OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Office of International Students
Post-Completion of Studies – Initial OPT Authorization
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DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF OPT

Optional Practical Training Approval does two things:
First, it extends your F-1 status benefits for the duration of the OPT approval, and
Second, it gives authorization to work for experience in your field of study after completion of your degree.

Timing of your OPT application is critical: because F-1 Status Benefits end when you complete your studies.

Approval of OPT allows employment, or other professional activity, that is related to your completed program of study.
Note: terms like “Post-Doc”, “Intern”, or “Research” are academic terms, not immigration terms. If the job or activity is related to your completed program of study, then it qualifies for OPT.
Note: any OPT activity, paid or unpaid, must be for at least 20 hours per week.

Because USCIS approval of OPT may take several months, we recommend that you discuss your OPT plans with an International Student Counselor at least four months before you plan to graduate.

You may request a maximum OPT of 12 months, depending on previous amounts and types of practical training you have had prior to your program completion.
(If your degree is in a STEM Field you MAY be eligible to apply for an OPT 17-month OPT extension, but only if all of your OPT Extension Employers qualify based upon their registration in the US government E-Verify Program.)

We recommend that you consider the following when timing your OPT application to USCIS:
1. An OPT application must be made, and received by USCIS, between 90 days before your program completion date (as adjusted on your I-20 at the time of your OPT application) and 60 days after that date.
2. You should choose an OPT Begin Date that best suits your plans. Your requested OPT Begin Date must be between your program completion date and 60 days after that date. (Note: you do NOT need a job offer to apply.)
3. USCIS may take 60 to 90 days to process and approve your OPT application.
4. Any OPT job must begin within 90 days of your approved OPT Begin Date.

NOTE: OPT is not a “status.” Your F-1 Status continues for OPT. You are still a Graduate Center “Student” for immigration, and you still must report regularly to the Office of International Students.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Before you apply for OPT, discuss these requirements with an International Student Counselor.

1. Write your own proposal letter (less than one page, half a page is best) that:
   a. describes the type of OPT job or work activity for which you will be looking,
   b. explains how this job or work activity is related to your completed degree program of studies, and
c. tells how the OPT experience will help you professionally when you return to your home country.

2. Obtain a letter from your Program, either Advisor, Mentor, or Executive Officer (less than one page) that:
   a. confirms your expected Completion Date ______________________ (either your Deposit Date or your Degree Date – based on our discussion),
   b. recommends OPT, and
c. certifies that the purpose you have described (in your letter) is related to your field of study, and is suitable for your level and area of study.

3. (OPTIONAL) If you have a job offer, you may include a letter from your employer with the following:
   a. the job description, which shows the relationship to your degree, and
   b. the beginning date of the job.

NOTE: A job offer is NOT required to apply for Initial post-completion OPT.

NOTE: PREVIOUS FULL-TIME CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING:
If you have received twelve months or more of FULL-TIME CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING while studying, you are INELIGIBLE for OPT. Part-time CPT does not count toward OPT ineligibility.