

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

Application Procedures for Optional Practical Training for F-1 Students

DEFINITION & ELIGIBILITY: An F-1 student may apply for optional practical training (OPT) directly related to the student's major area of study in the following cases: (1) during the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session if the student is currently enrolled and intends to register for the next term; (2) while the school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours/week; (3) after completion of course requirements, excluding a thesis, dissertation or equivalent; and (4) after completion of the course of study.

To be eligible, a student must have been enrolled as a full-time student for two full semesters (fall and spring semesters or one calendar year), and have maintained legal F-1 status during that time.

Only One Twelve-Month Period of Optional Training is Available Per Academic Level. You may only be authorized one 12 month period of OPT per academic level. For example, the F regulations state, "A student may be authorized 12 months of OPT, and becomes eligible for another 12 months of OPT when he/she changes to a higher educational level (e.g. Bachelor's to Master's etc.)". PLEASE NOTE: Individuals cannot receive two periods of OPT for the same education level. Newly enacted legislation effective April 8, 2008, now allows students in certain majors to engage in OPT for a 29 month period. Please read "**17-Month Extension Instructions.**"

APPLICATION DEADLINE DATES

You must submit an application for OPT to International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) within the 90-day period which begins before you complete your program of study and up to 60 days after your program end date. Each semester ISSS sets a date in which your OPT paperwork must be submitted. The date is set in order to give time for your paperwork to be processed and mailed to the Immigration Service. This information is sent via email and in the semester newsletter.

REQUEST FOR RECOMMENDATION FROM THE ISSS OFFICE

To obtain the ISSS Administrator's recommendation for OPT you must submit the following documents for processing:

1. Completed I-765 form {for question #16 write in (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT, or (c)(3)(B) for post OPT, training }
2. Photocopy of your passport identification page including passport expiration date. Passport must be valid, not expired.
3. Photocopy of I-94 (front and back).

4. Photocopy of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if applicable
5. Two color photographs with a white background taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). They should be printed on thin, glossy paper, not mounted and not retouched. All photos should be identical. All photos must meet the specifications for full frontal/passport photos. For more information on photo standards visit the Department of State website at <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index/html> or contact the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283. Lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil. You may obtain the proper and acceptable photographs at Stewart's Photography 103 Thornhill Drive, Kinko's, Walgreen's, or any company that prepares passport type photographs. The cost of the photographs should not exceed \$10.00 depending on the company.
6. \$340.00 check payable to Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
7. Graduation Certification Form.

Bring all of these items to the Administrator of ISSS. Please allow five working days for the ISSS Administrator to process your application after receipt of all documents.

ISSS must prepare a new I-20 with the OPT authorization noted on page 3. You must come back to ISSS within one week to sign your new document. ISSS cannot submit your paperwork to the USCIS Service Center without your signature on the new I-20 form. PLEASE NOTE: The new regulation requires that your form I-765 and I-20 be filed with the USCIS Service Center no more than 30 days following the Designated School Official's (DSO) recommendation in SEVIS. Therefore, it is imperative that you return to the ISSS immediately after you receive notification that your OPT I-20 has been processed.

The Administrator will mail the documents to the USCIS-Texas Service Center for you. Average time the USCIS will take to process them is 80-90 days. USCIS will mail the card directly to ISSS. ISSS will notify you when your card has arrived.

PLEASE NOTE: You cannot begin employment until you have received the EAD.

OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

During your OPT you are now required to report to Southern Miss the following information:

- Any change of name or address
- Any interruption of such employment
- Name and address of employer

LIMITED PERIODS OF UNEMPLOYMENT TO MAINTAIN STATUS

- During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment.
- Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization.
- Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month OPT period.

TERMINATION OF PRACTICAL TRAINING

Authorization to engage in practical training employment is automatically terminated when you begin study at another school or at another educational level. A student cannot have full-time practical training and attend school full-time at the same time.

TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Reentry provisions of the regulations require students in OPT status to present (1) Form I-20, endorsed for travel by ISSS “within the last six months,” and (2) The “Employment Authorization Document (EAD)” and (3) letter from employer on company letterhead. Please Note: It is to your benefit to have at least five months remaining on your EAD when you reenter the U.S.

You may travel outside the United States before the EAD is issued. However, after your EAD has been issued you should refrain from departing the United States and attempting to reenter unless you will be returning to continue employment in the United States. Be sure to consult with the ISSS Office when contemplating travel during your OPT period as these guidelines are subject to change.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ISSS

During the period in which you are authorized OPT you must continue to maintain a relationship with ISSS. ISSS will remain responsible for maintaining your record in SEVIS. Therefore, you must keep ISSS apprised of any name or address changes, change of employer or cease of employment. In addition, please make sure that we have your most current email address.

Your failure to maintain this relationship may result in the lost of your lawful F status and/or the revocation of your authorization to work in the United States.

Do not hesitate to contact ISSS to discuss any issues relating to OPT.

F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

INFORMATION PACKET

REVISED 04/30/2008