

## **OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING** **INFORMATION AND APPLICATION PACKET**

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An international student with F-1 visa status may engage in temporary employment to gain practical experience in his or her field of study through the **practical training** employment options. There are **two types** of practical training:

- Curricular Practical Training (CPT) (required by academic course)
- Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Each employment option has its own rules and procedures that the student must follow in order to gain permission to work. This packet is for Optional Practical Training. **Please read carefully all the information provided before you apply for authorization for OPT.**

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**Optional Practical Training gives F-1 international student the opportunity to gain paid practical experience in their field of study. OPT is available to students for up to 12 months after each educational level (i.e. undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate). OPT can be done during or after completion of a degree program.**

### **PRECONDITIONS**

- Legal F-1 visa status
- Full-time enrollment in an accredited school for at least one academic year (time spent on academic leaves abroad also counts)
- Passport must be valid for at least another six months
- Employment must be related to the student's major field of study and commensurate with the student's level of study
- No offer of employment is required, but the student is expected to work or be seeking employment
- Student must apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) **before** beginning employment

### **EMPLOYMENT DURATION**

- Cumulative maximum limit of twelve months is allowed during any uninterrupted stay in F-1 visa status. Any previous part-time OPT will be deducted from the 12-month limit.
  - **PLEASE NOTE: The 12-month clock starts ticking down from the first day listed on your EAD, whether you are working or not**
- Students who engage in 12 months or more of full time curricular practical training become ineligible for Optional Practical Training, Part-time CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT
  - **PLEASE NOTE: Students are advised to use CPT during their studies and OPT after graduation so that they can take full advantage of the paid 12-month opportunity.**
- OPT done while school is in session is limited to part-time employment only (20 hours per week).

## **APPLICATION TIMEFRAME**

- With the assistance of a Designated School Official, any international student who wishes to engage in OPT employment must apply for and receive an EAD from the USCIS before he/she begins work.
  - **PLEASE NOTE**: Students are encouraged to submit applications to the USCIS between 120 and 150 days prior to graduation to offset the lengthy processing times.
- Students engaged in pre-completion OPT must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment.

## **AUTHORIZATION/APPLICATION PROCESS**

### **STUDENT CHECKLIST**

- Complete the attached Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. **While signing this form, make sure you sign CLEARLY and WITHIN THE LINES because your signature will be scanned for your EAD.**
- Write a check or money order payable to the US Department of Homeland Security with the amount of the fee required for Form I-765. The fee amount for this form may change at any time; **the current fee amount is \$300**. Do not mail cash.
- Obtain two photographs. The photo requirements are the same as for passport photos (full frontal face photographs in color with plain background; the same size and image specifications as for passport photos.) The two photographs must be identical and no more than 30 days old when the application is filed. Head and face coverings are not acceptable except for limited religious or medical reasons.
  - Lightly print your first and last name on the back of each photograph with a pencil.
  - Make copies of both sides of the I-94 (it's usually stapled to your passport) and the ID page and US visa page of your passport.
  - Make copies of any previous EAD cards (if applicable.)
  - Complete the Student Intent Form. Make sure you meet with a relevant faculty member to sign the Academic Department Certification, which certifies that the OPT work is related to your field of studies
  - Make an appointment with Shelly Shinebarger in Dean of Students Office (X6116)
  - Bring all required documentation together with your current, original I-20 and valid, unexpired passport (including the I-94).

### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

- If your F-1 status is valid and the proposed employment qualifies for OPT, the DSO will update your record in the SEVIS database to include an official recommendation for OPT
- You must mail the completed Form I-765, the filing fee check, the two photographs, and copies of all your original documents as listed above to the USCIS Service Center with jurisdiction over your place of residence. If you apply, while you are residing on campus, the relevant Service Center will be the one in St. Albans, Vermont (see the instructions to Form I-765 for a listing of other Service Centers). The address of the USCIS Vermont Service Center is:

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Vermont Service Center  
75 Lower Welden Street  
St. Albans, VT 05479**



## IMPORTANT RELATED ISSUES

**PLEASE REMEMBER** that while engaged in OPT after your graduation from Union College, you are still required to report to us in our capacity as the Designated School Officials any legal changes in your name, address and/or visa status.

### **WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU AS AN OPT EMPLOYEE**

- You may begin work under OPT only after you have obtained your EAD from the USCIS
- Some employers may not be familiar with OPT type of work-if employers ask for additional information proving that this is legal employment opportunity, the Office of International Studies will provide such information.
- Remember (and remind your employer) that you pay local, state, and federal taxes, but you are not subject to social security and medicare (aka FICA) taxation if you have been in the US for less than five years and if you are on practical training. Your employer does not have to contribute his/her portion of FICA either.
- Your employer might request that you fill in additional paperwork and/or you present additional documentation before you start working. If you change employers, just make sure your EAD is valid at all times.
- Your EAD will not specify an employer but will state that it is for practical training employment. If you work at a job that is not directly related to your studies, this might cause problems later on if you apply for any change of status or adjustment to permanent resident status.
- Changing employers while on Optional Practical Training does not require submission of a new application to the USCIS provided that each new position is directly related to your field of study and commensurate with your level of study.
- If while working under OPT you decide to transfer to another school and/or start studies at a higher educational level, your OPT work permission will be automatically terminated.

### **TRAVEL ABROAD AND REENTRY WHILE ENGAGING IN OPT**

- If you are engaged in pre-completion OPT (i.e. before graduation), follow the same travel procedures as all regular F-1 students.
- If you are engaged in post completion OPT (i.e. after graduation), you can travel abroad and you will be readmitted to resume employment for the remainder of the period authorized on your EAD, **ONLY IF** you present your current Form I-20 endorsed by your DSO within the preceding 6 months and an unexpired EAD. You are also required to have a valid passport with a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the United States.
  - o **PLEASE NOTE:** If you leave the US after graduation but before getting an EAD, you will not be permitted to re-enter the country to work under OPT. We advise you NOT to leave the United States BEFORE you have obtained your EAD!
- Please remember that your visa status is **YOUR** responsibility.

### **POSSIBILITIES AFTER THE 12 MONTHS OF OPT**

- If you wish to continue working in the US beyond the year of OPT, consult your employer, or an immigration lawyer for other options to stay/work legally.
- Students become eligible for a second 12-month OPT authorization if they move on to a higher educational level (i.e., go to graduate school).
- Students cannot add unused OPT time to any future OPT periods.

