

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING BULLETIN (OPT)

- WHAT?** An opportunity for students who have been enrolled for one full academic year in the United States to work in a position directly related to their academic studies. Students retain F-1 visa status while pursuing Optional Practical Training.
- WHO?** F-1 Students who have lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis at a US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, formerly the INS) approved school for one full academic year. Time spent studying abroad counts toward the one full academic year requirement IF the student spent at least one full academic term in a full course of study in the U.S. prior to study abroad. Practical Training applications must be made directly by the student, not through a third party.
- WHEN?** OPT can be granted for an aggregate maximum of 12 months for the duration of F-1 student status.

- o during annual summer vacation and at other times when school is not in session - only if student is currently enrolled and registered for the next term.
- o while school is in session provided that OPT does not exceed 20 hours per week. If the student holds other jobs such as on-campus employment, the total number of work hours of all jobs including OPT must not exceed 20 hours per week.
- o after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or the equivalent). For bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree programs only. Students can receive another 12-month period of OPT upon completion of a second degree at a higher level.
- o after completion of the course of study.

Students must apply for OPT prior to the completion of all course requirements or prior to the completion of the course of study. Applications can be submitted up to 120 days in advance of the completion date. Students in their first academic year will only be granted employment authorization from the date of completion of one full academic year. Students may not begin work until the date specified on the employment authorization document (EAD) issued by the USCIS. Students must be physically in possession of the card before working.

HOW? To apply for OPT authorization:

- 1) Pick up an application packet from the International Student Advisor (ISA), Puryear Hall, 1st floor, or download from the web at <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/international/Intstudents/Immigration/immigindex.html>.

- 2) Submit to ISA all materials (see OPT Checklist), along with your I-20, I-94 card, passport, and visa, up to 120 days before completion of studies.
- 3) Upon favorable review, ISA can authorize OPT for a maximum of 12 months. A SEVIS-generated I-20 will be given to the student with a notation on page 3 authorizing OPT.
- 4) Once the ISA approves OPT, you must apply for an EAD (Employment Authorization Document) on Form I-765 to the USCIS office in St. Albans, VT. Mail the I-765 along with \$340 fee, 2 immigration photos, copy of SEVIS-generated I-20, copies of old I-20s, copy of passport, copy of F-1 visa, and copy of I-94 arrival/departure card.
- 5) In 2-3 weeks, the USCIS will send a receipt notice to the address indicated on the I-765. The EAD will also be sent to this address so it is strongly recommended that students have the EAD sent to a U.S. address of a friend or relative where they can receive mail after graduation.
- 6) Bring a copy of the receipt notice and EAD to the Office of International Education for your student file.

DO I NEED A JOB OFFER TO APPLY FOR OPT?

No specific job offer is required to request OPT or to apply for an EAD. You are advised to secure a job offer before applying for the EAD so that time for OPT is not lost.

CAN I CHANGE EMPLOYERS?

A student authorized to engage in OPT may change employers during the period of authorized OPT as long as the employment is directly related to student's field of study and commensurate with the student's educational level. The F-1 is obligated to notify the ISA of changes of employment.

DOES THE FACT THAT I HAVE DONE CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT) AFFECT MY ELIGIBILITY FOR OPT?

Time spent doing CPT does not take away from OPT unless the student has used up 12 months of full-time CPT. Part-time CPT does not count toward this limit.

CAN I USE LESS THAN 12 MONTHS OF OPT?

Yes. OPT can be granted for a maximum of 12 months. If you use the 12 months of OPT before graduation, you are ineligible for post-graduation OPT.

Practical training time lost cannot be recovered. Once an EAD is issued the clock begins ticking. The EAD cannot be cancelled or re-issued.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET AN EAD FROM USCIS?

Once the EAD is filed with USCIS, it should be adjudicated within 90 days. If you do not hear from USCIS within 90 days, student should consult with ISA immediately.

HOW CAN I CHECK ON THE STATUS OF MY APPLICATION?

Once you receive a receipt notice from the USCIS, you can check the status of your application online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp>.

CAN I TRAVEL WHILE MY OPT APPLICATION IS PENDING?

Please realize that travel while OPT is pending carries some degree of risk. If you must travel after applying for OPT but before receiving USCIS approval, you must leave and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and carry the proper documentation (endorsed I-20, receipt from the USCIS Vermont Service Center acknowledging that the OPT application is being processed, I-94 card, valid passport, F-1 visa stamp, and offer of employment if applicable). If you do not have a job offer and are interviewed by an immigration officer upon returning to the U.S, it is important to explain that you are re-entering to search for employment and honestly answer any questions regarding your purpose in re-entering the U.S.

ONCE MY OPT HAS BEEN APPROVED, CAN I TRAVEL DURING THE OPT PERIOD?

If you have completed your studies and are traveling during the authorized OPT period, you may travel and re-enter the U.S. to work at a confirmed job. If you depart before obtaining a job, you cannot re-enter until you have a job. You must have the Form I-20 endorsed by the ISA within the last 6 months, an unexpired EAD, a letter from your employer, a valid F-1 student visa and passport, and the I-94 arrival/departure card. Remember that time spent abroad is counted against OPT and cannot be regained.

CAUTION: If you have completed your studies and have not received authorization for OPT, then you will not be eligible to apply for OPT upon return to the U.S. and may not be permitted to enter the U.S.

CAN I RENEW MY F-1 VISA DURING THE OPT PERIOD?

If your F-1 visa has expired, you must renew it in your home country before re-entering the U.S. ***Please realize that F-1 visa renewal during the OPT period carries some degree of risk.***

IMPORTANT: Once you complete your studies, you cannot work on-campus UNLESS you use your OPT.

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You MUST report the following information to the International Student Advisor during OPT:

- Name or Address Change
- Change of Employer
- Termination of Employment

ANY QUESTIONS?

Contact: Krittika Onsanit, International Student Advisor
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