

Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the term used by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to refer to a temporary off-campus employment option available to F-1 students. OPT provides F-1 students an opportunity to gain practical work experience in their major field of study so that they can make a more professional contribution upon return to their home country. OPT employment authorization is granted by the INS upon application from the student and recommendation from an International Student Advisor in the International Center. OPT can be used before and/or after completion of study under the following circumstances:

- OPT may be **full or part-time** during a student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next quarter.
- OPT must be **part-time**, 20 hours or less per week when school is in session.
- OPT may be **full or part-time** after completion of course requirements for a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree program, excluding thesis or the equivalent
- OPT must be **full-time** after completion of the course of study.

Eligibility Requirements

- You must have been in lawful student status for one full academic year.
- The type of employment you are seeking must be directly related to your major area of study and commensurate with your level of education.
- You must make an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor in the International Center.
- You must submit a complete application to the INS California Service Center.
- Students **must** apply for OPT before completion of their final term (quarter).

General Information

- OPT is limited to a maximum of 12 months per each advanced degree. A student may be authorized 12 months of practical training and becomes eligible for another 12 months of practical training when he or she changes to a higher educational level.
- You do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT, but once approved, time spent unemployed cannot be redeemed and will count towards the 12-month limit.
- Employment may occur anywhere within the United States and students may change employers during authorized employment.

Importance of the Actual Date of Completion

Completion of the course of study is the date that all program requirements are met (example: final exams or submission of thesis) and not the date of the Graduation Commencement ceremony. Your lawful F-1 status in the United States expires 60 days after the date of completion of all program requirements regardless of the expected completion date indicated on your I-20. **Applications for OPT during this 60-day period will no longer be accepted.** It is the student's responsibility to ensure their legal status in the United States at all times.

Application Procedures

- Pick-up an OPT application from the International Center.
- Make an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor.
- Fill out the INS I-765 form **before** your appointment with the Advisor who will answer any questions you may have regarding the form.
- Have photos taken (as described in application instructions).
- Bring your current I-20, the photos, completed INS form, your passport and your I-94 card to your appointment with an Int'l Student Advisor.
- Pick-up your completed documents from the International Center 1-3 days later.
- Mail the completed application as specified in the OPT application instructions to the INS California Service Center.

Travel Outside the United States and Re-entry

Once a student has completed his or her studies and leaves the United States **before** optional practical training is authorized, the application for optional practical training is considered abandoned. He or she may not be permitted to re-enter the U.S.

Students who travel outside United States while on OPT are required to present an unexpired F-1 visa, their I-20 appropriately endorsed for travel within the last six months and an unexpired "Employment Authorization Document" (EAD) card to the Immigration Inspector at the port of entry. Without these valid documents students may not be granted re-entry into the United States. It is also recommended that students obtain a certification letter from their employer when traveling in order to facilitate re-entry.