

WHEN CAN I APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING?

Immigration regulations require that students be enrolled full time every semester. The only exceptions are (a) if a student is already on OPT before the beginning of the semester or (b) if a student has been pre-approved for reduced enrollment in his/her final semester (less than 9 hours).

Students who have been in **F-1 status for at least 9 months (two academic semesters)** are eligible for optional practical training (OPT), which is a temporary employment authorization in their major field of study for purposes of gaining practical experience. Students may receive **twelve months** of practical training **for each higher academic level** (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate).

Students may apply for authorization for optional practical training directly related to their major area of study in the following cases:

1. Pre-completion OPT during summer vacation. Students must intend to register for the next semester. It is advisable to have a job offer at the time of application in this case. The job can be full or part-time. Apply 90 days before you wish to begin work.
2. Pre-completion OPT while school is in session. Must maintain full time enrollment. Practical training may not exceed twenty hours a week. Should have a job offer before applying, and cannot hold any on-campus positions simultaneously. Apply 120 days before you wish to begin work
3. Pre-completion OPT after completion of all course requirements **except** thesis or dissertation, or final project requirements for non-thesis students. OPT is authorized to be worked before the student's program end. Should have a job offer before applying. Apply 120 days before you wish to begin work.
 - If degree requirements will not be completed before the program end date on the I-20, must request an extension of program.
 - If less than 12 month allotment of OPT is used, must apply for remaining OPT time. Requires new OPT application and fee.
4. Post-completion OPT after program end date
 - Apply **no more than 90 days before the completion of the program, but no later than 60 days after program completion** (during the grace period).
 - OPT must begin within 60 days of program completion, even if you apply during the 60 day grace period.
 - Students carrying 3 or more **course work** hours may NOT begin OPT before the end of the semester.
 - Students on assistantships, and any other students enrolled for full time hours, including research hours, cannot begin OPT before the end of the semester or the end of their assistantship contract, whichever date is later.

Extensions of OPT may be filed for a

- Cap gap extension if you have been approved for H1b during post-completion OPT but you will have a gap between when your OPT ends and when the H1b status begins.
- 17 month STEM extension if you graduated with a degree in science, technology, engineering, or math, and meet USCIS requirements while on post-completion OPT. ONE extension is permitted, whether at the bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level. Once used, there is no other STEM extension available.

Upon completion of all the attached forms, an international advisor will review your application and decide either to recommend or not recommend your application for submission to USCIS for adjudication. A new SEVIS I-20 will be issued indicating the recommendation by the international advisor for the OPT.

Please note:

- Your OPT will be terminated if/when you transfer to another school or enroll in another degree program.
- You may NOT work during any gap between your program completion date and the beginning of your authorized OPT.