Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 non-immigrant status that allows students to work off-campus in a field related to their area of study. Applying for OPT is a two-step process which begins first with a recommendation for OPT from the International Student Advisor (ISSA) and second, with approval of the application by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In order to maintain F-1 status while on OPT, students must report employer name and address to USCIS and not be unemployed for a total of more than 90 days.

If you are applying for OPT, it is important for you to understand the application procedure and the rules that govern this type of employment authorization. Please read all OPT handouts carefully and speak with an ISSA if you have any questions.

Eligibility
To be eligible for OPT you must be in valid F-1 status and have maintained valid F-1 status for at least one academic year before applying.

OPT Limits
There is a limit of 12 months of full-time OPT. OPT may be used before completion of studies, after completion of studies, or a combination of both time periods. OPT may be full-time or part-time, but any pre-completion OPT is limited to part-time during the school year. Any periods of OPT, whether part-time or full-time, will be deducted from the total twelve-month period available.

> *Part-time OPT* (20 hours per week or less) is deducted at half of the full-time rate (two months of part-time OPT = one month of full-time OPT) before completion of studies. After completion of studies, part-time OPT is counted at the full-time rate.
> *Full-time OPT* is training that is more than 20 hours per week. Full-time OPT can only be granted during official college breaks or after the completion of degree requirements.

On your application you must indicate part-time or full-time employment and you must indicate the EXACT DATES of your employment authorization, including a day, month, and year for both start and end dates. The latest possible start date for authorization after the end of your final academic term is 60 days after your completion of studies.

*The 17 month post-completion OPT extension for certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) degree holders is not applicable for Wellesley students.

When to Apply
OPT applications may be filed up to 90 days *before* the completion of all degree requirements, and up to 60 days *after* the completion of all degree requirements. It takes approximately one week for the ISSA to process an OPT Recommendation. Your application must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of when OPT is recommended by the ISSA. USCIS processing time for this type of application is from 30 to 90 days. Please apply early to avoid delays in starting your employment.

How to Apply
Make an appointment to speak with the ISSA
On the day of your appointment, bring with you:

☐ All instructional handouts

☐ OPT Date & Employer Verification Form

☐ Form I-765-completed and signed

> The Form I-765 can be completed online, saved, and printed. This is helpful to eliminate the difficulty of reading handwriting and leads to more accuracy. Please go to http://www.uscis.gov, click on "Immigration Forms," and scroll down to Form I-765. Complete the Form, save it for your records, and print out a copy to sign in **blue ink**. If you with to complete the form by hand, please write in **blue ink**.

Under section 16, write either (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT, or (c) (3) (A) for pre-completion OPT.

Carefully consider the address you use to complete this form. You should use an address where you will be in 2-4 months, when your EAD will be mailed.

☐ Copy of **all** Form I-20s (pages 1 & 3 stapled together); include forms from previous U.S. schools (if applicable)

☐ Copy of your F-1 visa (unless you are Canadian, or have had a change of status approval)

☐ Copy of your Form I-94 (front and back)

☐ Copy of your passport photo page

☐ Copy of your passport expiration date page (if different from your passport photo page)

☐ 2 photographs (see *Photo Specification Handout*). Lightly write your name and SEVIS ID# on the back

☐ Personal check or money order made out to U.S. Department of Homeland Security for $380. Write your SEVIS ID # on the front of your check in the memo section. **Do not write on the back of the check.**

☐ Copy of any previously issued EADs (if applicable)

☐ Special Registrants must show proof of registration and should provide a brief letter indicating their FIN# and the date and location of registration from their last entry in F-1 status.

☐ Form G-1145 (if you wish to receive an e-mail and/or text message confirming that your application has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility)

If the ISSA determines that you are eligible for OPT, you will be issued a new Form I-20 with the appropriate recommendation. Your recommendation information will be entered in Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), and you will be contacted by the ISA via email to pick up your OPT application materials.

STEP II: PICK UP YOUR RECOMMENDATION & MAIL YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS

You are responsible for mailing your application materials to USCIS in a timely manner. **We strongly suggest that you MAKE COPIES OF ALL YOUR DOCUMENTS before mailing, and that you send your application by Priority Mail (USPS) with delivery confirmation.** Send your application packet to:

By U.S. Postal Service (USPS):   USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

By Express Mail or Courier Service (FedEx, UPS, etc.):   USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121
Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Maintaining F-1 Status While on OPT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an extension of F-1 status. While you are on OPT, you are still in F-1 status and must follow the regulations in order to maintain your F-1 status.

1. Maintain employment during OPT—you must be actively seeking employment or be employed. If you are unemployed for a total of more than 90 days during the 12-month OPT period, you will no longer be maintaining your F-1 status.
2. Report any change of name or address to Slater International Center by email within 10 days of the change.
3. Report the name and address of your employer and any changes to your employment (including termination of employment) to Slater International Center by email as soon as the change occurs.

Travel/Renewing your Visa while on OPT

You must have a valid travel signature on your Form I-20 to travel and re-enter the United States in F-1 status.

Pre-Completion OPT

If you have **not completed your degree requirements** and you have **pre-completion OPT,** you may travel and re-enter the United States with a valid passport, Form I-20 (with a valid travel signature), a valid F-1 visa and financial documentation.

Post-Completion OPT

If you apply for post-completion OPT you must consider your future travel plans to determine what you will need to do.

Before your degree completion you may travel while your post-completion OPT application is pending.

Once you have completed your degree your OPT application must be approved and you must have a job or proof of a job offer in order to re-enter the U.S.

You should be prepared to present the following documents when re-entering the U.S. while on OPT:

- **Valid F-1 visa** - If your F-1 visa has expired and you must travel outside of the U.S., you will need to apply for a new visa at a U.S. Consulate outside of the U.S. *Please note that you may remain in the U.S. with an expired visa as long as your EAD, passport and Form I-94 are valid.*
- **Valid passport** (passport must be valid at least six months into the future)
- **Valid EAD** - The EAD is marked "Not valid for re-entry." This simply means that **the card alone is not sufficient for re-entering the U.S.** for those who have completed their degree requirements and have post-completion OPT.
- **Form I-20** with OPT recommendation (Note: the travel signature on page 3 should be less than six months old)
- **Proof of employment** – A letter from your current or prospective employer which indicates that you have a temporary job offer and that you will be employed for the duration of your OPT.

NOTE: If you should re-enter the United States in visa waiver or tourist status, you will no longer be eligible for OPT.