



OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please read this document carefully as the information provided will answer many of your questions.

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional practical training (OPT) is defined as paid temporary employment that is **directly related** to the international student's degree program. It is similar to a paid internship where the student will have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom to a real-work experience. It is a professional level job that compliments the student's course of study.

Why should I apply for practical training?

Practical training is a benefit of the F-1 visa that provides actual employment experience in the student's major. Practical training provides an opportunity to increase employment marketability for the job search at home.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for practical training, a student must have maintained their F-1 status for a period of one full academic year (Fall & Spring). This includes completing 12 units each semester and refraining from illegal employment. Students who are or have been out of status should check with the International Student Office about eligibility.

What is my status while working on OPT?

All international students who are using the OPT benefit are still considered F-1 visa students. OPT is a benefit of the F-1 visa; it is not a different status.

How long can I work?

International students are authorized for a total of 12 months of OPT for each academic level of study. For example, students can receive 1 year of OPT during their Associate of Arts degree, another year of OPT during their Bachelor's degree and another year of OPT during their Master's degree. Students can also split the 12 month OPT authorization between two degrees at the same academic level.

How long can I be unemployed?

New rules limit the amount of time a post-completion student may be unemployed to only 90 days. A student who does not have a paid job by day 90 must do volunteer (free) work on day 91 in order to maintain status. Those who are unemployed over 90 days are considered out of status with US DHS.

Where can I work?

OPT can be completed in anywhere in the United States as long as the job is **directly related** to the major as listed on the student's I-20. Students must apply for OPT with their current school, but are allowed to move anywhere in the US to complete the employment.

Do I have to use the full 12 months at one time?

It depends on when the student applies:

➔ If the student uses OPT while in school: Part-time OPT requests can be submitted for the full 12 months OR for shorter amounts of time. (Full-time school attendance is required for part-time OPT requests). Each request for OPT requires a new application and fee to the US Department of Homeland Security (US DHS).

➔ If the student uses OPT after graduation: Students can split the 12 month OPT authorization between two degrees at the same academic level. However, applications must be filed within the specified application period.

Can I use practical training before I complete my studies?

Yes. Practical training can be used before graduation, as long as the student continuously enrolls in 12 units. Part-time OPT allows international students to work up to 20 hours per week only. This will be counted at a half-time rate against the total 12 month OPT limit. For example, if the student uses 2 months of part-time OPT, it only counts as 1 month of used time. Therefore, upon graduation, the student will have 11 months of optional practical training available.

How many hours can I work?

Pre-completion practical training allows the student to work up to 20 hours per week only (part-time). Students can work full-time during vacation periods such as summer vacation. Post-completion practical training requires that students work 40 hours per week (full-time); part-time work after graduation is not allowed.

Do I need to have a job before I apply?

No. International students generally will apply for practical training without an offer of employment. The Employment Authorization Card (EAD) is date specific; students cannot work beyond the dates printed on the card for any reason. Students are encouraged to plan carefully in order to ensure that they are able to use the full amount of time that was requested.

If I am graduating, when do I need to apply for practical training?

International students who are graduating may apply up to 90 days prior to their program completion date OR within the 60 day grace period (within 60 days of the graduation date). Students must plan accordingly to ensure that the OPT application is received as required by US CIS.

How long does it take to get the EAD card?

The processing time is 90 days. It is strongly advised that students apply early to ensure that the EAD card is received in a timely manner. International students are NOT allowed to work without the EAD card or work beyond the printed dates on the card, so plan appropriately.

Can I travel outside of the country while my application is pending at US CIS?

Yes. International students can travel outside of the United States while waiting for the OPT application to be processed. Students will need to travel with a valid F-1 visa a valid passport, a properly signed I-20 and a copy of the WAC receipt notice. (The WAC receipt notice is a document that will be sent to the student by US DHS once the application has been received).

Can I travel outside of the country after I receive my EAD card?

Yes; however, caution is needed. The student must always travel with a valid F-1 visa, a valid passport, a properly signed I-20 with a recent travel signature within the last 6 months and the EAD card. IF UNEMPLOYED: If the student is unemployed, travel abroad counts towards the 90 day unemployment limit rule. Such students should also be prepared to produce evidence of a continued job search. IF EMPLOYED: Employed international students are encouraged to travel with a letter from their employer verifying employment and/or a recent pay stub. These documents may be requested by the Port of Entry Officer.

Do I have to pay taxes while on OPT?

Yes, international students will have to pay state, local and federal taxes for any employment in the US. However, international students should not have to pay social security on any earned income.

Can I take classes while I am working in post-completion practical training?

Yes. International students are eligible to attend classes part-time while on post-completion practical training. Classes can be taken at COD or at other institutions.

What if I transfer to another school while I am using practical training?

Transferring to another school OR beginning another level of study at the same institution voids the employment authorization.

What does DHS/SEVIS require me to do as a part of my OPT?

US DHS requires that an F-1 student on OPT report:

1. Employer name and address
2. Employment start and end dates
3. Any change of student address

This information must be reported to the International Student Office and will be updated in the SEVIS system. Failure to report this information is a violation of student status. Students are encouraged to retain proof of the type of employment taken should they be questioned about the type of job and how it relates to their listed major. International students must also give the ISO a copy of the EAD card once it is received.

What happens after I complete post-completion OPT?

International students have 60 days to depart the United States or complete the transfer process to a new institution upon completion of OPT authorization. If transferring, the international student must be able to resume classes within 5 months of the transfer-out date listed in SEVIS or the date your OPT ends, whichever is earlier.

What if I have other questions related to practical training?

The International Student Office conducts workshops throughout the semester regarding OPT and the Job Search process. All students who are interested in applying for OPT must attend one of these workshops in order to have their application processed. Please visit our website at www.collegeofthedesert.edu/international and click on the “Upcoming Workshops” for dates and times.

How do I apply for OPT?

1. In order to apply for Optional Practical Training, international students must first attend an OPT workshop hosted by the International Student Office. Please visit our website at www.collegeofthedesert.edu/international and click on the “Upcoming Workshops” for dates and times.

2. Students who have completed the required workshop should contact the International Student Office at 776-7205 to schedule an appointment with Christina. Students will need to bring the following to the appointment:

- * All previously issued I-20s from all schools attended
- * Your passport (with an expiration date that is past the planned OPT time)
- * Your I-94 card
- * A check or money order in the amount of \$340.00 made out to “US Department of Homeland Security” (*effective 7/31/07 – please check with the ISO regarding fees prior to application*)
- * 2 passport-size color photographs. Photographs must be in the exact format indicated below or they will not be accepted:

