

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

SPRING 2005

## Definition of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Allows an F-1 student to gain a maximum of 12 months of practical experience.
- Employment must be directly related to **field of study** and **commensurate** with degree level.
- It is off-campus employment.
- Students do **not** need to secure employment before applying for OPT.

## Eligibility Requirements For Optional Practical Training

- Students may engage in OPT after being enrolled for at least one full academic year.
- Passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future.
- Prior use of full-time CPT for one year or more makes you ineligible for OPT.

## When Can I Use Optional Practical Training?

- During annual vacations and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, **and is eligible for registration**, and intends to register for next term (full-time);
- While school is in session and student has coursework to complete (cannot exceed 20 hrs/week)
- After completion of the course of study, or, for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent).

## Application Deadline For Opt After Completion Of Studies

We strongly recommend that you start the application process for OPT 90 days before you complete your studies. The new regulations mandate that a request **must be made prior to the completion of all course requirements for the degree** or prior to the completion of the course of study.

**Note: USCIS takes approximately 60-90 days to process OPT** and there is no way to expedite it. However if your application has not been adjudicated within 90 days of USCIS receipt you may request to the USCIS local office (having jurisdiction over your place of residence) to grant you an interim 240-day Employment Authorization Document (EAD). See OISS staff if this service is needed.

## Application Documents

1. Letter from academic advisor specifying graduation date or photocopy of nomination for graduation form signed by department chair or program director.
2. Bank letter or any other proof of funding (original).
3. Reduced Course Load Form approved from the Graduate School (**ONLY** if currently part-time).
4. Complete form I-765.
5. Complete form I-538 (Section A only).
6. Provide two photographs of yourself. Must meet the USCIS specification (see attached).
7. Check payable for \$175.00 to **US Department of Homeland Security** (fee subject to change).
8. Submit photocopies of:
  - 8a. I-94 card (both sides)
  - 8b. Biographical pages of your passport
  - 8c. Current visa page
  - 8d. All previous I-20ID
  - 8f. Previous EAD card (if any)

## Important Information

- 1) Part-time OPT is always deducted from the available OPT at 50% of the full-time rate (this option is **not** available for Post-completion OPT).
- 2) According to the new regulations (12/15/04), the DHS has indicated that a person may reenter the U.S. to search for employment while the request for OPT is pending (**this is risky**). However, if your OPT has been approved and you depart the U.S. before you get a job, your OPT ends and you cannot reenter.
- 3) Your employment begins and ends on the dates stipulated on the EAD card **only**.
- 4) You must **not** work or collect wages until your OPT has been granted.
- 5) If you have a job, you may travel and reenter to resume work at the same job. If traveling, you must carry the following documents with you at all times:
  - 5a. I-20 ID properly endorsed within the last six months
  - 5b. Unexpired F-1 student visa
  - 5c. EAD card
  - 5d. Unexpired passport
  - 5e. Letter from employer confirming employment
- 6) While on OPT you are required to update your address with us within 10 days of your move.  
<http://www.uri.edu/iss/request/address.php>
- 7) A student may be authorized 12 months of practical training, and may become eligible for another 12 months of practical training when he or she **changes** to a **higher educational level**.
- 8) Your dependents will remain in valid status for the duration of your OPT.
- 9) Your on-campus employment ends on the date specified on your new I-20 as the **expiration date**.
- 10) Your OPT ends if your transfer to another school or if you enroll in another educational level.
- 11) Mail all of the **application documents** (except items 1, 2 & 3) using a return receipt requested service (approx \$6.00), after you have met with OISS staff and we have **returned** all documents to you.

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

### After you have mailed your OPT packet you will receive the following documents by mail:

- Post office receipt for OPT packet.
- Notice of Action from USCIS, where they acknowledge the receipt of your money and the I-765 (OPT) application (10-30 days).
- On rare circumstances you **might** receive a request from USCIS to submit additional evidence to process your OPT application. You should let OISS know if you receive this blue form (30-60 days).
- EAD card (60-90 days).

*Keep this handout with you for future reference (REV. 04/05).*