Optional Practical Training (OPT) General Guidance

Eligibility and guidelines:

- You must be in F-1 status for at least 9 consecutive months.
  - Exceptions: A.C.E (English Language) students are not eligible for OPT.
  - A student who has used full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for one full year is ineligible for OPT.
- The employment must be directly related to your major.
- You may work anywhere in the United States.
- OPT permission is for 12 months of employment. Students enrolled in STEM major (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) are eligible for 17 months extension (details provided separately).
- Employment must be full time (over 20hrs/week and up to 40hrs/week).
- You do not need a job offer before applying for OPT.
- OPT start date must be no later than 60 days after graduation (program completion).

Application assistance by International Student Advisors at the Office of International Programs (OIP) is required. Times reserved for OPT applications are by appointment by writing to international@montana.edu. OPT application assistance is available on Tuesdays 8:00-9:00am, Wednesdays or Thursdays 4:00-5:00pm at the OIP, 400 Culbertson Hall.

Documents needed to apply:

- I-20: Bring all of your I-20’s.
- 2 passport photos (taken within the last two months)
- Passport with visa and entry stamp to download new I-94.
- Checkbook or money order. The application cost is $380.00 – checks made out to “Department of Homeland Security.”
- Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card (if you have previously applied for OPT)
- I-765 to be filled out at OIP – the OIP address will be entered as a return address to ensure the card does not get lost.
- Copy of your graduation application.

Early in your final semester of study is the time to contact OIP to learn about and apply for OPT. Applications may be completed no earlier than 90 days prior to the chosen OPT start date. Applications must be completed no later than the last day of the 60 day grace period after program completion. Employment CANNOT begin until the EAD card is received. Estimated time from application to receipt of EAD card is three months.

OIP “OPT Checklist” revised 3-4-15