

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) GUIDE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

### WHAT IS IT?

**Optional Practical Training (OPT) is off-campus employment authorization that lets F-1 students get work experience in their major field of study.** The amount of work you are permitted is a maximum of 12 months of *full-time* employment for each *higher* educational level you pursue in the U.S. You can use it during or after your studies. You can work for any employer, anywhere in the country.

**Think of it as an OPT bank account!** In that account are 12 months of full-time optional practical training for your current program of study. Let's say you'd like to work full-time for three months after your sophomore (second) year in your bachelor's degree. That's a three-month withdrawal of full-time employment, leaving you 9 months left to spend during your bachelor's degree. During your junior year, you decide to work *part-time* (less than 20 hours a week) for two semesters or nine months. Since part-time employment counts at half the full-time rate, you've made a withdrawal of four and a half months of full-time employment. This leaves you with four and a half months of full-time employment still in your account to use after you graduate.

If you decide to spend all of your OPT after you complete your degree, you must request all of it at once, that is the full year. You cannot use it in pieces.

If you decide to go on for your Master's degree after completing your OPT for your Bachelor's, your bank account will be *full again* with another 12 months available to you!

### HOW CAN IT BE USED?

- ✓ **Summer vacation and semester break** - *either part-time or full-time employment*
- ✓ **While school is in session** - *part-time employment only*
- ✓ **After completion of all course requirements for a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, excluding the thesis or equivalent** - *part- or full-time employment*
- ✓ **After completion of ALL requirements for the course of study** - *full-time employment only*

### HOW CAN YOU QUALIFY FOR IT?

- ❶ You must have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year.
- ❷ You must be able to describe how the type of work you are seeking directly relates to your major. You do not have to have a job offer to apply for OPT. If you are applying for Pre-Completion of studies OPT, however, it is wise that you be as sure as possible of a job so that you don't waste any of your OPT "account."
- ❸ If you are seeking Post-Completion of Studies OPT, your department must certify the date that you are expected to complete your program of study. You may apply for Post-Completion of Studies OPT up to 90 days before your completing your program of study, but not later than 60 days after. If you apply within the 60 day period after completion, you are likely not to receive your full 12 month OPT benefit due to USCIS processing times.
- ❹ You cannot already have used 12 months of full-time *Curricular* Practical Training.

### **HOW DO YOU APPLY?**

Pick up an Application for F-1 Optional Practical Training Employment Recommendation, fill it out and return it to ISS in 235 West Quad. When you return it, we will review your application to make sure it is complete and that you qualify. If everything is in order, we will issue a new Form I-20 recommending your OPT and contact you to come pick up your application. When you pick up your application, we will provide you with instructions on how to submit your application to USCIS and track its progress.

### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?**

After your application is filed at USCIS, it can take **three months** for your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to be returned to us from USCIS. It could take less or more depending on their workload and any security clearances. If it takes longer than 90 days, you may request "Expeditious Handling" of your application.

**It's important to take USCIS processing time into consideration when planning the date you want to start working!** YOU CANNOT BEGIN TO WORK UNTIL YOU HAVE YOUR EAD CARD!!

### **WHAT IF YOU WANT TO TRAVEL BEFORE STARTING POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT?**

Contact your international student advisor before making any travel plans if your OPT is still pending USCIS authorization. DHS regulations require that you have your EAD card and a job or job offer to return to the U.S.

### **HOW CAN YOU EXTEND YOUR OPT?**

You can extend Pre-Completion OPT by filing another application. You may not continue to work until it has been authorized by USCIS.

Only qualified "STEM" graduates (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) may qualify for an extension of their Post-completion OPT for an additional 17 months.

### **STUDY AND POST-COMPLETION OPT**

DHS regulations state that, "Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level." Therefore, you should not continue your U.S. studies until after your OPT has ended. Students may pursue incidental or non-degree studies (continuing education).

**APPLYING FOR DSO RECOMMENDATION  
FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

**❶ COMPLETE THE ATTACHED FORMS:**

**1. DSO Recommendation Request Form:**

- Item 1: Expected date of Completion of studies: The earliest your application may be submitted to the government for Post-Completion of Studies OPT is 90 days before this date.
- Item 2: Indicate what type of OPT you are applying for and the dates you want to work.
- Item 3: If you previously have been authorized for OPT for your current education level, tell us when it was authorized and the start and end dates as they appear on your EAD(s).
- Item 4: Describe how your proposed employment for practical training is directly related to your major and appropriate for your level of education. Take time to do this carefully. Do not say that you are seeking an entry-level job in your major. Your description must clearly explain to an Immigration Officer what you expect to DO on the job you are seeking. Do not use any abbreviations or acronyms in your description.
- Item 5: Complete the Academic Information and Other Requirements
- Item 6: Read and sign the Acknowledgement of Understanding.

**2. F-1 STUDENT STATUS RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT (if that is the type of OPT for which you are applying)**

**3. Form I-765: APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION.** Go to [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov), complete items 1-16, print out and sign it in blue ink **DO NOT SUBMIT ELECTRONICALLY:**

- Item 3: Address. Please enter your home address to ensure you receive the EAD card.
- Item 10: A-Number or I-94 Number: Put your I-94 number unless USCIS has previously assigned you an alien registration number.
- Item 11: If you have ever applied for hardship or optional practical training employment before, answer yes, where and when you applied, whether it was granted or denied and attach a photocopy of any EAD card issued for it.

Your Certification: Sign in BLUE ink, put your telephone number and the date.

- Item 16: Enter the code that applies to the type of OPT you are requesting: Pre-Completion OPT – (c)(3)(A); Post-completion OPT – (c)(3)(B); STEM Extension (c)(3)(C)

**4. Form G-1145 E-NOTIFICATION OF APPLICATION/PETITION ACCEPTANCE.** Go to [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov), complete, print out and sign (in blue ink) the MOST RECENT Form G-1145 available.

**2 ATTACH THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS TO YOUR APPLICATION:**

- ✓ **Two Passport Type Photographs.** Print your name and SEVIS ID number on the back in pencil.
- ✓ **Forms I-20.** Photocopies of all previous Forms I-20 issued by us and other schools you have attended.
- ✓ **Photocopy of any previous EAD Card(s).**
- ✓ **Photocopy of Form I-94 (both sides)**
- ✓ **Photocopies of your passport identification pages, and visa.**
- ✓ **\$380 Fee** in the form of a check or money order payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. If you are using a personal check, it must have your name and address on it.

**INFORMATION ABOUT APPLICATION PROCESSING**

- 1. If everything is in order, we will issue you a new Form I-20 with our recommendation on it.**  
We will contact you to come in and pick up your application.
- 2. We will provide you with information about how and when to send your application to USCIS.**
- 3. You cannot begin working until you have received your EAD Card.**

**OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING  
DSO RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM**

**1. PERSONAL AND PROGRAM INFORMATION:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Local address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

SEVIS ID#: \_\_\_\_\_ College: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Date of Completion of Studies: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. TYPE OF OPT YOU ARE REQUESTING:**

- ☐ **Pre-Completion of Studies: Full-time.** Available during vacation periods or after completion of all of coursework except for comprehensives, thesis, or dissertation **only**.

**Starting on** \_\_\_\_\_ **and ending** \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ **Pre-Completion of Studies: Part-time.** (20 hours or less per week)

**Starting on** \_\_\_\_\_ **and ending** \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ **Post-Completion of Studies:**

**Starting:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Your start date may be any date after you complete your studies up to 60 days later. (If you choose a date within the 60 day period following completion of your program, you will likely not receive the full 12 month OPT benefit due to USCIS processing delays.)*

**Ending:** \_\_\_\_\_

You must apply for all of the 12-month benefit you have remaining for this program of study unless you have plans for further study at the same education level, e.g., a second master's degree.

- 3. PREVIOUS OPT:** If you have previously received OPT employment authorization for your current education level, indicate the date(s) it was authorized and the start and end dates on your EAD(s):

Starting on \_\_\_\_\_ and ending \_\_\_\_\_

- 4. DESCRIBE YOUR PROPOSED EMPLOYMENT AND EXPLAIN HOW IT RELATES TO YOUR MAJOR.** Do not say that you are "seeking an entry level position that is appropriate for your skills and experience!"

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. ACADEMIC INFORMATION (Undergraduate and Graduate students)**

- a. Will you complete your program of study this semester? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. Have you checked your degree audit? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- c. Have you applied for graduation? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- d. Do you have a pending petition to change a grade? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- e. If you were admitted to BC as a transfer student and are eligible for transfer credits, did you complete the transfer evaluation process? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS (Graduate students only)**

- f. Have you completed all your course work for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- g. Is there a thesis required for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- h. If yes, was your thesis ☐ certified ☐ NOT certified ☐ waiting for results
- i. Is a comprehensive exam required for your program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- j. If yes, did you pass your comprehensive exam? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- k. Does your program require a state project or class other than a thesis or comprehensive exam? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**7. STUDENT'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING**

Everything I submit above is accurate and factual to the best of my knowledge. I understand that I am requesting the DSO's recommendation for Optional Practical Training Employment authorization. The ISS will advise and assist me with reviewing my application for completeness and eligibility. Once the school has recommended the OPT, the application will be returned to me for filing it at the USCIS. I understand that I am completely responsible for properly filing my OPT application with the USCIS and tracking its processing through the USCIS Case Status Online System at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). I understand that I may be asked to submit proof of passing exams, thesis, etc. and that if I do not pass I must inform ISS immediately. If I do not inform ISS it may affect my status in the United States.

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My Signature

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My Name (please print)

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Date Signed

## **HOW TO FILE YOUR OPT APPLICATION**

### **I. Acknowledgment of Understanding**

I understand that I am completely responsible for properly filing my OPT application with the USCIS, as explained below, and tracking its processing through the USCIS Case Status Online System at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

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My Signature

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My Name (please print)

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Date Signed

### **II. Be sure that your application contains all of the following documents:**

1. Form I-765 (Properly completed and signed in blue ink)
2. Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
3. Fee: \$380 (check/MO) payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
4. Your newly issued Form I-20 with your DSO OPT recommendation on page three
5. Photocopies of all previous I-20's
6. Two passport format photos with your name and SEVIS ID# printed on the back in pencil
7. Photocopies of all the following:
  - a. Previous EAD's
  - b. Passport Identification page,
  - c. Visa,
  - d. Form I-94 (both sides)

### **III. Make a photocopy of all the above documents for your records.**

### **IV. Make sure that the Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance is paper-clipped (not stapled) to the top of your complete application.**



**V. Your complete application (see II above) must be received at USCIS within the following deadlines:**

1. Within 30 days of the DSO's OPT Recommendation on your Form I-20, that is, Signatures on pages 1 and 3.
2. For students applying for Post-OPT, your application may not be received at the USCIS Lockbox later than 60 days after you have completed your program of study.
3. It is strongly recommended that you send your application by some type of courier service that will provide you with proof of timely receipt.

**VI. File your complete application with delivery tracking to the lockbox.**

USCIS  
P.O. Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

**VII. Send (email or fax) evidence of timely filing and acceptance of your application to our office and keep copies for yourself.**

1. Courier delivery receipt
2. G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

Please note: If your complete application is returned to you, for any reason, that means that it *has not been accepted*. Contact our office immediately for information about your options.

**VIII. Track the progress of your application through the USCIS Case Status Online System at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).**

**IX. Provide us with a photocopy of your EAD Card if it is being sent directly to you.**



## **F-1 STUDENT STATUS RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OF STUDIES OPT**

During your period of authorized Post-completion of Studies OPT, you are continuing in your F-1 Student Status and have legal responsibilities. Below is a list of these responsibilities. Please read them carefully and sign the Acknowledgement below that you understand them.

1. Only work in your major field of study and within the dates that you have been authorized on your EAD.
2. DHS regulations state, "During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment..." [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(E)]. You are required to report interruptions of OPT employment to our office [8 CFR 214.2(f)(12)(i)].
3. It is strongly recommended that you keep a record and supporting evidence of all your OPT-related activities such as:
  - Details of job searches: correspondence with prospective employers, interviews, etc.
  - Employment information: dates, name/location of employer, position, part/full-time
  - Volunteer work: dates, name/location/type of volunteer work, part/full-time. Please note that federal law requires that a volunteer may not assume a normally paid position or displace a U.S. worker.
4. You are required to report the following information to our office:
  - Change of name (You must bring proof of your updated passport noting the change)
  - Change of address
5. Beginning a new course of study or transferring U.S. schools automatically terminates OPT employment.
6. Obtain a DSO's endorsement to travel every six months.
7. Employment authorization is automatically suspended in the event of a strike or other labor dispute involving work stoppage at the place of employment [8 CFR 214.2(f)(14)]

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON POST-OPT**

I have read and understand my F-1 student status responsibilities while I am on Post-OPT.

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My Signature

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My Name (please print)