



University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Office of International Programs  
601 South College Road-Wilmington-NC-28403-5965  
910-962-3685 (phone)-910-962-4053 (fax)

### **Work Authorization for F-1 Degree-Seeking Students**

As an F-1 student you are eligible for two types of employment: on-campus & off-campus employment. The information below lists the requirements of both on-campus & off-campus employment.

#### On-Campus Employment

- You are eligible to work on-campus as long as you are enrolled full-time in your program of study.
- Immigration authorization is not required.
- Application for employment is made directly with the hiring department.
- The job does not need to be related to your program of study.
- You may work up to 20 hours a week while school is in session and unlimited hours during official school breaks (winter, spring and summer break).
- All students **MUST** meet with Joanne Ferguson in Payroll before they begin working. Make an appt. with Joanne by calling 910-962-7255. When meeting with Joanne, students must bring with them: Social Security card, visa, passport, I-94, I-20, local and foreign addresses and a voided check for direct deposit purposes.

#### Off-Campus Employment

Off-campus employment for F-1 students is called “Practical Training”.

### **What is Practical Training and What Types of Practical Training Are There?**

The term “Practical Training” designates two specific types of employment authorization which enable F-1 students to hold employment outside their colleges or universities for the purpose of gaining experience or additional knowledge in their field of study. The two types are distinguished as “Optional Practical Training” (OPT) and “Curricular Practical Training” (CPT).

1. Optional Practical Training is defined by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as a practical work experience that is directly related to your field of study and commensurate with your level of study. It can be authorized in any combination of the following ways: (1) during official school vacation periods: full or part-time (2) while school is in session/student is still in course work phase: part-time only (3) while school is in session/student has completed all course work but prior to completion of a thesis, dissertation or the equivalent: full or part-time (4) after completion of all degree requirements: full time.

2. Curricular Practical Training, as defined by USCIS, must be an “an integral part of an established curriculum.” As such, CPT is work experience which is required to complete one’s degree program and must offer credit that will count towards a student’s degree requirements. This may, but will not always, include internships, cooperative education programs, thesis research or independent study.

Note: the distinction between “Optional Practical Training” and “Curricular Practical Training” is that the former enhances or enriches an academic experience, while the latter is *required* to meet the academic or curricular degree requirements.

## How Much Time Am I Allowed on Practical Training?

1. You are allowed a maximum of 12 months of full-time Optional Practical Training during or following each advancing degree level. Some students may be eligible for a 17 month extension beyond the 12 month period—speak with your international student adviser to see if you could be eligible. Part-time OPT accrues at a rate of 50%, e.g., 6 months of part-time OPT count as 3 months of the total of 12 months you are allowed.
2. There is no time limitation for Curricular Practical Training, but a student who participates in full-time CPT for 12 or more months is not eligible for OPT at the same degree level.

Note: USCIS defines “part-time” employment as 20 hours per week or less and “full-time” employment as anything over 20 hours per week.

## How Do I Know if I Am Eligible for Practical Training?

You are eligible for practical training if you:

- have been in F-1 status for at least one academic year;
- are in good academic standing;
- are maintaining your legal status; that is:
  - your passport and I-20 are valid at all times;
  - you continuously pursue a full course of study;
  - you report all address changes within 10 days of moving;
  - you follow procedures for moving from one educational level to another (e.g., from Bachelor’s to Master’s), and for transferring from one school to another, if applicable.

## What is the Process to Apply for Practical Training?

1. Complete forms and gather all supporting documents for your application.
2. Meet with your international student adviser; make an appointment by calling 910-962-3685. When you meet with your adviser, bring the following documents with you:
  - a. If you are applying for Curricular Practical Training bring:
    - i. “Employer’s Certification for CPT Authorization” form, completed and signed by your employer
    - ii. “Academic Official’s Certification for Curricular Practical Training” form, completed and signed by your academic adviser
    - iii. An unofficial full transcript (downloaded from the web is fine) that bears your name and *includes the course or research credit(s) covering your CPT*
    - iv. Passport and I-94
  - b. If you are applying for Optional Practical Training bring:
    - i. A completed Form I-765 ([http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765\\_form.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765_form.pdf))
    - ii. “Academic Official’s Certification for Optional Practical Training” form, completed and signed by your academic adviser
    - iii. Passport, I-94 and all I-20s and EADs (if applicable) you have ever had
    - iv. 2 passport photographs (you can obtain these at Auxiliary Services)
    - v. Filing fee of \$340 (as described on page 4)
3. Practical Training Authorization Process:
  - a. Curricular Practical Training: If all of the aforementioned paperwork is in order, your international student adviser will *authorize* your CPT, submitting it to SEVIS and printing out the CPT authorization on a new I-20. *Once you receive this new I-20 you are authorized for CPT.*
  - b. Optional Practical Training: If all of the aforementioned paperwork is in order, your international student adviser will *recommend* your OPT, submitting it to SEVIS and printing out the OPT recommendation on a new I-20. You will then mail a copy of this new I-20 with your OPT application to USCIS. Review the “OPT Application Checklist” on page

4 to ensure your OPT application is complete. Soon after submission of your application, USCIS will send you a receipt notice and case number which will enable you to check the status of your application online. If approved, the OPT card will be sent directly to the address you provided on the Form I-765. *Once you receive the OPT card you are authorized to work between the start and end dates listed on the card.*

### **Special Considerations for Optional Practical Training**

- **OPT Application Deadlines**
  - Pre-completion OPT applications can be filed up to 120 days before the proposed OPT start date if the student has completed a full academic year in F-1 status. If not, the student may only file the OPT application up to 90 days before the end of the full academic year. The application must be filed within 30 days of the date your international student adviser enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS.
  - Post-completion OPT applications can be filed up to 90 days before the degree completion date and up to 60 days after the degree completion date, provided that it is filed within 30 days of the date your international student adviser enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS.
  - Applications for the 17 month STEM extension must reach the USCIS before the current EAD expires but no earlier than 90 days prior to the end date of the OPT.
  
- **Travel Warnings**
  - Traveling abroad between the time you mail your OPT application and the time you receive the USCIS receipt notice could result in the loss of OPT and denial of readmission to the US.
  - While on post-completion OPT, regulations allow you to reenter the US to resume employment only (i.e., not to look for a job).
  - If you will need to apply for an F-1 visa to return to the US while on OPT, you should first speak with your international student adviser since this visa application is considered a higher risk and the chances of denial could be greater than normal.
  
- **Unemployment while on Post-Completion OPT**
  - During any initial 12-month period of post-completion OPT, no student may be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 90 days.
  - If a STEM student receives a 17 month extension, the limit on unemployment is raised to an aggregate of 120 days, applied to the entire 29-month period on which the student is on post-completion OPT.
  
- **US Residential Address & Employer Name and Address Updates**
  - Students engaged in post-completion OPT are required to update their US address changes to their international student adviser within 10 days of moving. All updates to employer name and employer address are also required to be sent to their international student adviser immediately.
  
- **OPT Termination**
  - Your post-completion OPT authorization ends when you commence another degree program or the expiration date of your EAD, whichever comes first.

## OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Gather the documents listed below, paying close attention to which forms should be in original version and which forms should be in photocopied version. Your OPT application will be returned if something is missing. The OPT application you mail to USCIS should consist of the following items only.

### Originals of:

\_\_\_\_\_ Form I-765. Be sure you have signed the form and have given a US address which will be valid in the future. Be sure to fill out the form in blue ink.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$340 check (or money order) made payable to "US Department of Homeland Security." If your name and current address are not on the form of payment, be sure to write them down. Remember to also write "fee for I-765" on the memo line of check.

\_\_\_\_\_ Two passport photographs.

### Photocopies of:

\_\_\_\_\_ All I-20s you have ever had—including the new one with the recommended OPT on page 3.

\_\_\_\_\_ Passport biographical page, photo page and expiration date page (these 3 items may or may not be on the same page)

\_\_\_\_\_ Your most recent US visa

\_\_\_\_\_ Your Form I-94, front and back

\_\_\_\_\_ Copies of any/all previous OPT cards (front and back)

### Submit your OPT application by mail to:

USCIS Texas Service Center  
4141 North St. Augustine Road  
Dallas, TX 75227

Phone: (214) 381-1423

**ACADEMIC OFFICIAL'S CERTIFICATION FOR**  
**CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING**

*(to be signed by the academic adviser)*

Federal regulations permit F-1 students to apply for limited periods of "Curricular Practical Training" (CPT) prior to completion of a course of study. Each application must be accompanied by an employer's offer, an academic official's certification (see below) and must meet the following criteria: the proposed employment must be an integral part of the student's academic program for which the student will earn academic credit that counts towards his or her degree requirements. Federal regulations require a "Designated School Official" (international student adviser) to certify *under penalty of perjury* a student's eligibility for employment authorization. The international student adviser's certification is based on the information provided below. We therefore rely upon your careful evaluation of the student's employment letter and all the curricular information provided below.

***I have read and understand the above information and certify all information below is accurate.***

Academic official's name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

College/Department \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Extension \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student's Major \_\_\_\_\_

The student is (check one) \_\_\_\_\_ an undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_ in a Master's program \_\_\_\_\_ in a Ph.D. program.

The student is expected to complete all degree requirements in \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year) and is expected to complete/has completed required course work in \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year).

The student's proposed employment qualifies for curricular practical training for the following reason:

\_\_\_\_\_ The employment is part of a Cooperative Education program.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employment satisfies an internship or practicum which is listed in the catalogue.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employment will yield crucial data which is necessary to complete the student's thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employment is necessary for the student to complete a project for which he or she will receive academic credit that counts towards the student's degree requirements.

**Please complete the following curricular details of the practical training program:**

1. Course title and number as it appears in the catalogue: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Number of credits the student will earn *towards degree requirements* from this course: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Explain why the employment is required to fulfill the course requirements & how the training will be evaluated:

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**ACADEMIC OFFICIAL'S CERTIFICATION FOR**  
**OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**  
*(to be signed by the academic adviser)*

Federal regulations permit F-1 students to apply for limited periods of "Optional Practical Training" (OPT) in increments not to exceed a total of 12 months (in some cases 29 months) during and/or following each degree level. Each OPT application must be recommended by the academic adviser. In the case of students who do not yet have job offers, we ask that you briefly question them about the general type of work they are seeking so that you feel comfortable certifying the information below. Please note that in order for the Office of International Programs to comply with immigration regulations, it is critical that you supply all of the information requested below.

***I have read and understand the above information and certify all information below is accurate.***

I support \_\_\_\_\_'s application for optional practical training  
*student's name*

in \_\_\_\_\_ . This student is a graduate / undergraduate in \_\_\_\_\_  
*field of study* *circle one* *school/college*

who is expected to complete / has completed all course work on \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ and is expected to complete  
*circle one* *month/day/year*

all degree requirements for a \_\_\_\_\_ (including dissertation defense, where  
*degree level*

applicable) on \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ . The student will receive the \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ diploma. The proposed  
*month/day/year* *month/year*

employment is directly related to the student's field of study and is commensurate with the student's level of study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature* *Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name* *College/Department*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Email* *Campus Extension*

