

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Optional Practical training is work permission available to all degree seeking F-1 students. OPT may be used prior to or after completion of studies. OPT taken prior to completion of studies is commonly referred to as "*pre-completion practical training*," while taken after completion of studies is often called "*post-completion practical training*."

IMPORTANT NOTE: BCIS APPROVAL IS REQUIRED FOR BOTH TYPES OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING.

RESTRICTIONS ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (Pre- and Post-Completion)

1. The employment must be **directly related to student's field of study**.
2. **OPT can be used only during the following times:**
 - a. during the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session if the student is currently enrolled and intends to register for the next term of the session; or
 - b. while school is in session, provided that practical training, in combination with any other authorized employment, does not exceed twenty hours a week; or
 - c. after completion of all course requirements (but before completion of a course of study), excluding a thesis or the equivalent, if the student is in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program; or
 - d. after completion of the course of study
3. The **maximum total time** available for OPT is **12 months of full-time employment**.
NOTE: effective January 1, 2003, a student becomes eligible for another 12-month period of practical training when s/he moves to a higher educational degree level.
4. **All OPT requires prior approval from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (US CIS)**. You should apply at least two to three months before you want to begin the period of work in order to receive approval in time.
5. **Students are eligible for OPT *only* after they are in F-1 status and have been studying full-time for at least one academic year**. This means Fall then Spring semesters or Spring then Fall semesters, depending on when one began: summer semester does not count towards practical training eligibility.

PRECOMPLETION PRACTICAL TRAINING RESTRICTIONS

1. Any time used in pre-completion practical training is **subtracted from the 12-month allotment of OPT**.
Note: Part-time pre-completion OPT is deducted at 1/2 the full-time rate.
2. Students may not engage in full-time employment during the school year unless all course requirements have been met.
3. Students may supplement a teaching or research assistantship or other on-campus employment with OPT only if the total employment does not exceed 20 hours per week when school is in session and 40 hours per week during annual school holidays.

POSTCOMPLETION PRACTICAL TRAINING RESTRICTIONS

1. Available **AFTER completion of studies** (last final exam date in semester)
2. May be **authorized for up to 12 months** (minus time spent in pre-completion OPT, not CPT)
3. Can be **authorized without job offer**.
4. Student must **apply during the period 120 days prior to the completion of studies date and CANNOT apply during the 60-day grace period following the program end date**. NOTE: if the student has been enrolled in a 1-year program (e.g., Day MBA), then the earliest date s/he can apply is 90 days prior to the student's completion of studies date.
5. Student must **complete OPT within 14 months of completion of studies**.

The student needs the following items to apply for OPT:

1. Personal check for \$120 made out to US CIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services)
2. *Completed I-765 form (get in Int'l Student Office or you can find it at www.immigration.gov)*
3. Bring I-94 card
4. Two (2) ADIT style photos, see handout
5. ID Page from Passport, or old EAD card if you already had one.
6. SEVIS I-20, copies of all other I-20's
7. *Academic Advisor's recommendation form (get in Int'l Student Office)*
 - I. Come to the office to pick up Academic Advisor form.
 - II. Get pictures taken
 - III. Make an appointment to meet w/ Hannah. Bring your pictures, passports, completed academic advisor form, checkbook, all I-20's with you to the appointment.
 - IV. You can apply up to 120 days before your work period start date. **And you MUST apply before completion of studies!** If you don't then you have lost your chance.
 - V. Another new rule is after a higher degree you are eligible for 12 more months of OPT, but you must earn a higher degree such as Bachelor's and then Master's.

