OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Definition of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study and **commensurate** with degree level.
- Allows a maximum of 12 months of practical experience.
- Students do **not** need to secure employment before applying for OPT.
- Requires USCIS approval

Preconditions For OPT

- Students may engage in OPT after being enrolled for one full academic year.
- OPT is available before and after completion of the educational objective, but different rules apply to pre- and post –completion OPT
- Passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future.
- Prior use of full-time CPT for one year or more makes you ineligible for OPT.

Pre-completion OPT

- 20 hours/week limit while school is in session, student must be register full time
- Over 20 hours during official school breaks as long as student is currently enrolled, **and** intends to register for next term (full-time)
- Only graduate students can apply for pre-completion OPT

Post-completion OPT

- Over 20 hours after student has completed all course requirements for the degree including completing thesis or dissertation.
- Only full-time OPT can be requested
- Undergraduate students can request OPT only after completion of the course of study

Application Deadline For Opt After Completion of Studies

- ISS recommends that you start the application process 90 days before you complete the course of study.
- **USCIS takes approximately 90 days to process OPT** applications and there is no way to expedite the process.

Types of Post-Completion OPT Employments

All OPT employment must be directly related to the student’s major field of study and commensurate with the degree level. The following types of paid and unpaid activities are considered valid OPT employment according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and should be reported to the OISS.

- **Paid employment**
  Students may work part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full-time.

- **Multiple employers**
  Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student’s degree program.

- **Short-term multiple employers** (performing artists)
Students, such as musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs.

- **Work for hire**

This is also commonly referred to as 1099 independent contractors where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.

- **Self-employed business owner**

Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s degree program.

- **Employment through an agency**

Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

- **Unpaid employment**

Students may serve as volunteers, unpaid interns, researchers, community service workers, etc, where this does not violate any labor laws. These students must be able to provide evidence from the organization that the student performed services at least 20 hours per week during the period of post-completion OPT.

**Most Common Questions**

- **Can I reenter [the U.S.] if my request for OPT is pending?**

No, you must have your OPT card in hand.

**Can I reenter if my OPT has been approved but do not have a job?**

We cannot offer assurances that you will be permitted back in if you have been approved but do not have a job. Technically, you are eligible to reenter. However, the Port of Entry Officer may deny a reentry.

- **Can I re-enter the U.S. if I left while on OPT and have employment?**

Yes, you may reenter. You must show your EAD card, your I-20 with travel signature and an updated letter of employment.

- **May I work at more than one location while on OPT?**

Yes, you may hold one or more jobs, as long as they are in *your* field of study. One of those jobs must be full-time.

- **If I am employed by URI while on OPT, do I require an EAD card?**

Yes, if you have been granted OPT and are working at URI, you must have an EAD card to work at URI.