



Optional Practical Training

June 2009

1. Under your F-1 status and **after** you have been lawfully enrolled in a program on a full time basis for one academic year, you are eligible to receive 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for each training level (Bachelors, Masters & PhD). OPT is also available to F-1 students in a Study Abroad program if they have attended at least one full academic year enrolled in a full course of study in the U.S. prior to studying abroad. This training time may be used *after graduation*. You will *not* be granted more than 12 months of OPT time after each training level.
2. Employment will be authorized **only** for a position directly related to your major field of study.
3. You may **not begin working** until you have received your employment authorization document (EAD) or before the start date on your EAD is reached.
4. **Currently it takes about 90 days or longer for USCIS to process your OPT application.**
5. You may apply for OPT as early as two weeks after your final semester begins (about 90 days before end of term) but **no later than** 60 days after your program end date (graduation date). The 12 months of OPT must be completed within the 14-month period following graduation. Do not wait until *after* graduation to apply or you will lose the privilege.
 - a. If you wish to apply for OPT, fill out Part I of the **OPT Request Form** (attached) and have your Academic Advisor or Dean fill out Part II.
 - b. **Make an appointment** with the International Student Advisor in the Center for Global Education. The process will take approximately an hour. There is a **\$50 processing fee** that will be charged to your student account at the time of your appointment. You will fill out the following form at this meeting:
 - I-765 Application for Employment
 - SEVIS I-20
 - c. **Bring the following documents to this meeting:**
 - Completed OPT Request Form (both Part I and II)
 - All I-20s you have ever been issued
 - Valid passport and F-1 visa
 - I-94 Card (this should be in your passport)
 - Two passport-sized photos on a **white background with full-frontal pose**. Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo. These can be done at the U.S. Post Office in Whitewater (\$15) or LaBelle Studio, 558 E. Clay, Whitewater, must make appointment first by calling 473-2490.
 - A \$340.00 **money order** made payable to Department of Homeland Security.
6. Things to Consider:
 - a. The US Post Office **will not forward** mail from the US Government. Therefore, think about where you will be living at the time you expect to receive your card and use that address on your application. If you are unsure of where you will be, you can use the Center for Global Education's address. However, if you do move before you receive your EAD card, make sure you change your address online at the USCIS website at: <http://www.uscis.gov/AR-11>.
 - b. You will need to **select a date** to begin your Practical Training. If you are doing Post-Degree Practical Training, **you must pick a date within the 60 days following your "official" graduation date** (the last day of the semester, not your commencement date). Keep in mind that January 1 and July 4 are always holidays.
 - c. Currently students are advised not to leave the U.S. while on OPT if they do not have a job to return to. If the OPT has not yet been approved then travel outside the U.S. should be fine. If you do choose to leave the U.S. I advise you **not to travel** until you receive your EAD because the date you will receive your EAD card is uncertain. Further, your EAD will say "not valid for re-entry." The law says you may re-enter the

country under Practical Training to **resume** work. This implies you have been working. If you do travel under Practical Training, we recommend you get a letter from your employer that states you are expected to report back to work on a specific date. You will still need a **current signature** for travel from the Center for Global Education and your I-20 from the CGE Office. If you no longer live locally allow about 3 weeks for this process.

- d. Your I-20 will be considered **extended** to the end of your OPT time shown on your EAD. You will still have a 60-day grace period after your Practical Training to leave the country, change your status or enroll in another degree program.
- e. You may go to school part time while doing OPT, but the regulations state you should be working or actively seeking employment in your major field of study. Authorization to engage in Practical Training is terminated when students either transfer to another school (ends on date records are transferred to another school) or begins study at another educational level.

7. **Mailing Your Package:** The Center for Global Education will mail your OPT application for you.

Once your package is received by the USCIS, they will send notification that they have received your package. **The USCIS receipt is important** and will have a file number on it. You must use this file number and your I-94# on any correspondence you may have with USCIS about your application. This receipt also carries a phone number, which accesses a touch-tone system that allows you to check on your application. You may also check on the USCIS website (USCIS.gov). If you receive a message that your application has been “approved” on a particular date, you will likely have your EAD within 2 weeks of that date.

9. **Student’s Responsibilities:**

- a. While on OPT, remain connected with UW-W Center for Global Education. Check your UW-W email account at least once per week.
- b. Maintain your living address with the Immigration Service and the UW-W Office of International Education and Programs. You can update your address with the Immigration Service by going to the following web-link. There is no charge for updating your address. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/ar-11.pdf>
- c. An F-1 student authorized by the USCIS to engage in practical training is required to report any change of name or address, or disruption of such employment to the Center for Global Education for the duration of the authorized training.
- d. Send the Center for Global Education a copy of your letter of offer from your employer with a job description. This letter should be on your employer’s letterhead.
- e. Keep all copies of I-20’s issued to you with your permanent, important records. If you have an opportunity to return to the U.S. in the future, the Immigration Service may want copies of these documents.
- f. Make a copy of your EAD card and send it to the Center for Global Education at 809 West Starin Road, Hyland Hall 1227, Whitewater, WI 53190.

