

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 17 months, for a total of 29 months, for certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degree holders (only if the employer is registered with the E-Verify system). Employment authorization is given in the form of a small, plastic card called an Employment Authorization Document or EAD. This card will show your photo and signature, and the type of employment authorization. It will also specify the dates students are eligible for employment.

Eligibility Requirements

- To be eligible for the Optional Practical Training (OPT) option, you must have been enrolled as a full-time F-1 student at least for one academic year.
- The employment must be directly related to your major field of study.

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 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.

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 120 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 Form I-20 recommending OPT. For undergraduate and masters 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 once you realize you will not complete your program by the end date posted on your Form I-20. Please note that the Form I-20 cannot be extended once the program end dated has passed.**

Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status

During the 12 month post-completion OPT F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accumulate a total of more than 90 days of unemployment during any period of authorized post-completion OPT. 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, then there is no additional 60-day grace period afterwards.

Travel while on OPT

Travel while on OPT is a complicated issue. In most cases, re-entry to the U.S. will not be possible once students complete their program unless they have received their EAD card and have a valid offer of employment letter in their possession. 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.

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 HTH Student Insurance) at monthly intervals.

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension

Duration of status and work authorization will be "automatically extended" for students on OPT who have timely filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. Although this extension is meant to be automatic, a request must be made in SEVIS. **Please schedule an appointment to speak with the International Student Adviser to request a new Form I-20 before your EAD expires in order to take advantage of this cap gap extension.** The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf. An application is filed with USCIS when your application has been received in **by USCIS** and your check cashed.

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. We may need to contact you by email in the event of regulatory changes.

- 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. This may take 2-4 months *or longer*.
- 3) F-1 regulations require that you report any changes in address within 10 days of moving. You must inform ISSS of the LOCAL address where you are currently living in order for us to report the information to SEVIS. Failure to report your address is a violation of your immigration status and may result in termination of OPT.
- 4) You must report the name and address of your employer to ISSS. Please see the OPT Report Form on our website at www.albany.edu/iss under "forms".
- 5) You are required to report change of employment to ISSS within 10 days.
- 6) You are required to report the interruption of your employment to ISSS within 10 days of your termination.
- 7) You must complete a Departure Form when you end OPT and plan to depart the United States. On our website at www.albany.edu/iss under "forms".
- 8) You must report changes in your name to ISSS within 10 days of the name change.
- 9) You must report any changes in immigration status (such as getting an H-1B) to ISSS.

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 at least one week for processing):

1. Completed application form (attached). This form should be filled out by you and your Academic Adviser. The form must be completed **before** the adviser signs it. If applying for post-completion OPT, application must be submitted to ISSS as early as possible but normally no later than 4 weeks before the end of the term or within 30 days after completion of studies;
2. Completed I-765 form.
3. Employment offer letter (if any);
4. Photocopy of current Form I-94 Form (both sides);
5. Photocopy of identity pages in passport, including expiration date and most recent F-1 visa stamp;
6. 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 takes 2-4 months. You **CANNOT** begin OPT without the EAD card):

1. A money order, certified check or personal check for the amount of \$340, payable to **Department of Homeland Security**
2. Cover letter addressed to the Vermont USCIS processing center;
3. Completed Form I-765;
4. Photocopy of the new Form I-20 issued for OPT (do not send the original);
5. Photocopies of all Form I-20 ever received (pages 1 and 3);
6. Photocopy of current Form I-94 (both sides);
7. Photocopy of identity pages in passport;
8. Photocopy of most recent U.S. Visa;
9. Two identical passport photographs, with white background; see guidelines at http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/guide_2081.html;
10. Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) issued to you (both sides).
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. Changes of local addresses must be reported to ISSS within 10 days so we can update SEVIS. You must report any interruptions of employment to ISSS.

Send your completed application by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested or express mail with proof of delivery to:

**For US Postal Service deliveries:
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266**

**For Express mail and courier service deliveries:
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067**

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.

Cover Letter

USCIS Dallas Lockbox
ATTN: I-765

Dear Officer:

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

1. Check for the amount of \$340.00, payable to Department of Homeland Security;
2. Completed Form I-765;
3. Form I-20 issued for OPT;
4. Photocopies of all Forms I-20 ever issued to me;
5. Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back);
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 REQUEST FORM
FOR F-1 STUDENTS
(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: _____

Local Address: _____

Have you attended an Off-Campus Employment Workshop? [] Yes [] No If yes, when ___/___/___

Employer's Name and Address (if any): _____

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

Number of Months of OPT Requested (1 – 12): _____

- [] Full-time (greater than 20 hours per week) [] Part-time (20 hours or less per week)
[] Post-Completion OPT (after the completion of studies) [] Pre-Completion OPT (before completion of studies)

Student's Signature _____ Date _____

The information below should 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:** _____