

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

WHAT IS OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

Optional practical training is temporary employment authorization that allows F-1 students to gain practical work experience (on- or off-campus) by applying their academic knowledge to a position directly related to their major field of study. *OPT is not available to students in Liberal Arts & Science: General Studies.* You are permitted to work for a maximum of 12 months of Full-Time employment (over 20 hours per week) for each higher educational level you pursue in the U.S. (Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate).

TYPES OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Pre-Completion OPT:

- Pre-completion OPT is granted to students who will work BEFORE graduation/degree completion.

Post-Completion OPT:

- Post-completion OPT is granted to students who will work AFTER graduation/degree completion.

17 Month STEM Extension:

- Additional 17 months of OPT for students already participating in Post-Completion OPT in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics fields, who are employed by an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system. Bachelor's degree required.

FACTS ABOUT OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

- Application fee for OPT is \$380.
- OPT approval is obtained through the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).
- To be eligible, you must have completed at least one full academic year of study (fall and spring semesters only) with no violations of your visa status.
- After you have completed the first academic year, the earliest you can apply for OPT is 90 days before you wish to begin working.
- You do not need to have a job offer before you apply.
- You may not exceed 90 aggregate days of unemployment
- You are only eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT for each higher degree level earned.
- The time you work using pre-completion OPT takes away from the 12 months total OPT, deducted at a 50% rate for part-time.
 - **Example:** If you work 4 months using pre-completion OPT, you will have taken away 2 months of post-completion OPT, leaving you with only 10 months of post completion OPT.
- If you have used 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training, you are not eligible for any Optional Practical Training.
- If your OPT is approved you will be issued an EAD card, which you must have before you begin working.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT

- During summer vacation and semester break you may work either part-time or full-time.
- While school is in session you may work part-time only (less than 20 hours per week).
- Since you are working on OPT while you are still in school, you must be enrolled full-time (12 credits undergraduate/ 9 credits graduate).
- You may choose your OPT start date.

POST-COMPLETION OPT

- You *should* apply for OPT before you graduate/finish coursework
- The earliest you can apply for post-completion OPT is 90 days before your graduation or completion date.
- Full-time employment only - you must work *at least* 20 hours or more per week.
- You choose the date you wish to begin working.
 - Start date MUST be within 60 days of graduation.

Study and Post-Completion OPT

- Immigration 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.

PROCESSING TIME

After we send your application to USCIS it should take two to three months for your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to be returned to us from USCIS. It could take less or more time, depending on their workload.

- It is 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!!!

TRAVEL WHILE OPT APPLICATION IS PENDING

Contact your International Student Advisor before making any travel plans if your OPT is still pending USCIS authorization. You are required to have your EAD card to return to the U.S. and should also be able to prove that you have a job or job offer. We recommend that you do not travel before you receive your EAD card. If you do, you are taking a risk of being denied entrance to the U.S. and losing your OPT benefit. Please contact your International Student Advisor if you must travel before you receive your EAD.

OPT EXTENSION

If you have not used your full-year benefit, you can extend Pre-Completion OPT by filing another application and paying another \$380 fee. You may not continue to work if your EAD card has expired and you may not start working again before you receive your new EAD. You cannot extend Post-Completion OPT (unless you qualify for the STEM Extension). You will be eligible for another 12 month period of OPT if you go on to a higher level of study.

HOW TO APPLY FOR OPT

STEP 1: Meet with International Student Advisor

- Complete the OPT Request Form to determine eligibility
- Sign the “Student Responsibilities while on OPT” form

STEP 2: Checklist - Gather the following documents to submit with your application

- I-765 Form: Application for Employment Authorization (*most recent form*)
- G-1145 Form: If you would like Electronic Notification of Receipt
- Photocopy of your passport identification page
- Photocopy of your visa
- Photocopy of the front and back of your I-94 (*white card stapled in your passport*)
- Photocopy of all previous I-20s
- Two passport-type regulation photos, which are less than 6 months old
(On the back, write your name and I-94 number in pencil.)
- Photocopies of any EAD cards or employment records from previous jobs in the U.S.
- A check, money order, or cashier’s check for \$380, payable to the *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*
- New I-20 with OPT recommendation (you will receive this at your final meeting with the International Student Advisor).

STEP 3: Submit Application

- Return to International Student Advisor with all checklist items completed.
- DSO will make the recommendation in SEVIS and print two copies of your new I-20.
- New I-20 will be endorsed by the DSO on pages one and three (just below the actual printed recommendation, not on the travel line).
- Allow the DSO to make photocopies of all documents being sent to USCIS.
- Send all items CERTIFIED MAIL with return receipt requested, to the following address

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For Express mail and courier service:

USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

STEP 4: Processing

- After sending all documents to USCIS, you will receive a “Receipt Notice” at the address listed on the I-765 form.
- You may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying you that your application has been accepted. You must complete Form G-1145 and clip it to the first page of your application.
- You may track your case using the receipt number at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>.
- When your EAD card does arrive, your International Student Advisor will need a photocopy.

IMPORTANT: YOU CANNOT BEGIN WORKING UNTIL YOU RECEIVE YOUR EAD CARD!

Optional Practical Training Request Form

1. PERSONAL AND PROGRAM INFORMATION:

Name _____ Date _____

Last _____ First _____

Local (US) Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Student ID# _____ Major _____

Expected Date of Graduation: _____

2. WHAT KIND OF OPT ARE YOU APPLYING FOR?

Before Completion of Studies:

Full-time. *Only available during vacation periods or if you have completed all of your coursework.*

Starting on _____ and ending _____

Part-Time. *Less than 20 hours a week.*

Starting on _____ and ending _____

After Completion of Studies (Full-time only):

Starting on _____. *Your start date could be as early as the expected or actual date of completion of studies you put above, or any other date within the 60-day period following it.*

Ending on _____. *You must apply for all of the 12-month benefit you have remaining for this program of study.*

How much of your 12-month OPT benefit for this program have you used, if any? _____

3. DESCRIBE your proposed employment and EXPLAIN HOW it relates to your Major. What type of a job are you looking for? What will you be doing? What skills that you learned at GCC will you use in this employment? Be as specific as you can!!

Post-Completion OPT: Student Responsibility

Please read carefully, sign, and return to DSO- be sure to keep a copy for your records

General Responsibilities:

- I understand that I may not work on-campus once my EAD card is valid and the start date on the EAD card has arrived, even if I have yet to find OPT employment.
- I understand that I am still in F-1 status. Having OPT does not change my status to working.
- I understand that I must find a job within 90 days of the start date of my OPT, and cannot accrue 90 days or more of unemployment at any time during OPT.
- I understand that my authorization to engage in OPT is automatically terminated if I transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level.
- I understand that DHS regulations require me to seek employment directly related to my major area of study and commensurate with my education level.
- I understand that within 60 days of the expiration date of my OPT, I must either request a transfer to four-year university, or return to my home country.

Reporting Responsibilities:

- I understand that if the EAD card is send directly to me, I must provide the DSO with a copy when I receive it.
- I understand that my address must be updated with the DSO within 10 days of moving.
- I understand that I must report back to the DSO with my employer's information as soon as I am employed.
- I understand that I am required to report any changes of name, address, or interruption of employment for the duration of the OPT to the DSO within 10 days of the change.
- I understand that if my immigration status changes, I am required to send the DSO copies of my new documents within 10 days of the change.
- I understand that it is my responsibility to stay informed about changing federal regulations that may impact my OPT or F-1 status.
- I understand that failure to do the above could result in loss of my legal non-immigrant status and that if this occurs, I may have to stop working and/or leave the United States.

Travel while on OPT:

- I understand that if I leave the U.S. before I receive my EAD card, I may not be eligible to return to the U.S.
- I understand that if I decide to travel while on OPT I must have a valid I-20 signed by a DSO within six months before reentering the U.S., an unexpired EAD card, a valid passport, valid employment letter, and a valid F-1 visa stamp to be readmitted to the U.S. The letter from an employer should contain salary information, a statement that the employment is temporary, and that I will be employed after returning from travel.

Signature: _____ Date _____ / _____ / _____