

WHEN CAN I APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

Immigration regulations require that students be enrolled full time every semester. The only exceptions are (a) if a student is already on OPT before the beginning of the semester or (b) if a student has been pre-approved for reduced enrollment in his/her final semester (less than 9 hours).

Students who have been in **F-1 status for at least 9 months (two academic semesters)** are eligible for optional practical training (OPT), which is a temporary employment authorization in their major field of study for purposes of gaining practical experience.

Students may receive **twelve months** of practical training **for each higher academic level** (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate).

Students may apply for authorization for optional practical training directly related to their major area of study in the following cases:

- (1) After completion of the course of study. [post-completion OPT] Application for OPT in this case **must be submitted up to 90 days before the completion of the program, but no later than 60 days after program completion**. The OPT must begin within 60 days of graduation (= completion of program requirements).
- (2) After completion of all course requirements except thesis or dissertation, or final project requirements for non-thesis students. Should have a job offer before applying. [pre-completion OPT]
 - Students are expected to defend and complete all graduation requirements during the OPT period.
 - Students must be registered for Defending Student Status (1 hour), for Thesis and Defense (3 hours), or 3 hours for final project/independent study for non-thesis students **AND** have been pre-approved for reduced enrollment.
 - Students carrying 3 or more course work hours may NOT begin OPT before the end of the semester.
 - Students are limited to working only 20 hours per week during pre-completion OPT, and cannot hold any on campus employment.
 - Students on assistantships are enrolled for full time hours and therefore cannot begin OPT before the end of the semester or the end of their assistantship contract, whichever date is later.
- (3) During the student's annual vacation (summer) as long as the student intends to register for the next semester. [pre-completion OPT] It is advisable to have a job offer at the time of application in this case. The job can be full or part-time. Since the application process may take two months or longer, be sure to submit your application in a timely manner.
- (4) While school is in session, provided that the practical training does not exceed twenty hours a week. [pre-completion OPT] Must have a job offer before applying, and cannot hold any on-campus positions simultaneously.

In order to avoid the loss of any OPT time, we strongly recommend that you submit your paperwork to us approximately 90 days before the ending date of your program or before you want to begin work. In order to give us time to process and mail your application, do not submit it any later than 3 weeks before your I-20 expires. Beyond sixty days after program completion you will no longer be eligible to apply for OPT.

If you meet these qualifications, you can proceed with the application for practical training authorization. Upon completion of all the attached forms, an international advisor will review your application and decide either to recommend or not recommend your application for submission to USCIS for adjudication. A new SEVIS I-20 will be issued indicating the recommendation by the international advisor for the OPT.

Please note:

- ♦ Your OPT will be terminated if/when you transfer to another school or enroll in another degree program.
- ♦ You may NOT work during any gap between your program completion date and the beginning of your authorized OPT.
- ♦ Only ONE 17 month extension period is permitted, whether at the bachelor's, master's, or PhD level. Once it is used, there is no other extension option available.