

Applying for F-1 Optional Practical Training

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete your studies. Authorization for optional practical training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) – formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS - and can take at least 90 days and frequently up to 120 days to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization at the earliest possible date.

What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for optional practical training, you must:

- have been in full time student status for at least one full academic year preceding the submission of your OPT application
- be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application, and
- intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study.

When should I apply?

- If you are a student completing the first academic year of study (or are in a one year program), the earliest you can submit the application is 90 days prior to the date you complete your first academic year.
- If you are beyond the first year of study, you may submit your application no earlier than 120 days prior to the start date you request for your OPT.
- If you are applying for OPT based on completion of all coursework and/or completion of your academic program, you must submit an application for optional practical training prior to your completion date. Applications received at USCIS after the completion date will be denied.

Dates of OPT Authorization. The OPT card is approved for a specific beginning and end date. You must identify those dates on the OPT Request Form. For OPT after completion of studies or graduation, the beginning date can be no later than 60 days after the date you complete your studies. If you have questions about your OPT dates, please discuss this with the OMA Director.

How do I apply for OPT? OPT must be recommended by the OMA Director so your first step is to visit the OMA Director. With the OMA Director's endorsement you then submit your application to USCIS. Read below for details on the documents you will bring with you to the OMA Director:

- A completed the LVC F-1 Optional Practical Training Request Form.
- A completed I-765 form. (Make certain that the address you put in item #3 will be valid for the next 90 to 120 days as that is where your receipt and employment card will be sent). **Mail from USCIS will not be forwarded by the US Postal Service**
- A copy of your I-94 form (both sides) and a copy of the visa and identification pages from your passport
- Two recent photographs per the attached instructions from USCIS (see sample). Write your name and SEVIS number in pencil on the back of the photos. Do not cut to size or staple.
- A check for \$180 payable to USCIS (there is a \$180 filing fee for this application.)

The OMA Director will review your application and submit a recommendation for OPT by updating your record in SEVIS. The SEVIS system will produce a new I-20, a copy of which you will submit with your application for optional practical training. (See below for complete instructions on how to submit your OPT application to USCIS.) Please return to the OMA Director three business days after submitting your application. At that time you will receive your new I-20 for inclusion with your OPT application.

F-1 Optional Practical Training: Part Two Submitting Your OPT Application

Once you have picked up your OPT application from the OMA Director, you must send it to USCIS. The following documents must be included in your application for optional practical training:

1. A copy of pages 1, 2 and 3 of the SEVIS Form I-20 issued for OPT, signed and dated by an the OMA Director signed by you at the bottom of page 1. (You keep the original.)
2. Copies of all previous I-20s including the endorsement page
3. A completed and signed Form I-765
4. A copy of your I-94 form (both sides) and a copy of the visa and identification pages from your passport
5. Two recent photographs per the attached instructions from USCIS. You can write your name and admission number in pencil on the back of the photos. Do not cut to size or staple.
6. A copy of your last Employment Authorization Document (EAD) if applicable
7. A check for \$180 payable to USCIS (there is a \$180 filing fee for this application.)

After making copies of all the above documents, staple all the documents listed above and send by certified mail with a return receipt or a courier service to the USCIS Service Center that services the address listed on your I-765. Those with addresses in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, your application should be sent to **USCIS Service Center, 75 Lower Welden Street, St. Albans, VT 05479-0001**. If other, consult with the OMA Director to learn where to send your application.

How will I know the USCIS has received my OPT application? The first sign that USCIS has received your application is the cashing of your check. If the check has not cleared your bank within six weeks contact the OMA Director. USCIS will then send you a notice (Form I-797) stating you need to wait for about 80-90 days to receive your EAD with the case # (EAC....) This is your receipt so take care not to lose it. With the receipt number, you can track the progress of your application at the [USCIS website](#). If you have not received your EAD card within 90 days from the date of USCIS receipt, you may be able to get a temporary card from USCIS in Hartford. Contact the OMA Director for more information.

How will I know if my OPT application has been approved? You will receive from the USCIS a small photo identification card, called an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). This card will state the type and length of the period of employment authorized. When you receive this card, you must check it to make certain all the information is correct. If there are errors, please consult with the OMA Director immediately to determine whether the card needs to be returned for corrections.

Staying in Touch With the OMA Director During the OPT Period

USCIS regulations now require LVC to report to the USCIS student tracking system, SEVIS, any change in your address during the optional practical training period. Students on OPT can notify the OMA Director of change of address. In addition we are required to report the end of the OPT period if it ends prior to the authorized expiration date. You can report this by sending an email to dorman@lvc.edu.

Travel and Re-Entry While in OPT Status

Items Needed to Reenter the U.S. – please see the OPT FAQ for issues related to traveling while in OPT status. Or while your OPT application is pending.

1. Valid passport and valid F-1 entry visa
2. Valid I-20 form endorsed by the OMA Director within the preceding six months
3. Valid EAD and letter from employer showing temporary employment in the authorized field of study.

F-1 Optional Practical Training : Part Three Frequently Asked Questions about F-1 OPT

Do I need to have a job to apply for optional practical training? No, but remember OPT only permits employment related to your field of study.

When am I eligible to apply for OPT?

- During vacation periods (no restrictions on hours per week)
- During the semester (limited to 20 hours/week) and student must maintain full time enrollment
- After completion of all course requirements, excluding a thesis or dissertation requirement
- After completion of a course of study (i.e. after graduation).

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

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document? No. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS. Working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment and may jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

Can I travel outside the US while my OPT application is pending at USCIS?

Before graduation, for example over Spring Recess, you may travel outside the US prior to USCIS approval of your application, if you return to the US prior to graduation.

After graduation, the OMA Director does not recommend travel outside the US prior to receiving OPT approval from USCIS. If you must travel outside the U.S. after graduation, but before you have been approved for your practical training employment, it is advisable to speak with the OMA Director or about the timing of your application and the date you list as the beginning date of the proposed employment. The beginning date selected is important because it has an impact on how early you can apply, thus how early you will obtain approval.

What about traveling abroad after I have completed my studies and while I hold practical training status? If you have completed your course of study and have received your USCIS authorization for practical training (your EAD card), you may travel abroad and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. You will need the following documents for your re-entry: (1) a valid passport, (2) a valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport, (3) the new SEVIS I-20 recommending optional practical training (4) your original practical training Employment Authorization Document (EAD) issued by the USCIS and (5) proof that you have a job in the U.S. appropriate for practical training and that you are returning to the U.S. to resume or start this employment. **If you do not have all of these documents you should NOT travel abroad without first consulting the OMA Director.** (An expired F-1 visa can pose a problem; it may be difficult to renew your F-1 visa while you are on practical training.)

Will I have to pay U.S. taxes for income earned while on practical training? In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than six 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.

F-1 Curricular Practical Training: Part One

What is Curricular Practical Training?

Curricular practical training is an employment option available to F-1 students where the practical training employment is considered to be an integral part of the curriculum or academic program. This employment may be an internship, cooperative education job, a practicum, or any other work experience that is either required for your degree (as defined in the course catalog) or for which academic credit is awarded.

What is the criteria for determining if I am eligible for Curricular Practical Training?

To be eligible for curricular practical training, you must have been in legal student status for 9 consecutive months, your employment must be an integral part of your degree program or requirement for a course, and your job offer related to your major or field of study. The OMA Director can authorize curricular practical training for you if it can be clearly documented that the proposed employment meets one of the three following conditions:

1. The training employment is required of all degree candidates in the program and is necessary for the awarding of the degree. Included in this category is employment in a required internship or practicum. Graduate students in their first year of study may be eligible for curricular practical training in this category. Undergraduates are not eligible in their first year of study.
2. The training employment will result in the awarding of academic credit, at least preponderantly, if not solely, on the basis of the training experience. Included in this category is employment for a course specifically designed to award academic credit for an employment experience. Also included in this category is employment that will result in the award of at least one course credit for an independent study. In both of these cases you must be registered for the course during the period that you are working under curricular practical training authorization.
3. Students in dissertation status where the training opportunity is an absolutely necessary component of the student's research without which the dissertation cannot be completed may be authorized to undertake curricular practical training. A letter from the student's dissertation advisor explaining in detail the relationship between the proposed employment and the student's dissertation research must be provided.

If I use Curricular Practical Training, will the time be deducted from the twelve months of optional practical training?

The time you spend on curricular practical training will not be deducted from the twelve months of allowable optional practical training UNLESS you use 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training.

What is considered part-time?


Employment for 20 hours or less per week while you are enrolled for classes is considered part-time curricular practical training. The employment authorization written on the back of your I-20 ID copy will specify permission to engage in part-time training and you must limit your work to no more than 20 hours per week. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in part-time curricular practical training, but you must be simultaneously enrolled as a full-time student in order to maintain lawful F-1 status.

What is considered full-time training?

Employment for more than 20 hours per week is considered full-time curricular practical training, regardless of whether you are enrolled full-time or part-time for classes. The employment authorization on your I-20 ID copy will specify permission to participate in full-time training. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in full-time curricular practical training, however if you participate in twelve months or more of curricular practical training you will not be eligible for post-completion practical training.

How do I apply for Curricular Practical Training?

Your first step is to contact the OMA Director to evaluate your eligibility for curricular practical training and the proposed employment opportunity to determine whether or not both you and the job meet the eligibility requirements. If all eligibility requirements are met, you will need to present the OMA Director with the following documents:

-  A completed Form I-538 (you may wish fill out this form online. Make sure you print it out from a laser printer). Complete Section A; the OMA Director will complete Section B.
- Your original I-20 form.
- A letter from your employer which states the duties of the job, beginning and ending date of your employment, and supervisor's name, title, address and phone number.
- A letter from your academic advisor:
 1. If your employment is based on a degree requirement, this letter should describe your proposed employment and the curricular requirement.
 2. If your employment is based upon the awarding of course credit, the instructor of that course may write the letter for you. The letter should include the course name, title, number of course credits and a brief description of the course requirements and the method of evaluation.
- Proof of registration for curricular practical training credits if you are earning academic credit for the CPT experience. Please note, you must be registered for CPT credits in the same semester during which the work will be done. (i.e. You must be registered for CPT credits in the summer if you will be working in the summer.)

Curricular practical training is authorized by the OMA Director; it does not require approval from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The authorization is noted on the back of your I-20 form. You must not continue employment beyond the date authorized unless you apply and are granted an extension of your permission to work.

Do I need a U.S. Social Security Number?

Yes, if you plan to work in the U.S. you will need a valid Social Security number. The OMA Director can provide with instructions on applying for a social security number.

Do I have to pay U.S. taxes on my salary?

In general F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than six years are exempt from social security taxes (also known as F.I.C.A. tax). You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer because many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax laws. If you need more information about the F-1 social security tax exemption, please contact the OMA Director. Students in F-1 status are subject to all other taxes that may apply, including federal, state and local.

What proof of employment authorization can I give my employer?

Your I-20 form authorized for curricular practical training is all you will need to provide your employer. Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form entitled Employment Eligibility Verification (INS Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your I-20 endorsed for curricular practical training should meet the documentation requirement of the I-9.

Introduction to Electronic Filing (E-Filing) USCIS Forms

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/eFiling.htm>

Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/e-i-765.htm>

Filing Fee:	<p>\$180</p> <p>If you are in one of the categories noted below, no fee is required.</p> <p>If filing for an initial EAD under one of these categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Refugee, asylee or paroled as a refugee;○ N-8 or N-9 Nonimmigrant;○ Citizen of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, or Palau;○ Granted Withholding of Deportation;○ Deferred Enforced Departure;○ Dependent of certain foreign government or international organization personnel; or,○ Applicant for asylum (however, applicant filing under special ABC procedures must pay the fee). <p>If filing for a replacement or renewal EAD under one of these categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Citizen of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, or Palau;○ Granted Withholding of Deportation;○ Deferred Enforced Departure; or,○ Dependent of certain foreign government or international organization personnel. <p>If you are filing for a replacement EAD, and you are a dependent of certain foreign government or international organization personnel, no fee is required.</p> <p>You may pay your fee by electronic transfer of U.S. funds from a bank account (checking or savings account), by credit card (American Express, Discover, MasterCard, or Visa), or by a debit card that bears the logo of a credit card we accept.</p>
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Initial Evidence and Supporting Documentation Required:

You may need to provide documents that support your application. Please see [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#) of Form I-765 Instructions for descriptions of those documents. **After filing your form electronically, please mail the supporting documentation to the address listed on your Confirmation Receipt notice.**

Please be sure to attach a copy of the Confirmation Receipt notice or Form I-797 (Receipt Notice issued by USCIS) to the documents to help USCIS match them to your file. Retain a photocopy of all documents you submit for your records.

If you are E-Filing, please do **not** mail forms or supporting documentation to the addresses listed in Part 5 of the paper-based form I-765 Instructions.

Copies:

If these instructions state that a copy of a document may be filed with this application, and you choose to send USCIS the original, we may keep that original for our records.

Translations:

Any foreign language document must be accompanied by a full English translation that the translator has certified as complete and correct, and by the translator's certification that he or she is competent to translate the foreign document into English.

Other Instructions:

Photographs and Fingerprints:

PLEASE NOTE: The USCIS cannot process your application until you have appeared for your scheduled appointment at an Application Support Center.

- On completion of your E-Filed application, your Confirmation Receipt notice may direct you to call the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283 (TTY 1-800-767-1833) to schedule an appointment with an USCIS Application Support Center for the collection of a digital photograph, signature and fingerprint. Some Application Support Centers are not able to collect digital information at this time. You may be directed to another location that may be several hours from your home. Use the list below to help determine if E-Filing will be the best option for you.
- The Application Support Center will need to see your receipt number; take a copy of your Confirmation Receipt notice to your appointment at the Application Support Center.

Access Form for Electronic Filing:

[I-765 \(E-Filing\)](#)

https://egov.immigration.gov/ins_efile/InteractionMgr?interactionmgr.interaction=Select_I765