Optional Practical Training
Recommended Procedure

*Optional Practical Training* (OPT) is defined as “temporary employment directly related to the student’s field of study, for purposes of gaining practical experience.”

**Enrollment**: You must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least nine months to be eligible for OPT.

**Limitations**: You are eligible for a maximum of only twelve months for all practical training at each degree level. Part-time OPT (less than 20 hours per week) performed during the program of study shall be deducted from the available practical training at one-half the full-time rate. You may not accept employment until you have been issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the USCIS.

You may apply for authorization for optional practical training directly related to your major area of study and commensurate with your educational level [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(D)(1)] in the following cases:

- During annual vacation as long as you intend to register for the next semester (it is recommended that you have a job offer before applying);
- While school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed twenty hours a week (it is recommended that you have a job offer before applying);
- After completion of course requirements except for thesis, project, or portfolio (it is recommended that you have a job offer before applying); and
- Before completion of the course of study, for practical training following completion of studies. (The USCIS must receive your application for this type of practical training *before* you complete your program. Note: this does not mean before graduation!).

The Office of International Education in the Center for Professional Excellence recommends that you begin this process 120 days before you want to begin working and at least 30 days before the completion of your course of study.
The Application Procedure

It is recommended that students take the following steps in order to take advantage of e-filing the I-765 form.

- Access Form I-765 at the following website: [http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm](http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm) in the “Immigration Forms” area.
- Fill out the form with the required information. In item #16 on the form indicate the appropriate code and write next to the code the type of eligibility category “(c) (3) (i) F-1 Optional Practical Training”
- Submit the form electronically to the USCIS.
- You will be requested to pay via a checking account automatic debit. Have a check ready when you submit the form so that you can provide your routing information for automatic payment.
- Following successful submission of your information, you will be able to print a verification form that will include directions for continuing the process. In addition, you should print a copy of the I-765 for later submission to the USCIS. You will be advised to call for an appointment at a local USCIS office in the Chicago area in order to have pictures taken and provide fingerprints.

Following e-filing and the picture/fingerprinting process, the student should submit the following documents to the International Student Coordinator in the Center for Professional Excellence, at which time a new I-20 will be issued with endorsement for OPT:

- An I-538 with section A completed (There is a fillable version of this form available on the BCIS website at [http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm](http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm) in the “Immigration Forms and Fees” area.)
- Letter from the academic adviser indicating the current academic status (i.e., whether you have completed all requirements for the degree except for the thesis) and the expected date of completion of studies. USCIS does not view the graduation ceremony as completion of studies; completion of studies means completion of all coursework (non-thesis majors) or the date the final thesis is submitted.

When all of the above steps have been taken and the student has appeared in person for photographs and fingerprints, the student should submit to the USCIS Service Center having jurisdiction the following documents:

- Copy of the completed I-765. (or an original if not filed electronically)
- Photocopy of the I-94 (front and back)
- Photocopy of the last EAD (front and back), if available and applicable
- If you have not previously been issued an EAD, submit photocopies of the identification page(s) from the passport or other ID photos (i.e., school ID, driver’s license).
- A photocopy of the I-20 with DSO recommendation
- A photocopy of the I-538
- Photocopies of all previous I-20s (front and back, SEVIS and non-SEVIS)
- If not filed electronically, you will also need to send a check or money order for the applicable I-765 fee and 2 color photos.

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