

# INFORMATION: OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

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Optional practical training is authorization for employment in the USA issued by the US Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) for temporary work directly related to your major area of study. It may be used before or after completion of studies. You will receive a total of 12-months of optional practical training for each higher degree.

### ELIGIBILITY

If you have been enrolled as a full-time student for at least one academic year and are in lawful F-1 status, you may be eligible to apply for optional practical training. If you were previously granted less than 12 months of optional practical training in this same degree program, you may apply for the remaining time available.

### PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME WORK

Work for 20 hours per week or less is considered part-time. More than 20 hours per week and up to full-time is "full-time" for immigration purposes.

### TIMES TO USE OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

You may apply for optional practical training:

- During vacation when school is not in session if (1) you are currently enrolled and eligible, and (2) intend to register for the next semester. You may request full-time or part-time work authorization.
- While school is in session and you have not completed course work. This type of practical training authorization is limited to part-time employment (up to 20 hours a week). You may not hold any other type of employment at the same time.
- While school is in session and you have completed all course requirements for the Masters or PhD degree. This is for students in master's or doctoral programs who are working on a thesis or equivalent. You may request full-time or part-time authorization.
- Post-degree practical training. This is available after completion of all degree requirements, including submission of a thesis. This is issued for full-time only.

Your total period of authorization for optional practical training cannot be more than the equivalent of 12 months of full-time work. Part-time practical training (20 hours a week or less) will be deducted from the available 12 months at *half* the full-time rate. *Curricular practical training is different from the optional practical training category. See separate International Student Services handouts.*

### JOB OFFER

An offer of employment is not required for optional practical training.

### WHEN TO APPLY FOR POST-DEGREE PRACTICAL TRAINING

You can submit your application up to 120 days before you complete your course of study or before the beginning date of your proposed employment. If you are applying for post-degree practical training you must submit your application before the completion date of your degree requirements. Processing time at USCIS varies so students are encouraged to apply early.

### "COMPLETION DATE"

Your completion date is the date you complete all the requirements for your degree. In the case of graduate students with a thesis or dissertation requirement, it is the date on the library

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deposit receipt, or the date you receive the diploma if in the same semester as completion. Please check with an advisor if your case varies.

### **STARTING WORK**

You may not begin work until you receive the EAD card (Employment Authorization Document) or before the begin date listed on your EAD. For permission following your degree, you must also have completed all requirements for your degree.

### **TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE USA**

If you have completed your course of study, you must have your practical training authorization, EAD card, before temporarily leaving the USA. Upon re-entering you must present to the border officials the EAD card *and* a valid I-20 endorsed for travel. That signature is valid for multiple entries, and is valid for 6 months.

### *\*NOTIFICATION RESPONSIBILITIES*

**You are required by Immigration to report an change of address to International Student Services within 10 days. You must also notify International Student Services of any change in employment.**

### **HOW TO APPLY**

#### **STEP 1 International Student Services procedures**

- Attend an International Student Services Practical Training workshop.
- Submit to International Student Services the Optional Practical Training application, including current I-20 form.
- International Student Services will review your application and prepare a recommendation to the USCIS. This may take up to 10 working days.

#### **STEP 2 Submitting your application to the INS**

Assemble your papers in this order:

- \$340 certified bank check or money order payable to *US Citizen and Immigration Services*
- Completed Form I-765 form (Revised 05/09/02)N. Respond to Q. #16 by writing **(c)(3)(i)** within the parentheses.
- Photocopy of pages 1 and 3 of the I-20 showing the OPT recommendation. [INS will not return your 1-20, so we advise that you send only a copy.]
- Photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.
- Two (2) color photos with a **white background** taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the USCIS. (See USCIS handout on photos)
- Photocopy of your passport identity, expiry and visa pages and any previous EAD cards.

Mail your complete packet to:

**USCIS Texas Service Center  
PO Box 851041  
Mesquite TX 75185-1041**

We recommend that you keep copies of your application packet. We also recommend that you send it certified mail with return receipt. USCIS will send a receipt letter to you several weeks after they receive it. The estimated time at INS is 90-120 days, although this varies.

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