Practical Training Instructions for F-1 Students

DEFINITION OF TERMS:

- **Part time**: Less than 20 hours per week
- **Full time**: Over 20 hours a week
- **Course Work Completion Date**: The date on which all course work is completed
- **Degree Requirement Completion Date**:
  - Undergraduates and non-thesis option graduate students: the course work completion date is also the degree requirement completion date
  - For all other graduate students the date on which all course work, research credits, and other requirements of the degree (including dissertation, defense, thesis, etc.) are complete
- **Graduation Date**: Date on which degree is received (May/October/January)
- **Program End Date on I-20**: The expiration date of your I-20

What is Practical Training and what are the different types of practical training available?

“Practical Training” designates **2 specific types of employment** authorization which enable F-1 students to hold employment outside their universities for the purpose of gaining experience or additional knowledge in their fields of study.

1) **Optional Practical Training (OPT) AND 2) Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**

1) **OPT** is defined by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as a practical work experience that is directly related to your field of study and commensurate with your level of study. OPT enhances or enriches an academic or curricular experience. It can be authorized in any combination of 2 ways:

   a. **PRE-completion OPT**: Start date prior to the program end date on the student’s I-20
      - Part time while school is in session
      - Full time or Part-time:
        - During school vacation periods (as long as student will be registered in the school in the following semester)
        - If start date requested is after completion of all required course work
   b. **POST-completion OPT**: Start date after course work completion or after degree requirement completion
      - Full time only

2) **CPT** as defined by USCIS, must be an “an integral part of an established curriculum.” As such, CPT is work experience which is required to complete one’s degree program **AND** must offer credit that will count towards a student’s degree requirements. This may but will not always, include internships, cooperative education programs, research or independent study.

How Much Time Am I Allowed on Practical Training?

- Eligible for a maximum of 12 months of full time OPT during or following each advancing degree level. Part time **Pre-completion OPT** accrues at a rate of 50%, e.g., 6 months of part-time OPT counts as 3 months of the total.
- If you have used full time CPT for one year or more, you are **no longer** eligible for OPT. Use of part-time CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT.
- **Special Extensions**:
  - If you are a student in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) you are eligible to apply for a one-time extension of 17 additional months, thus making their OPT total a maximum of 29 months.
  - If you are the beneficiaries of a timely-filed H-1B petition; you are eligible for an OPT extension or a work authorization extension (if on post-completion OPT at the time of filing) or an extension of your F-1 status (if in legal F-1 status at the time of filing). This extension is applicable until the effective date of your H-1B (October 1 of the year in which the petition was filed).
Am I Eligible for Practical Training?

- F-1 status for at least one academic year;
- Good academic standing;
- Maintaining your legal status, that is:
  - Passport and I-20 are valid at all times;
  - Pursue a full course of study;
  - Report all address changes within 10 days of moving;
  - Follow USCIS and Rutgers procedures for moving from one educational level to another (e.g., from Master’s to PhD), and for transferring from one school to another.

How do I apply for Practical Training?

- Attend a workshop on Off-Campus Employment/ Post-Graduate Employment (depending on your needs). Check with a Center administrative staff at (848)-932-7015 or access our website and go to the Events Calendar to find out when the next scheduled workshop will be. There is no sign-up requirement.

- Complete all forms handed out during the workshop, and gather all supporting documents for your application. Review the checklists on pages 3 for a list of all the documents required for your application.

- Submit the forms to your international student adviser, either during your adviser’s scheduled “walk-in hours,” by appointment, through email (CPT only), or by submitting the paperwork at the front office (CPT only). Bring all the documents for the application with you when you meet with your international student adviser. (Your international student adviser will not review your application if any of the documents are missing.)

External Resources

- STEM designated program list http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm
- E-Verify http://www.dhs.gov/e-verify

PRACTICAL TRAINING AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

It is very important that you plan ahead for these applications and take into consideration the processing timelines mentioned below. The Center will not accept last minute applications. If your situation requires special handling outside of the normal processing times, please contact your adviser, however, we cannot guarantee faster processing.

1) Curricular Practical Training:

- If all required documents for your CPT application are in order, your adviser will evaluate your application and, if approved, authorize your CPT by submitting it to SEVIS electronically.
- It can take up to two weeks for SEVIS to return the data and for your ISA to issue a new I-20. The CPT authorization is printed on page 3 of your new I-20. You may start working once you receive this new I-20 and the CPT start date has arrived.
- You are required to apply for a new CPT for each new employment. You must also apply for a new CPT if your employment carries over from one semester to another.
- You are required to register for corresponding credit(s) each semester that you apply for a CPT & for each new employment.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR CPT APPLICATION

1. Employer’s Certification for CPT Authorization form and a job offer letter. If a job offer letter includes ALL required information noted on the form, then the job offer alone is sufficient.
2. Academic Official’s Certification for Curricular Practical Training form signed by your Undergraduate Dean or your Graduate Program Director
3. Unofficial full transcript that bears your name and includes the course or research credit(s) covering your CPT
4. Valid passport (for review by your ISA)
2) **Optional Practical Training:**
   - If all required documents for your OPT application are in order, your adviser will recommend the OPT and submit it electronically to SEVIS.
   - It can take up to two weeks for SEVIS to return the data and for us to print out a new I-20 which notes the OPT recommendation on page 3.
   - You can then pick up this I-20 with the OPT recommendation to mail a copy with your OPT application.
   - Before mailing your application, please review the “OPT Application Checklist” to make sure your application is ready and complete.
   - Once your application is complete, you then mail the entire OPT application to the address provided in the mailing instructions of this handout OR to the appropriate address provided on the instructions for the I-765. We suggest you mail your application by “certified mail, return receipt requested.” This will cost a few dollars more than regular mail, but you may need proof that you have mailed the application in a timely manner.
   - After the submission of your application, you will receive a receipt notice with your receipt number which will enable you to check the status of your application online or to contact a customer service representative of USCIS if necessary.
   - USCIS can take up to 90 days to process the application. There is no expedited processing for OPT applications.
   - If approved, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) will be sent directly to you at the address you provided on the Form I-765. (Remember, the EAD Card will not be forwarded to another address in the event you move.) Once you receive the EAD card you are authorized to work on OPT between the start and end dates listed on the card.

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR OPT APPLICATION**

**BRING ALL OF THE DOCUMENTS (I & II) WITH YOU WHEN YOU COME IN TO MEET WITH YOUR ISA FOR THE OPT APPLICATION REVIEW AND REQUEST FOR A NEW I-20. It is important that you bring both sets of documents to your ISA for the most timely and effective processing of your application.**

**I. For OPT recommendation on the I-20: ISA will keep these documents**
   1. Unofficial full transcript that bears your name
   2. Academic Official’s Certification for OPT form (with the bottom section completed by the student)

**II. For the I-765 Application: You will send these documents to USCIS**
   *Pay close attention to which forms should be in original version and which forms should be in photocopied version.

**Originals:**

   - Be sure you have signed the form & have provided a U.S. address which will be valid at least 4 months
   - Fill the form online and sign in BLACK ink
   - #16 on the form: (c) (3) (A) – Pre-completion OPT; (c) (3) (B) – Post-completion OPT

2. **$380 check (or money order)** made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”
   - If your name and current address are not on the form of payment, write them on the check/money order
   - Write “fee for I-765” on the memo line. Furthermore, for identification purposes, please write your SEVIS ID number and your phone # on the form of payment.

   - Using this form, you may request an E-Notification that your application has been accepted by the USCIS. The E-Notification is NOT the official USCIS receipt notice.

4. **Two identical color photographs** of you taken within 30 days of filing this application
   - White to off-white background, to be printed on thin paper with glossy finish unmounted and unretouched
   - Passport-style photos must be 2” by 2”
   - Must be in color with full face, frontal view
   - Head height should measure 1” to 1 3/8” from top to bottom of chin
   - Eye height is between 1 1/8” to 1 3/8” from bottom of photo
   - Head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member
   - Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and SEVIS ID number on the back of the photo
**Photocopies:**
All I-20s you have ever had— including the new one with the requested OPT on page 3 (copy pages 1 & 3 of all SEVIS I-20s and pages 3 & 4 of all non-SEVIS I-20s)
- From your passport, very clear copies of: (1) all pages that contain biographical information; (2) the page that has your picture; (3) the page showing passport expiration date (these 3 items may or may not be on the same page)
- A copy of your most recent visa
- Your latest paper Form I-94, front & back OR a print out of your electronic I-94 (www.cbp.gov/I94)
- Copies of any/all previous EAD cards (front and back) that have been issued to you

**Mailing your application:**
If your state of residence is **New Jersey**, New York, or Pennsylvania, please submit the OPT application to the address listed below. If you live in a State other than the ones listed above please refer to the instructions for the form I-765 to find out which USCIS lockbox address has jurisdiction over your state of residence and mail your application there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For US Postal Service Mail Deliveries (e.g. 1st class, Priority, Express):</th>
<th>For Express Mail and Courier Service Deliveries (e.g. FedEx, DHL):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266</td>
<td>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ATTN: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business, Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
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**OPT Application Deadlines:**
Pre-completion OPT applications can be filed up to 90 days before the proposed OPT start date if the student has completed a full academic year in F-1 status. If not, the student may only file the I-765 for pre-completion OPT up to 90 days before the end of the full academic year. The application must be filed within 30 days of the date your international student adviser enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS.

Post-completion OPT applications can be filed up to 90 days before the degree completion date and up to 60 days after the degree completion date, provided that it is filed within 30 days of the date your international student adviser enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS. Applications for the 17 month STEM extension must be filed before the current EAD expires.

STEM based OPT extension applications must reach the USCIS before the post-completion OPT end date. The application for extension can be filed up to 120 days prior to the end date of the OPT.

H-1B Cap-Gap extensions must be requested before the program end date or the end date of the OPT (whichever is the case) if the student is the beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition.

**Effect of periods of unemployment while on Post-Completion OPT:** During any initial 12-month period of post-completion OPT, no student (including STEM students) may be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 90 days. If a STEM student receives a 17 month extension, the limit on unemployment is raised to an aggregate of 120 days, applied to the entire 29-month period on which the student is on post-completion OPT.

**Three Travel Warnings:** (1) traveling abroad between the time you submit your OPT application and the time you receive the USCIS receipt notice, or if your OPT has expired and you are waiting for a STEM extension EAD could result in the loss of OPT and denial of readmission to the U.S., (2) while on post-completion OPT or an extension, regulations allow you to re-enter the U.S. to resume employment, (3) if you will need to apply for an F-1 visa to return to the U.S. while on OPT, please note that this may be a high risk visa application and the chances of denial could be greater than normal.

**OPT Termination:** Your OPT authorization ends when you commence another degree program, change to another status, the expiration date of your EAD, if an extension request is denied, or if on H-1B cap-gap extension – if the H-1B petition is rejected, revoked or denied.

**OPT Withdrawal or Cancellation**
Before application has been mailed: It is possible to cancel the OPT recommendation, contact your ISA
After application has been mailed: Contact your ISA to request help with the cancellation of OPT. No guarantees.