- If you do decide to travel while your OPT application is pending, in addition to all necessary travel documents, be sure to bring with your I-20 with “OPT REQUESTED” status noted and your I-765 receipt confirmation (I-797C).

When OPT is approved:

- Passport with valid visa
- Updated I-20 with either proof of OPT application, or documentation of employment on page 2
- Proof of employment (offer letter or employment confirmation letter from employer)
- EAD Card

**Note:** Before considering travel, please make sure your visa is not expired. If it is, you will need to get a new visa/ask for a visa extension at a U.S. Embassy or consulate outside the U.S. **Note:** A U.S. visa cannot be granted while in country.

**Note:** Travel guidelines are only recommendations; the ISSS office cannot guarantee any travel will be approved, and traveling during OPT is always a risk. Bring as much documentation with you as you can, and **always make copies of all your documents!**

AFTER OPT

You have 60 days to leave the US after your EAD card has expired.