Optional practical training is available for degree seeking students. An initial period of 12 months may be awarded by Immigration (USCIS) per degree level. You may be eligible for a new period of OPT only if you move subsequently to a higher degree level. OPT can be used during breaks in study or after completion of your final degree requirement. OPT requires that you pursue employment in your area of study, but does not require you to have a job offer at the time of filing.

**TIMELINE**

- TOO EARLY to apply for OPT
- TOO LATE to apply for OPT
- 90 DAYS: I-20 End Date
  - Program Completion Date
  - Apply for OPT
- 60 DAYS: Requested OPT start date
  - Apply for OPT
- 1 YEAR: 90 days of aggregate unemployment

You can only apply for OPT starting 90 days before your I-20 ends and no later than 60 days after it ends.

**OPT APPLICATION**

1. Submit to ISO:
   - I-20 Request for OPT form
   - I-765 form
   - Academic Advisor Recommendation form

2. Submit all forms to US Citizenship and Immigration Services
   
   Be mindful of the timeline above.

   **Detailed application instructions and link to forms at** [http://issp.virginia.edu](http://issp.virginia.edu)

**TIPS FROM ISO**

- Best to apply as early as possible
- USCIS can take 90 days or more to approve your application
- If you are applying WITHOUT a job offer, pick the latest date in the 60 day window.
- Avoid picking a weekend or holiday date for your requested OPT start date
- OPT start date CANNOT change after you submit your application to USCIS. Employers may be willing to accommodate your start date.