

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

Definition of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your current major field of study for a maximum of one year during per higher degree level (bachelor's, master's, doctorate) in your F-1 status. The purpose is to "round off" or complement your academic work.

12-Month OPT Eligibility Requirements

The work must be directly related to your current major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. The work may occur anywhere in the United States. In order for you to be eligible to apply for Optional Practical Training, you (1) must have been in lawful F-1 student status for at least one full academic year and (2) must submit your application in a timely fashion (see next section). Students enrolled in English language training programs are not eligible for practical training.

Application Deadline for 12-Month OPT Following Completion of Your Program

You must properly file your OPT up to 90 days prior to your program end date and no later than 60 days after your program end date. You must also file OPT within 30 days of the date the DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record, which means you must file your OPT application to USCIS within 30 days after Career Services issues a new I-20 to recommend your OPT. The 30-day period starts counting from the date when the I-20 is issued. You do not need a job offer first to apply for the 12-month OPT following degree completion.

Importance of the Actual Date you Complete Your Program of Study

Immigration regulations refer to the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, not to the date you participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a certificate or diploma. Your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date you complete degree requirements and you are expected to leave the country by that date unless you file a timely application for practical training or make other plans to lawfully remain in the U.S. Failure to complete your degree by the date specified in your OPT application will result in the loss of your OPT and the termination of your I-20 form. If you will not be completing your program as originally anticipated, you must apply for an extension of your I-20 form and continue to maintain your registration as required by the University's Matriculation Maintenance policy.

Using 12-Month OPT Prior to Completing Your Program

You may submit an application to the Career Services Center as early as 90 days before being enrolled for one full academic year in good standing, provided that the period of employment will not start prior to the completion of the one full academic year. You must be currently enrolled and eligible for registration, and intend to register for the next term/session. You must first have a job offer when applying to use OPT for work prior to completing your degree. The work could be full time during annual vacations. The work is limited to 20 hours per week if you wish to use your OPT while you are still taking a regular full course load or authorized part time semester. Full time OPT used prior to finishing your degree program will be deducted from your 12 month limit per degree level. Part time OPT used prior to finishing your degree program will be deducted at one-half the time used from your 12 months limit per degree level. Before selecting this option, please meet with your Academic Advisor and the Co-Op/Internship Director to see if Curricular Practical Training is an alternative.

Authorization May Not Be Rescinded

Once authorization to engage in Optional Practical Training is granted, it may not easily be rescinded or cancelled. This means that, after practical training is authorized by the USCIS, unexpected delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job or loss of a job may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work or revocation of your OPT. Once permission to work has been given, it is gone regardless of subsequent occurrences. If you have never worked using your OPT and wish to cancel the authorized time prior to the start date of the card, please meet with the International Student Services to discuss this option.

Actual Date Practical Training Employment May Begin

You may not begin work on your 12-month OPT until the following requirements are satisfied: (1) you have obtained an EAD card (Employment Authorization Document) from the USCIS (2) the date is reached when the EAD authorizes employment to begin. You may not begin working until you have received your EAD card and it is valid! If you are currently working on CPT and wish to continue working with no interruptions, you should (1) request a start date immediately following your program completion and (2) apply 90 days prior to your program completion to maximize your chances of receiving the OPT card on time.

Status and Employment Authorization with a Pending H-1B Petition

Duration of status and employment authorization will be extended to a student on OPT who is a beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. If USCIS denies a pending H-1B petition, the student will have the standard 60-day period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition) before he/she has to leave the United States.

Travel Outside the U.S.

Students in OPT are still in F-1 student status and must present (1) Form I-20, endorsed for travel by an International Student Advisor within the last six months, (2) the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card), (3) a valid F-1 visa and passport (if required), and (4) proof of your job if you are traveling after your OPT has been authorized. If your OPT has been approved and you depart before you get a job, your OPT ends and you cannot reenter the US. Be sure to consult your International Student Advisor when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue Optional Practical Training. While it is possible, it is not recommended to travel outside of the U.S. during the time when an OPT application is pending as you may miss important communication from the USCIS regarding the processing of your case. Traveling outside the U.S. for 5 months or more will lead to violation of your F-1 status, cancellation of your F-1 visa and OPT.

Termination of Practical Training

Your OPT will automatically be terminated if you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level. Your OPT will automatically be terminated if you change your non-immigrant status to another category (such as H-1B). Please notify the International Student Services if you end your OPT prior to your authorized end **date. Failure to complete your degree by the date specified in your OPT application is grounds for termination of your OPT.**

For more information about OPT, please contact your International Studies program.

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