

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING – GENERAL INFORMATION

CLEVELAND INSTITUTE OF ART/ INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

11141 EAST BLVD., CLEVELAND, OH 44106

216-421-7406 PHONE / 216-754-4077 FAX

What is F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)? OPT is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. OPT is authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take up to 120 days to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 OPT status is 12 months for an undergraduate degree and an additional 12 months for a graduate degree. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of OPT during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you graduate.

What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 OPT? To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full time student status for at least one full academic year, (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application, and (3) intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study.

If I complete a degree program, take 12 months of OPT, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of OPT? As of January 1, 2003, an F-1 student may become eligible for another 12 months of OPT when he or she moves to a higher educational level. This benefits, for example, a student who has used 12 months of OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and is now completing a masters program.

How long does it take to get authorization for OPT and when should I apply? Authorization for OPT is granted by the USCIS and can take up to 120 days to obtain. Therefore it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to commence employment. You may submit your application 90 days prior to graduation or within 60 days after your program completion date.

What dates should I request for the beginning and ending of my OPT? The earliest day you can request for the beginning of the OPT is the day after you complete your degree. However, you may request that it officially begins anytime in the 60 days following graduation. The ending date is 12 months after the beginning date.

Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT? You do not need to have a job offer before applying for OPT.

Will I receive a new I-20? Yes. All applications for OPT must include a SEVIS form I-20 with the OPT recommendation by the Designated School Official (DSO).

How will I know if the OPT application has been received and approved? Within 30 days of receiving the application, the USCIS will send a receipt (Form I-797) to the ISS. The DSO will contact you to pick this up. Once you have the receipt, you can check your case status on line at www.uscis.gov.

Once approved, the USCIS will mail your Employment Authorization Document (work permit card) to the DSO. This card will state the type and length of the period of employment authorized.

E-Notification: If you want to receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application. Form G-1145 can be downloaded through the link above.

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document? No. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS and the start date on the card is reached. Working before OPT has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment.

What about traveling abroad after I have completed my studies and while I hold OPT status? Please discuss your travel plans with the DSO before making any arrangements – this is very important.

Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on OPT? In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than five calendar years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax law. You will be subject to all other taxes that may apply: federal, state and local. You should check to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the U.S. allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

Am I required to report any information to CIA while I am on OPT? Yes. You are required to report a change of address within 10 days of moving and you are also required to report the following employment information: employer's name, address, phone number, and your dates of employment.

What if I cannot find a job? The latest regulations (04/08/2008) state that students who accrue 90 days of unemployment on OPT will have their work authorization terminated. If you are approaching 45 days without employment, contact International Student Services office so we can discuss your options for maintaining valid F-1 status.

Can I get an extension of my OPT? You may be eligible for an extension of your work authorization if you are currently employed in a designated STEM field (please contact International Student Services for a list) or if your employer has filed an H-1B application for you for the following fiscal year. Please contact International Student Services for more information about your specific situation.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING - FAQ

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1. Now that I've turned in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to come? According to the latest guidance from Department of Homeland Security, you may leave the country and re-enter if your OPT application is pending. You must carry the receipt notice from USCIS with your other documents when traveling and be ready to explain your situation to the Port of Entry officer.

However, once your OPT application has been approved, the border official will ask to see a letter verifying your offer of employment. Due to unpredictable processing times at USCIS, it is advisable that you **do not travel while the OPT application is pending** unless you have a job offer letter from an employer.

If you are considering traveling outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending, it is important that you discuss this situation with the Director of International Student Services.

2. What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT? You will need your I-20 that has been recently endorsed on the travel line by the DSO, the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) from the USCIS, your valid passport, and a current visa stamp. You must also take a letter from your employer stating your job description, salary, location of employment, and start date. If you do not have this letter or the other documents, the border official can deny you entry to the U.S.

3. What if I still have some time left on my student program? Can I travel during that time, even though my I-20 shows that I've been recommended for OPT but it is still pending with USCIS? Yes. You must be returning as a student to complete academic requirements. For example, a student who has applied for OPT in May, is enrolled during the summer, but who doesn't graduate until August, may still travel as a student until their graduation date by re-entering the U.S. with a valid passport, current visa stamp, and the I-20 endorsed by the DSO. We recommend that you carry with you a letter from the Registrar verifying your current enrollment and stating your expected completion date.

5. The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy? If you are going to Canada or Mexico or other contiguous territories (except for Cuba), and staying for less than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with a valid passport, your EAD card and an I-20 that has been recently signed by the DSO. Be sure NOT to turn in your I-94 card. You must keep it in your passport to re-enter the U.S. on an expired visa. If you are traveling elsewhere, you will need to go to a U.S. embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp for re-entry.

6. In what ways is my application to the embassy for a new visa stamp affected by being on Optional Practical Training? The risk of denial for a F-1 visa renewal when you are on OPT is higher than while you are in your active student program. The fact that the focus of your stay in the U.S now is that of working rather than going to school, it may be seen as an avenue for immigration rather than a temporary stay. If the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application could be denied.

7. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under OPT? You need to take a valid passport, your I-20 recently endorsed by the DSO, your EAD card, and the official employment letter showing your salary, location of where you are or will be working, job duties, and beginning date. You should also be prepared to discuss how this temporary job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there.

8. Do I still need to get the travel line on my I-20 signed by the DSO during the period of my OPT? Yes, during your OPT, if you need to travel outside the U.S., you need to have a recent signature on the back of your I-20. If you are not located in the Cleveland area, mail the original I-20 to the DSO for the travel endorsement well in advance of your departure date from the U.S. You are required to send the I-20 through express mail and enclose a self-addressed, pre-paid express mail envelope for the DSO to return your I-20.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING - PROCESS

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HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

- Step One** Obtain the application packet from the Director of International Student Services (DSO)
- Step Two** Prepare the following materials; **place them in the order outlined below**; and **submit** your complete application to International Student Services.
- Fee** \$380 Check or Money Order Made Payable to the
“U.S. Department of Homeland Security”
- Pictures** 2 passport-style pictures (available at Walgreens)
- Print your name, date of birth, and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo in pencil.
 - Place the photos in a small envelope marked “Photos” and attach them to the rest of your application.
- OPT Recommendation Form** The attached form must be completed by your academic advisor (undergraduates) or division chair (graduates).
- Completed I-765 Form** Available at www.uscis.gov - click on *Forms* on the top menu and search for I-765. Contact International Student Services if you have questions about this form.
- Completed SEVIS Release** Refer to form attached.
- Immigration Documents**
- Copy of passport biographical data and picture page
 - Copy of visa page
 - Copy of I-94-**FRONT & BACK** (small white card stapled in your passport), or visit www.cbp.gov/i94 to print your digital I-94
 - Copies of all previous I-20’s – **p. 1 & 3**
 - Copies of any Change of Immigration Status Approval Forms (I-797)
 - Copies of any previous work permits
- Step Three** Return to the Student Affairs Office two days after submitting your Optional Practical Training application. The DSO will review your application and submit a recommendation

for Optional Practical Training by updating your record in SEVIS. The SEVIS system will produce a new I-20, which must be signed by you to be included with your application for Optional Practical Training.

- Step Four** The DSO will photocopy the application documents and place a copy in your student file. She will then mail the application to the USCIS Service Center by regular mail. If you would like your documents mailed by certified or express mail, you may do this at CIA's mail room at your own expense. Please note the change in mailing address.
- Step Five** Within 30 days of mailing the application, the DSO should receive a receipt (Form I-797) stating the average processing time for this application and your file number (LIN-_____). This will be forwarded to you at the address you have provided. You may check the status of your application using the file number on line at www.uscis.gov (choose "Case Status Online & Processing Times" on the left menu). **E-Notification:** If you want to receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application. Form G-1145 can be downloaded through the link above.
- Step Six** When the EAD (employment authorization card) is received, the DSO will contact you. Department of Homeland Security regulations require you to keep us informed of your current contact information at all times including during the Optional Practical Training period. You can update your address by completing a new Critical Information Registration form from International Student Services. You are also required to report employment information including the employer's name and the company's address and telephone number. Periods of unemployment are limited to 90 days total and must be reported to the DSO.
- Step Seven** **OPTIONAL: You may be able to extend your health insurance coverage while on OPT by contacting your health care provider before your current coverage expires. This is highly recommended.**

Optional Practical Training Academic Advisor Recommendation

Optional Practical Training is a 12-month period in which F-1 students can work in their field of study to gain practical experience. The advisor's recommendation is required for the application process. If you have questions regarding this form, please contact International Student Services at 216-421-7406 or lbrindisi@cia.edu.

Student's Name: _____

Student's ID Number: _____

Student's Program (major & degree level): _____

Expected completion date of all degree requirements (mm/dd/yy): _____

Note: The student must be enrolled until all program requirements have been met.

Comments: _____

I verify that the above named student is in good academic standing. I recommend that the student be granted Optional Practical Training in the field related to the program indicated on this form and for the period requested by the student.

Advisor's name: _____

Advisor's title & department: _____

Advisor's signature: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO SEVIS DATABASE

PURPOSE: EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

I authorize The Cleveland Institute of Art to submit the necessary information to the SEVIS database in order to complete my employment authorization application. I am aware that once the information has been added to the SEVIS database, it cannot be deleted or changed. **All information on this form must be completed for the SEVIS database to be updated.** Upon completing the submission of information for a work permit of any type to the SEVIS database, a new I-20 will be generated. I will return to the Student Affairs office in two days to sign this new form and finalize my work permit application.

I am applying for one of the following: (Choose One)

➤ **#Optional Practical Training from _____ To _____**

- Full time (more than 20 hours per week)
- Part time (20 hours per week or less - pre-completion OPT only)

➤ **#Economic Hardship Off-Campus Employment Authorization**

Student Name (Please Print): _____

Current Complete Mailing Address: _____

What is your expected graduation date: _____

Phone Number: _____ **Email:** _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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| Office Use Only: Student Account Cleared _____ Student Loan Cleared _____ |
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| Office Use Only: SEVIS Updated _____ Date & Initials |
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