



# PhD Student Handbook

Academic Year 2017-18

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## **Welcome**

Welcome to USC and the Viterbi School of Engineering!

You are now a part of a vast community of dedicated, resourceful individuals who are striving to obtain their doctoral degrees in engineering. As you take part in this exhilarating and unforgettable experience, take advantage of the numerous opportunities that are available to you as a student at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering. Keep in mind that the individuals around you come from diverse communities around the world and bring with them knowledge that may give insight into your goals. Taking the time to establish connections with peers, faculty, and other professionals will make your experience more rewarding. There are many exciting experiences awaiting you, but before you dive in, we want to ensure that you have the tools you need to succeed.

This handbook was created with you in mind. It includes a wide range of information from fellowships to requirements for your doctoral dissertations. We have also provided information specifically for international students. The information provided will be a useful tool for you throughout your entire PhD journey, from the time you set foot on campus to the time you graduate.

There are plenty of other resources available online on the [USC Viterbi School of Engineering Website](#) and the USC Viterbi [Graduate and Professional Programs \(GAPP\) Website](#). The GAPP Office is also a great place to visit if you have any questions. It is located in OHE-106 and is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:00pm.

Jennifer Gerson and Tracy Charles are your Doctoral Programs staff in the GAPP Office. Contact them if you have any questions regarding fellowships, OPT, CPT, RCLs, or other PhD related topics.

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### **Faculty Mentor**

You and your advisor share the responsibility for establishing a relationship that contributes to the successful pursuit of your graduate degree. Your mentoring relationship should reflect mutual respect, fairness, collegiality, honesty and open communication. The following guidelines outline the ideal responsibilities of each party in the mentoring relationship. Of course, both you and your mentor must expect a degree of real-world accommodation to these specifications.

#### The Ideal Mentor:

- Reads and returns work promptly, with constructive comments.
- Develops with the student a list of short- and long-term research and professional goals.
- Clarifies expectations and policies.
- Communicates regularly about research progress, scheduling changes, and workshops or seminars that will aid in the student's professional development.
- Provides students with opportunities to develop and practice professional skills required for research, teaching and service.
- Helps students develop an innovative dissertation topic.
- Helps students develop a marketable job dossier.
- Supports the variety of professional interests a student may have in research, industry, teaching and service.
- Facilitates networking.
- Knows course and milestone requirements.
- Treats students respectfully as future colleagues.
- Encourages students, and provides emotional and moral support.

#### The Ideal Student:

- Chooses his or her mentor thoughtfully and wisely by becoming familiar with the professor's research and professional interests.
- Has developed short- and long-term professional and research goals, and shares these goals with his or her mentor.
- Is aware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses.
- Submits work promptly and comes to meetings prepared with specific goals, questions and tasks to be accomplished in that meeting.
- Communicates regularly with faculty about his or her progress, changes in focus, and professional needs.
- Asks for clarification of the mentor's expectations and policies.
- Respects the mentor's time and reputation.
- Asks the mentor for information and advice about workshops that will enhance professional development.
- Knows the requirements for the degree program, and asks the mentor for help in successfully completing those requirements.
- Takes the mentor's advice seriously.

Source: [Graduate School Website](#)

### **PhD Course Requirements**

Satisfactory completion of at least 60 units of approved graduate-level course work with a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 is required of all PhD students in engineering. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit. Work graded C- or below is not acceptable for subject or unit credit toward any graduate degree. Undergraduate prerequisites and graduate course work will be required in accordance with the regulations of the major department or program and the recommendations of the student's qualifying exam committee. Transfer units are subject to approval by the Office of Degree Progress (for course work taken at institutions in the United States) or by the Office of Graduate Admission (for course work taken at institutions outside the United States) and by the qualifying exam committee.

### **Screening Exam**

The original admission decision admitting a student to the PhD program is based on the student's previous academic records, Graduate Record Examinations scores and other evidence of scholastic abilities indicating promise for completing graduate studies. It is also a prerequisite that all PhD students successfully complete the screening procedures designated by the department. These usually consist of a written and an oral examination administered by the faculty. Students who fail the screening procedure may not be recommended to continue in the PhD program and any additional work may not be counted toward the degree.

### **Qualifying Exam Committee**

The qualifying exam committee is normally composed of five members, although additional members may be included at the student's or committee chair's discretion. The committee chair and at least two additional members must be affiliated with the student's program. The committee must also have one member from outside the student's home department. Faculty eligible to serve as committee chairs and members include tenured and tenure-track faculty of outstanding stature who have a documented record of exceptional expertise and superior achievement in their field, and whose appointment has been approved by the Dean of the Viterbi School of Engineering. At least three members must be tenured or tenure-track. [Graduate School Website.](#)

### **Qualifying Exam**

The qualifying exam is intended to determine the extent of the student's knowledge in engineering as well as the ability to do original and scholarly research. The qualifying exam committee decides the nature of the qualifying examination (both oral and written portions) according to the policies applicable in each department.

GRSC-800 Studies for the Qualifying Exam is an optional, zero-unit course that students may enroll in during the semester in which the qualifying exam is to be taken. While this course does not fulfill any degree requirements, it does fulfill the full-time enrollment requirement. If not otherwise enrolled, a student must enroll in GRSC-800 during the

semester in which the qualifying exam is to be taken. Students are strongly encouraged to take the qualifying exam during the first semester in which they are enrolled in GRSC-800, and may not enroll in more than two semesters of GRSC-800 before taking the qualifying exam.

The exam may be scheduled at any time during the semester provided that all members of the committee are available to administer it. After passing the qualifying exam the PhD student is admitted to candidacy by the Graduate School and the dissertation committee is established. After this step, students will normally engage in at least one year of full-time graduate study and research on campus.

### **Doctoral Dissertation**

An acceptable dissertation based on original investigation and supervised directly by the dissertation committee is required. The dissertation must show mastery of a special field, capacity for independent research and a scholarly result. Candidates are expected to keep all members of the dissertation committee informed of their progress at all stages of the dissertation. The dissertation committee must consist of at least three members. Two committee members must be from the home program, at least one of whom must be tenured, and one member must be from outside the home program. Faculty eligible to serve as committee chairs and members include tenured and tenure track faculty, and non-tenure track faculty of outstanding stature who have a documented record of exceptional expertise and superior achievement in their field, and whose appointment has been approved by the dean of the student's school.

### **Defense of the Dissertation**

After satisfactorily meeting all other requirements and after the research and writing of the dissertation are substantially complete, the PhD candidate must pass a general final oral examination devoted to the major field and to the topic of the dissertation. The examination will be conducted in such a manner as to determine to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee that the candidate has attained the stage of scholarly advancement and power of investigation demanded by the university for final recommendation to the doctorate. The faculty are invited to attend and to participate in the final oral examination. However, only the dissertation committee may vote. Unanimous approval of the committee is required for the student to upload the dissertation to the Graduate School.

### **Departmental Requirements**

The requirements and regulations set forth in the USC Catalogue are to be construed as the minimal requirements only as established by the Graduate School. Students must meet all the requirements established by their department. Please see the department links below.

### **Progress Toward the Degree**

PhD students are expected to make regular progress toward their degrees as defined by the faculty of their respective departments and within the time limits allowed. Graduate students' progress and performance are reviewed each semester. Students are expected to complete their required coursework within the first two to three years of beginning the PhD program. The qualifying exam is typically taken in year three or four. The

dissertation is written and defended in year four or five. Students making unsatisfactory progress receive a formal written warning and are placed on a semester of academic

warning with specific conditions to be met for continuation in the program. Please refer to catalogue sections [Academic Warning and Dismissal of Graduate Students](#) and [Grade Point Average Requirements](#). Questions about timely progress toward the degree may be sent to Jennifer Gerson at [jgerson@usc.edu](mailto:jgerson@usc.edu).

### **Enrollment Requirement**

All PhD students are required to be enrolled in coursework counting towards their degree every Fall and Spring term, from the beginning through the end of the PhD

International PhD students and all PhD students receiving funding through a fellowship or graduate assistantship are required to be enrolled full-time, which is six (6) units, each Fall and Spring semester.

Note: 794ABCDZ Doctoral Dissertation and GRSC-800 Studies for the Qualifying Exam fulfill this full-time requirement. Please consult your faculty and departmental advisors regarding your specific course requirements and obtain any necessary D-clearances. Please remember, D-Clearance only provides you permission to register for a class, it does not register you for the class. You must complete your registration online through [myUSC](#).

Courses may not be taken for audit or pass/no pass.

### **Tuition Refund Insurance**

Tuition Refund Insurance is optional, however, if you choose it you are responsible for paying this fee. You may reject Tuition Refund Insurance at the time of registration. If you have already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance, but would like to opt-out, please visit [Opt-Out Tuition Refund Insurance](#).

### Fellowship Payments

We strongly encourage all of our students to sign up for direct deposit to ensure your payment is delivered as soon as it is available.

**Domestic Fellowship Students** can have their stipends direct deposited through the Office of Payment Services (formerly called Disbursement Control). Set up instructions can be found at <https://procurement.usc.edu/payments/reimbursements/direct-deposit/>. (the form is linked on the bottom right under “Related Documents”) If you do not sign up for direct deposit, your stipends will be mailed to your local address. If you do not have a local address on file and you do not sign up for direct deposit, your stipends will be mailed to your permanent address. Please make sure your local address is up to date in OASIS. You may access OASIS directing by logging into [MyUSC](#).

**International Fellowship Students** will receive their stipends through USC Payroll and can [sign up for direct deposit through Workday](#). New fellows, please note that GLACIER must be completed and processed before you can access Workday. If you do not sign up for Direct Deposit, your stipend will be a paper check and will be routed to the GAPP Office. You will be notified when it is ready for pick-up.

The first paycheck will be on paper. The GAPP Office will notify you when it is ready for pick up.

Students are required to pay all charges on their USC account in which they are responsible by the deadline noted on the [PhD Important Dates and Deadlines](#) or they may be subject to late fees and finance charges. **It is your responsibility to check your USCe.pay account to ensure your account it up to date and you have not accrued late fees or finance charges.** Please visit [Student Accounts](#) for more information. Additional information can be found at [USCe.pay](#). If you have questions regarding your account, please email Tracy Charles at [tcharles@usc.edu](mailto:tcharles@usc.edu).

### Stipend Payment Schedule

If you have a fellowship through USC, the pay date is the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month unless the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday. In which case, the payment will be available the business day prior to the 26<sup>th</sup>. Stipends are considered late after the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month. Though you may receive your stipends via direct deposit before the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, please note that the stipend schedule does not run through Payment Services on the same day each month, so you will not always receive your stipend on the same day each month.

Most USC fellowships pay August-May. If you have an external fellowship, your fellowship stipend will be disbursed per the foundation’s guidelines.

### Important Information for Fellowship Students

If it is after the 26th of the month and you still haven't received your stipend, or your stipend amount is incorrect, please email Doctoral Programs Coordinator, Tracy Charles,



at [tcharles@usc.edu](mailto:tcharles@usc.edu). Please include your full name, USC ID# and amount in question. Tracy will work the appropriate department(s) to resolve the issue. As a reminder, students must be enrolled full-time (six advisor-approved units or GSRC-800 or 794ABCDZ) by the recommended registration deadline in order for fellowship stipends to disburse on time.

New international fellows must submit GLACIER paperwork by the recommended deadline for processing by the University in order to be paid on time.

Continuing international students must update GLACIER paperwork if there is a change in status, such as changing from fellowship to an RA/TA.

### [Fellowship FAQ](#)

#### **What is a fellowship?**

Fellowships are awarded to students who achieve a high level of academic excellence.

Fellowships allow students to focus full time on their studies. Fellowships typically include tuition, student health insurance package fees, access to the Engemann Student Health center, and a stipend distributed over the course of the academic year.

Some fellowships also cover mandatory fees such as the Graduate Student Programming fee, Norman Topping Student Aid Fund fee, and the Student Services fee. Lab fees and parking expenses are not covered by fellowships.

All parameters of your fellowship are outlined in your offer letter. We recommend that you review your offer letter carefully and become familiar with the terms of your fellowship.

#### **I have just arrived on campus to start my PhD program. What do I need to do to receive my fellowship?**

International student fellowship students must complete Passport Verification (PPV) upon arrival to USC; as well as attend a Viterbi One-Stop session to complete GLACIER paperwork.

Domestic and international fellowship students must be enrolled full-time to receive their fellowship. Full-time enrollment is equivalent to six advisor-approved units or GSRC-800 or 794ABCDZ. We recommend that PhD students register at least two weeks prior to the start of the fall semester, and before the winter recess for the spring semester.

For more information on important dates and deadlines, please visit [PhD Important Dates and Deadlines](#).

Please also visit our [Information for Newly Admitted Doctoral Students](#) for additional information.

### **When do I receive my stipend payments?**

The pay date is the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month unless the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday. In which case, the payment will be available the business day prior to the 26<sup>th</sup>. Stipends are considered late after the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month. Though you may receive your stipends via direct deposit before the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, please note that the stipend schedule does not run through Payment Services on the same day each month, so you will not always receive your stipend on the same day each month.

Most fellowships pay August-May. Please check your offer letter for detailed information regarding your fellowship.

### **How is the fellowship stipend disbursed?**

We strongly encourage all of our students to sign up for direct deposit to ensure your payment is delivered as soon as it is available.

Domestic Fellowship Students can have their stipends direct deposited through the Office of Payment Services (formerly called Disbursement Control). Set up instructions can be found at <https://undergrad.usc.edu/files/2015/06/Direct-Deposit-Form.pdf>. If you do not sign up for direct deposit, your stipends will be mailed to your local address. If you do not have a local address on file and you do not sign up for direct deposit, your stipends will be mailed to your permanent address. Please make sure your local address is up to date in OASIS. You may access OASIS directing by logging into MyUSC.

International Fellowship Students will receive their stipends through USC Payroll and can [sign up for direct deposit in Workday](#). New fellows, please note that GLACIER must be completed and processed before you can access Workday. If you do not sign up for Direct Deposit, your stipend will be a paper check and will be routed to the GAPP Office. You will be notified when it is ready for pick up.

### **Will the fellowship stipend be taxed and if so, what will be the tax rate?**

We strongly suggest that fellows contact the IRS directly, and/or consult with a tax professional. While receiving your fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form (although when you serve as a Teaching or Research Assistant you will receive a W-2).

The following link, <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf> contains information regarding tax treatment of fellowship awards. In addition, <https://sfs.usc.edu/tax/1098-t/> provides information regarding the IRS

1098-t form. These links are not meant to be a comprehensive list of tax resources or forms that you should consider.

International Students should review the [OIS website](#).

**How are the tuition units allocated while I am on fellowship?**

In general, you will receive enough tuition units to cover full-time enrollment during the academic year. Please refer to your fellowship offer letter for specific details. These units are split evenly between the fall, spring and summer semesters. If you wish to exceed the number of units stated in your offer letter, please contact your academic department's staff graduate advisor for advisement. The GAPP Office reviews requests for additional tuition over the fellowship on a case-by-case basis.

**I'd like to take an art or yoga class, or audit a class. Will my fellowship cover the tuition?**

In general, no. Only classes that count towards your degree program will be covered by your fellowship.

**My department wants me to work as a Research Assistant (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA). Can I do this while on fellowship?**

Most fellowships do not allow a student to simultaneously serve as an RA or TA while on fellowship. If you wish to accept a RA or TA position, your fellowship may be deferred for that time period. Please review your offer letter for specific terms. Please notify the GAPP Office as soon as possible so that your funding information is accurate. Fellowship deferments must be approved by the Add/Drop Deadline (third Friday of the semester).

**Can I receive two fellowships at the same time?**

Most fellowships do not allow a student to accept more than one fellowship at a time, and you may need to either decide which to accept, defer, or possibly forfeit. Please notify the GAPP Office as soon as possible so that your funding information is accurate. Fellowship deferments must be approved by the Add/Drop Deadline (third Friday of the semester).

**Can I work during the academic year while I am receiving my fellowship award?**

No. Fellows are expected to devote full-time to study towards their degree and not to undertake employment or other time consuming commitments during the academic year from the end of August through mid-May.

**Can I accept a summer internship or summer RA or TA position?**

You may accept a summer internship or a summer RA/TA position. However, if your fellowship pays a stipend over the summer term, you must defer the fellowship. If you are an international student and plan to work off-campus, you must apply for [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#).

**Can I receive scholarships during my fellowship?**

Possibly. Please notify the GAPP Office immediately if you are offered additional funding.

**I didn't receive my fellowship stipend or the amount was incorrect, what do I do?**

If it is after the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month and you still haven't received your stipend, or your stipend amount is incorrect, please email Doctoral Programs Coordinator, Tracy Charles, at [tcharles@usc.edu](mailto:tcharles@usc.edu). Please include your full name, USC ID# and amount in question. Tracy will work the appropriate department(s) to resolve the issue. As a reminder, students must be enrolled full-time (six advisor-approved units or GSRC-800 or 794ABCDZ) by the recommended registration deadline in order for fellowship stipends to disburse on time.

New international fellows must submit GLACIER paperwork by the recommended deadline for processing by the University in order to be paid on time.

Continuing international students must update GLACIER paperwork if there is a change in status, such as changing from fellowship to an RA/TA.

### **I'm switching from fellowship to an RA or TA. What do I need to do?**

Please work with your academic department administrator to complete your hiring paperwork. If you have remaining semesters of fellowship, please notify the GAPP Office to defer your fellowship.

International students will need to update GLACIER paperwork to reflect the change in status working as a graduate assistant and receiving wages. If your fellowship also pays a top-off stipend while on RA/TA, please be sure that GLACIER indicates a fellowship stipend as well as wages, or your top-off stipend will not disburse.

### **Graduate Assistantships**

Your Research Assistantship (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA) position will not only give you practical experience in your academic program, it also provides you with a source of income, as well as pays your tuition and health insurance fees.

All Domestic and International Graduate Assistants are encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through [Workday](#). Please note that your hiring paperwork must be completed through your academic department before you can access Workday.

Students are required to pay all charges on their USC account in which they are responsible by the deadline noted on the [PhD Important Dates and Deadlines](#) or they may be subject to late fees and finance charges. **It is your responsibility to check your USCe.pay account to ensure your account is up to date and you have not accrued late fees or finance charges.** Please visit [Student Accounts](#) for more information. Additional information can be found at [USCe.pay](#). Questions regarding your graduate assistantship should be directed to your department administrator.

### **Stipend Payment Schedule**

Graduate assistantship checks are paid on the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month unless the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday. In which case, the payment will be available the business day prior to the 26<sup>th</sup>. Stipends are considered late after the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month. Though you may

receive your stipends via direct deposit before the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, please note that the stipend schedule does not run through Payment Services on the same day each month, so you will not always receive your stipend on the same day each month.

### **Important Information for All PhD Students**

Please make sure to verify that all applicable charges have been properly applied and credited to your account. Report any discrepancies, such as un-posted credits, double

posting of fees, etc. to your home department as soon as possible so that corrective action can be taken. The failure to provide timely notification may result in a delay of benefits, late fees for unpaid tuition, etc.

Graduate assistants are encouraged to review the [Graduate Assistant Handbook](#).

### **RCR Training**

Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training is required for all new RAs. It is one aspect of USC's commitment to maintain the highest possible standards for integrity among its entire research community, including students, faculty and staff, as reflected in [USC's Code of Ethics](#). Responsible Conduct of Research denotes good citizenship in research conduct. Faculty, students and staff who report their work honestly, accurately, and objectively help maintain public trust in research and help convey the ethics of research to future generations of scholars. More information can be found at [Responsible Conduct of Research](#).

### **TA Training**

To ensure a successful teaching assistant (TA) experience right from the start, all new TAs must attend a training program and have proven English proficiency. In addition to online resources for new TAs, we offer a one-day training program at the beginning of each semester. It is the responsibility of the TA Coordinator or Graduate Advisor to register new TAs for this program.

The training will consist of a morning session with the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) and the afternoon session conducted by the Viterbi School of Engineering. New TAs must attend both sessions before you will be allowed to begin your duties in the classroom. More information is available on the [GAPP Website](#) and the [CET Website](#).

### **Student Health Insurance**

Upon registration for any number of units in any term, PhD students are automatically enrolled in the USC student health insurance plan, which includes vision care, a dental plan and access to the Engemann Student Health Center. Fellowship and graduate assistantship recipients have been given a health award as part of the benefits here at USC, and cannot be waived from coverage. Please visit [PhD Student Health Center Benefits](#) for additional information.

PhD students not receiving funding from USC may request a student health insurance waiver if they have coverage through an employer or spouse. Please visit [USC Student Health Insurance Waiver](#) for more information regarding waiving coverage.

### Conference Travel Funds

All USC PhD students attending conferences may apply for a travel grant through the [USC Graduate Student Government \(GSG\)](#). The GSG Travel Grant program works through a reimbursement process. You may submit your application before travelling to a conference, but you cannot receive your grant funds until you've returned from your conference. GSG accepts applications on a rolling basis. Travel Grants for participants (formerly called "presenters") are awarded on a first come, first served basis. After all participant grants have been awarded, Travel Grants for conference attendees are awarded with the remainder of funds (usually a few weeks after the end of the semester).

The [Women in Science and Engineering \(WiSE\) Program](#) provides travel grants to USC PhD students or postdoctoral fellows in science and engineering departments on the University Park Campus. Support will be approved in cases where either the participation by the candidate or the subject matter of the candidate's talk or poster serves to increase the representation of women in science and engineering. The primary goal of the program is to benefit the student's scholarly development through participation in a professional environment.

Graduate School funded fellows may apply for a travel grant through the Graduate School. A call for nominations will be sent to Graduate School funded fellows via email every Fall and Spring term. For more information, please email [graduate.fellowships@usc.edu](mailto:graduate.fellowships@usc.edu).

### PhD Hooding and Awards Ceremony

Every May, the Viterbi School of Engineering hosts the PhD Hooding and Awards Ceremony for graduating PhD students and award winners. Graduating PhD students, their families and advisors are invited to attend this ceremony. More information is available at [Viterbi PhD Hooding and Awards Ceremony](#). Questions about the PhD Hooding and Awards Ceremony may be sent to Jennifer Gerson at [jgerson@usc.edu](mailto:jgerson@usc.edu).

### International Student Employment

#### Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) offers an opportunity for students to gain valuable real world experience as a part of their education. However, it must be done in a manner that maintains academic integrity. It must not become a means to avoid immigration laws, and it should not prevent the student from making reasonable progress towards the degree. Please read and closely follow the policies and procedures outlining the responsibilities for both students and supervising faculty developed by USC Viterbi School of Engineering before proceeding further.

### *Viterbi CPT Policies*

- Students applying for a fall or spring CPT must have a GPA of 3.0 or above.
- Students applying for a summer CPT must have a GPA of 2.75 or above.
- Remote CPT is not allowed. The student must work at a company site.
- During Fall and Spring CPT must be in Los Angeles, unless you have 4 units or less.
- CPTs must be at least 12 weeks during Fall and Spring, 10 weeks during Summer.
- CPT applications must be processed in person. Do not fax, email, or send a friend.
- Receiving a mark of No Credit (NC) in ENGR-596 will result in ineligibility for future CPT.
- CPT is not permitted during a PhD student's first semester of enrollment in a degree program.
- A PhD student cannot receive CPT authorization and contemporaneously hold a 50% assistantship at USC. A student may hold a 25% assistantship at USC and be approved for CPT if the employment is in the Los Angeles area and if the offer letter states the outside employment will be for no more than 10 hours per week. An exception may be made only if the student is eligible for full-time CPT.

More information, including how to apply for CPT, is located on the [GAPP Website](#).

### **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed for students with F-1 visa status. It is designed to provide students with an opportunity to gain actual employment experiences in your chosen profession for a maximum of one year, before or after completing a degree program, to complement your academic work. OPT is approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The Office of Graduate & Professional Programs (GAPP) is responsible for completing the Graduation Verification section on the Request for 12-Month OPT I-20 form.

F-1 international students interested in applying for OPT must complete the OIS OPT Online Workshop. It includes important details about eligibility requirements, application timeline, reporting requirements and other pertinent topics related to OPT. All necessary forms for the OPT application are available at the end of the online workshop.

The entire OPT application process, from time of submission to OIS for your OPT I-20 to receipt of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) can take up to 3 months, so plan accordingly.

More information, including how to apply for OPT, is located on the [GAPP Website](#).

### **Academic Departments**

In addition to the GAPP Office, your academic department has a multitude of resources.

- Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering: <https://ame.usc.edu/>
- Department of Astronautical Engineering: <https://astronautics.usc.edu/>
- Department of Biomedical Engineering: <https://bme.usc.edu/>
- Mork Family Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science: <https://chems.usc.edu/>
- Sonny Astani Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering: <https://cee.usc.edu/>
- Department of Computer Science: <http://www.cs.usc.edu/>
- Ming Hsieh Department of Electrical Engineering: <https://minghsiehee.usc.edu/>
- Daniel J. Epstein Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering: <https://ise.usc.edu/>

### **Conclusion**

We wish you much success throughout your PhD program. Any questions or concerns may be directed to Jennifer Gerson at [jgerson@usc.edu](mailto:jgerson@usc.edu) or Tracy Charles at [tcharles@usc.edu](mailto:tcharles@usc.edu).

**FIGHT ON!**