Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows foreign students to engage in temporary employment in their field of study both before and after completion of studies.

The following information on Optional Practical Training concerns foreign students who are in F-1 immigration status and are either progressing in their degree program or are graduating from their degree program.

**Definition of “Optional Practical Training”**
Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession for a maximum of one year. Its purpose is to “round off” or compliment your academic work.

**Eligibility Requirement**
The work must be directly related to your major field of study and must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. The work may be full-time or part-time, and may occur anywhere in the United States. In order for you to be eligible to apply for OPT, you (1) must have been in lawful student status for at least nine months (one academic year) and (2) must submit your application during a 120-day period based upon the date you complete all program requirements (see next section). Students enrolled in English language training are not eligible for optional practical training after the completion of studies.

**Application Deadline**
You must first submit an application to your foreign student advisor within the 120-day period, which begins before you complete your program of study. However, you will be not be allowed to submit the application after you have graduated. The later you wait to apply, be advised that you might not receive the full 12 months of practical training. If your foreign student advisor recommends that you be allowed to participate in optional practical training, you must then submit an application for an “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD) to the Immigration office having jurisdiction over the place you are living at that time. The USCIS must receive this application during the same 120-day application period.

**Application and Authorization Procedures**
Your permission to begin Optional Practical Training does not begin until you have received an “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD) from the USCIS. In order to obtain this card, you will need to submit the following materials to the Foreign Student Advisor:

- Form I-765 (go [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) to download copy of form unless attached)
- Copy of Forms I-20 (All your I-20s even from previous school if you have it)
- Copy of I-94 (front and back)
- Check for $175.00 made payable to “DHS or Department of Homeland Security”
- 2 photographs (Passport style – white background)
- Copies of important passport pages (Biographical page, visa page, and expiration page if separate)
- Letter from your academic advisor, if recommended

Once USCIS receives your application, they will send you a ‘Notice of Action’ stating when your application will be processed. The USCIS work permission on the EAD will begin either on the day of completion of studies, as reflected by your Foreign Student Advisor’s recommendation on USCIS Form I-20, or the date the EAD is issued, whichever occurs later. However, those students who apply late may not receive the full period.

**Importance of the Actual Date you Complete Your Program Of Study**
Immigration regulations refer to the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, not to the date you participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a certificate or diploma. The Service ignores your graduation date because it realizes that many students, especially graduate students in thesis or dissertation programs, may complete requirements for a degree any day during this year. This means that the last day of an academic term may not be the date you complete program requirements. Your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the date you complete degree requirements and you are expected to leave the country by that date unless you file a timely application for practical training or make arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.

Making a Decision Regarding Participation in Optional Practical Training

Only One Twelve Month Period Per Degree Level. You are allowed only one year of OPT per level in your time as an F-1 (i.e. one for Bachelor’s and once for Master’s). You are permitted to use your year in increments if you wish so if you wish to pursue more than one degree on the same level, for example, if you intend to pursue two graduate degree programs on the Master’s level you may choose to do 6 months of OPT after each program. Please Note: Only two types of F-1 students have practical training rights restored after they have been used: (1) students who spend at least one year outside the U.S. and then return in F-1 status; and (2) students who change from F-1 to another status, spend at least a year in the other status and change back to F-1 status.

OPT allows for 12 months. OPT may be requested after the nine (9) month requirement has been met. If the student applies for OPT to begin after the completion of their program, the full 12 months is recommended. Students also have the option to request OPT during annual vacation, upon completion of course requirements excluding thesis or dissertation, or during the academic year. For the academic year, the student would only be allowed to work part-time. This part-time employment will subtract at a one-half rate from the twelve-month allotment.

Authorization May Not Be Rescinded. Once authorization to engage in OPT after completion of studies is granted it may not be rescinded, canceled, or deferred. This means that, after OPT is authorized by the Immigration Service, unexpected delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job or loss of a job may result in loss of time you have to actually work.

Actual Date OPT May Begin
You may not begin work until all three of the following requirements are satisfied: (1) you have obtained your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the INS; (2) the date is reached when the EAD authorizes employment to begin; and (3) you have actually completed all requirements for your program of study.

Change of Employer After Optional Practical Training Has Been Authorized
You may change employers after you have begun authorized employment provided the new job is (1) directly related to your major field of study and (2) appropriate for someone having your level of education.

Travel Outside the United States.
In order to reenter the U.S., you must present (1) your I-20; (2) a travel letter issued by the Foreign Student Advisor within the last six months; (3) your Employment Authorization Document. If you already have an employer, it is highly recommended that you obtain a letter from them verifying your employment and stating that you are returning after a brief absence to resume OPT employment. Be sure to consult with staff in the ISSS office when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue OPT.