OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR F-1 STUDENTS

Application Instructions
Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows students in F-1 status to gain practical experience and training in a field directly related to the major area of study before or after completion of program. Students are eligible to apply for OPT after one academic year in F-1 status. Students are allowed a maximum total of 12 months of OPT, which may be completed all at once, or at several different intervals (e.g., three months each summer). The initial 12 month OPT limit may be extended by 24 months, for a total of 36 months, for certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degree holders (only if the employer is registered with the E-Verify system). Students are eligible to do one year of OPT for each higher level of study – one year for a Bachelor’s degree, one year for a Master’s degree, and one year for a Doctorate degree. Employment authorization is evidenced in the form of a small, plastic card called an “Employment Authorization Document,” or EAD. This card will show your photo, signature, and the type of employment authorization. It will also specify the dates that you are eligible for employment.

Eligibility Requirements
- To be eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT), you must have been enrolled as a full-time student at least for one academic year and be in F-1 status at the time of application.
- All employment must be directly related to the major field of study for the program you are using to apply for the OPT authorization.

Pre-Completion OPT
Students may only work up to 20 hours per week while school is in session if OPT is authorized before completion of the program. There is no specified limit to the number of hours students may work during vacation periods or after completion of program. Part-time OPT is defined as 20 hours or less per week and counts ½ the time of full-time OPT (i.e., 4 months of part-time OPT = 2 months of full-time OPT). Full-time OPT is defined as more than 20 hours per week. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy may use full-time OPT during their dissertation research period while continuing full time registration. Students must confirm advancement to candidacy before applying for full time pre-completion OPT. Students who choose to break up their OPT into more than one period of pre-completion work authorization or to split their OPT period between pre- and post-completion OPT must file separate applications for each period of OPT.

Form I-765, question 16: (C) (3) (a)

Post-Completion OPT
Students planning to use Optional Practical Training (OPT) after completion of program may apply to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for OPT up to 90 days before completion of program but no later than 60 days after completion of studies. Once OPT is recommended in SEVIS by an International Student Adviser, the student must file Form I-765 with USCIS within 30 days of issuance of the Form I-20 recommending OPT. For undergraduate and master’s students the completion date is the date all requirements for the degree are met. For doctoral students,
Graduate Studies considers your completion date to be the end of the semester in which your dissertation is received by Graduate Studies. F-1 regulations do not allow students to postpone completion of program for any reason except unfinished academic requirements for the degree. Post-completion OPT is always defined as full-time (more than 20 hours per week) with the expectation that you will be engaged in full-time employment, or seeking full-time employment. Please consult the International Student Adviser immediately if you realize you will not complete your program by the end date listed on your Form I-20. Please note that the Form I-20 cannot be extended once the program end date has passed.

Form I-765, question 16: (C) (3) (b)

24 Month STEM Extension
Students majoring in certain fields may be eligible to extend their OPT for an additional 24 months, for a grand total of 36 months. These fields are referred to as STEM majors (Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Students who choose to use the 24 month STEM extension will apply for the initial 12 months of OPT first, and then apply again for the STEM extension before that first 12 months is over (but no earlier than 90 days before the initial 12 month OPT period expires). Please contact ISSS for a full list of qualifying requirements for the STEM degree and employment.

Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status
During the 12 month post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon full-time, qualifying employment. Students may not accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment during any period of authorized post-completion OPT (including weekends). A student’s I-20 can be automatically terminated by SEVIS if more than 90 consecutive days of unemployment are accrued. Please consult the International Student Adviser if you have questions about the unemployment limit. Please note that if the 90-day unemployment limit is reached, a student is then considered out of status. A student’s I-20 can be terminated and no additional 60-day grace period is allowed at that time. However, if a student is unemployed for 90 days and is working for the remaining 9 months, the 60 day grace period still applies.

“Volunteer work,” or unpaid activity, may count as employment under OPT as long as the employment meets all requirements, including that the student is working at least 20 hours per week in a position directly related to the student’s program of study.

Travel while OPT is pending
Travel outside of the United States while an application is pending with USCIS is strongly discouraged. Once you have completed your studies, you need documentation showing continuing status in order to reenter the U.S. For F-1 students on OPT, the proof that USCIS has granted you continuing status is the EAD card. Consult with the International Student Adviser before making any international travel plans.

Travel after OPT is approved
Students on an approved period of OPT may travel. To re-enter, the student must have a valid I-20 signed within the past 6 months from the date of re-entry, valid passport, valid F-1 visa, valid EAD card, and proof of employment (such as a contract or offer letter).

Grace period
Following the completion of OPT, students have 60 days to depart the U.S., enroll in a new academic program, or change to another non-immigrant status.
Health Insurance While on OPT
You must have health insurance while you are on OPT. If you are not working or work for an employer that does not offer health insurance, you may purchase insurance through ISSS (the GeoBlue Student Insurance) at monthly intervals. If you are currently enrolled in the GeoBlue international student health insurance, you must renew your policy with ISSS no more than 30 days after the completion of your program. If you are currently enrolled in NYSHIP insurance as a graduate/teaching/research assistant, but want to switch to GeoBlue after the completion of your program, you must do so before the program completion date.

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension
Please check with ISSS to see if you qualify for a cap-gap extension. For students who qualify for a “cap-gap extension” the duration of status and work authorization will be “automatically extended” if the student has a timely filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. The extension of duration of status and work authorization will terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student’s behalf. The only proof that students will receive of their Cap-Gap extension is a new I-20 from ISSS. ISSS does not automatically know if students receive the Cap-Gap extension, so you will need to request a new I-20 from the office with proof of successful filing, such as the receipt or approval notice from USCIS.

Reporting Requirements while on OPT
While authorized for OPT you are still an F-1 student under the University at Albany’s sponsorship. Make sure that ISSS has the e-mail address you read regularly and that you respond to ISSS emails. We will contact you by email in the event of regulatory changes and if you have not updated your information with our office. The Department of Homeland Security may also contact you, so your email address must be up to date in MyUAlbany and in SEVIS. While on OPT, you must:

1) Provide International Student & Scholar Services with a photocopy of your Employment Authorization Document, or EAD card (front and back).

2) When applying for OPT, keep in mind that you must receive authorization from USCIS and have an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) in your hands before you begin employment. The entire application process takes on average 3 months, but may take longer.

3) Update your U.S. Address in your MyUAlbany demographics. Kindly keep your address and other contact information, including email, up to date in MyUAlbany.

4) Students on OPT are required to report any changes to personal/contact information (including but not limited to name changes, email, phone number, and address), employment information (including but not limited to new employment, employer changes, end of employment, employer name, address, supervisor contact information, position, and how the employment relates to the student’s program of study) and changes in status (including changes of status to H1B, permanent residency, etc...).

5) You are required to report any of the above changes to ISSS/DHS within 10 days.

6) Students may report by submitting an “OPT data form,” available on ISSS’ website. Starting spring 2017, SEVP (the government agency which administers SEVIS) will be launching a portal for students to directly input changes in employment information. Students will be sent an email to enroll based on the email address in SEVIS, so your email must be up to date in MyUAlbany.

7) You are required to report the interruption of your employment to ISSS within 10 days of your termination.

8) You must complete a Departure Form when you end OPT and plan to depart the United States. Please see the Departure Form on our website at www.albany.edu/issss under “Forms”.

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OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION PROCESS:

Part 1 – Applying for new I-20 Form for OPT
Submit the following documents to International Student & Scholar Services (allow 5-7 business days processing):
1. Completed ISSS application form (attached, page 9). This form should be filled out by you and your Academic Advisor. The form must be completed before the advisor signs it.
2. Completed I-765 form.
4. Employment offer letter (if any).
5. Photocopy of current Form I-94 Form (both sides of card version) or print-out of the electronic I-94 - https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/
6. Photocopy of identity pages in passport, including expiration date and most recent F-1 visa stamp.
7. Photocopies of all previous I-20s.

Part 2 – Applying for EAD card:
You must mail the following documents to USCIS within 30 days of the issue date of Form I-20 recommending you for OPT. Processing with USCIS takes 2-4 months. You CANNOT begin OPT without the EAD card:
   - payable to the amount of $410.00
2. Cover letter addressed to the Dallas Lockbox USCIS processing center (page 8)
3. Original completed Form I-765 (you can also type the form using the online PDF)
4. Photocopy of the new Form I-20 issued for OPT (do not send the original).
5. Photocopies of all Form I-20s ever received (older version – pages 1 and 3, newer version – pages 1 and 2).
6. Photocopy of current Form I-94 Form (both sides of card version) or print-out of electronic I-94 - https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/
7. Photocopy of identifying pages in passport.
8. Photocopy of most recent U.S. Visa.
9. Two identical passport photographs with your name and I-94 number written on the back – see next page and go to: https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photos.html
11. Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional).

Note: Optional Practical Training MUST be related directly to your major field of study and commensurate with your level of education. YOU MAY NOT BEGIN EMPLOYMENT UNTIL YOU RECEIVE THE EAD FROM USCIS. While engaged in OPT, students are under the University at Albany’s F-1 program. Change of local address, email and phone number must be reported to MyUAlbany within 10 days so we can update SEVIS. You must report any changes in your employment to ISSS.

Send your completed application within 30 days of DSO signature using a method that shows Proof of Delivery to:

For US Postal Service deliveries: For Express mail and courier service deliveries (ex: FedEx, UPS)
USCIS USCIS
PO Box 660867 Attention: AOS
Dallas, TX  75266 2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business

MAKE COPIES OF EVERYTHING YOU SEND
FEDERAL MAIL IS NOT FORWARDED. If the address given on Form I-765 is not valid your EAD will be sent back to immigration by the post office.
Passport Photograph Information

When obtaining pictures to send in to USCIS, please visit:
https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photos.html for more information. The following information can be used to assist you.

Your passport photo must be:

- Printed on matte or glossy photo quality paper
- Size of photo:
  - 2 x 2 inches (51 x 51 mm) in size
  - Size of head must be between 1 - 1 3/8 inches (25 - 35 mm) from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head.
- Recent, taken in the last 6 months to reflect your current appearance
- Effective November 1, 2016: No glasses in your passport style photography
- Background must be plain white or off-white
- Head must be directly facing the camera with your full face in view
- Taken with a neutral facial expression or a natural smile, with both eyes open
- In color
- Taken in clothing that you normally wear on a daily basis
- No hats or head coverings, unless you wear it daily for religious purposes. Your full face must be visible and your head covering cannot cast shadows on your face.
- No headphones or wireless hands-free devices.

Photo Composition
- Make sure the photo presents the full head from the top of the hair to the bottom of the chin
- Center the head with the frame
- The person in the photo should have a neutral expression and be facing the camera

Paper Photo Head Size Template

Acceptable Photos (https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photo-examples.html):
For example use only

One of these boxes must be checked, or USCIS will not process the application.

Check “Permission to accept employment” if you have never applied for an EAD card before.

Legal name as it appears on passport & and I-20.

Your EAD card will be mailed to this address. This address must be clearly identifiable to be delivered. In your mailbox, please make sure your name is written inside. You may put the ISSS office address if you are unsure where you will be living.

ISSS address:
First Line—ISSS, 1400 Washington Ave, SL G-40

Check that the date of the form has not expired.

Only fill in if you have an SSN. If you have an SSN card, answer #10 with “No.” and skip to #14 on page 2 (leave the other items blank)

If you are requesting an SSN card, check “Yes” for #10 and #11 and fill in items #12-#13.

Only fill in if you are applying for an SSN.

Please note: There are now two pages to the I-765.
Your I-94 number is the admission number at the top of the I-94.

If you have never before applied for an EAD card, check "no". If you have applied for an EAD card in the past, check "yes" and complete the additional information.

You can find information for numbers 16-19 on your most recent I-94 (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov) and under the Travel History section of the I-94. If the travel history does not accurately reflect your last entry, please consult an ISSS advisor.

Sign and date the form. While all other sections of the form can be typed, your signature must be an original signature in blue or black ink. Include your phone number and date.

Most students should have this section blank. This section should only be completed if someone else is completing the form and filing it on your behalf (such as a lawyer or company).
Dear Officer:

Enclosed please find the following items related to my request for Optional Practical Training:

1. Check or money order for $410.00, payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2. Completed Original Form I-765;
3. Photocopy of Form I-20 issued for OPT;
4. Photocopies of all Forms I-20 ever issued to me;
5. Photocopy of current Form I-94 Form (both sides of card version) or electronic I-94;
6. Photocopy of identity page of passport;
7. Photocopy of most recent US visa stamp;
8. 2 passport photos, cut with white background with name and I-94 written on the back;
9. Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional)
10. Other evidence: ____________________________________________________

Please feel free to contact me if further information is needed.

Sincerely,

____________________________  ____________________________
Signature                          Date

____________________________  ____________________________
Name Printed                        SEVIS ID Number
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING I-20 REQUEST FORM
(ISSS Application form)

Name: ________________________________ SUNY ID: ________________

Academic Major: ____________________ Degree Level: (circle one) Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD

I-20 End Date: _____________________ (mm/dd/yy) SEVIS ID: _______________________

Telephone Number: __________________ E-mail Address: _______________________

I have attended an Off-Campus Employment Workshop. [ ] Yes [ ] No If yes, when ___/___/___
I have watched the on-line OPT tutorial at www.albany.edu/isss. [ ] Yes [ ] No

Start Date Requested for OPT (consult ISSS if necessary): ______________________________

Employer’s Name and Address for OPT (if any): ______________________________________

I have done OPT previously. [ ] Yes [ ] No If yes, at what level of study? ________________

I verify that my SEVIS USA Address, email and phone number in My UAlbany is correct:
[ ] Yes _____ (please initial)

I take full responsibility for reading/understanding the information presented in the OPT packet, the
workshop and/or the online tutorial:
[ ] Yes _____ (please initial)

Student’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT’S ACADEMIC ADVISOR

The signature of the academic advisor indicates a verification of the student’s level and field of study
and, especially, the expected completion date of studies.

Degree expected: [ ] Bachelor [ ] Master’s [ ] PhD [ ] Other ____________________________

Expected Completion Date (MM/DD/YY):

This date was determined as follows (check one)
[ ] Anticipated Graduation (must be registered in that semester)
[ ] Dissertation Defense & Submission (for Doctoral students)
[ ] Other - please explain: ______________________________________________________

Is the student in good academic standing? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Do you, the academic advisor, recommend that Optional Practical Training be given to enhance the
student’s understanding of his/her field of study? [ ] Yes [ ] No

I certify that the above information is correct and satisfies the information required by International
Student and Scholar Services to recommend Optional Practical Training for this student.

Name and Title of Advisor: ____________________________________________

Signature of Advisor: __________________________ Date: __________________

Phone Number: __________________ E-mail Address: _______________________

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