



F-1: OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

GENERAL INFORMATION

Optional Practical Training for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience complementary to the academic program. An F-1 student is eligible for a **MAXIMUM OF 12 MONTHS**. However, if a student begins a new academic program at a higher level (e.g. master's after bachelor's degree or Ph.D. after master's), the student is eligible for another 12 months of OPT. It is important to note, however, that part-time optional practical training (20 hours per week or less) is deducted from the available training at one-half the full-time rate. Thus, 2 months of part-time training would count as a one-month deduction from the available 12 months.

While on optional practical training, individuals are still considered to be F-1 students at Western Michigan University even though they may be working elsewhere in the United States.

This type of training is available to students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one academic year. Optional practical training is available in the following cases:

1. part-time or full-time during the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student intends to register for the next term of the session
2. part-time while school is in session
3. part-time or full-time after completion of graduate course requirements excluding a thesis or dissertation
4. full-time after completion of the course of study.

NOTE: *It is currently taking the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) approximately 3 months to process applications for Optional Practical Training.* Thus, it is important to apply as early as possible. For options #1, #2, and #3, students can apply as early as 120 days before their intended start date for OPT. (Reminder: Students using option #3 must continue to enroll full time, excluding vacations, till the completion of study). Students applying based on option #4 must complete and send their application to USCIS before they complete their degree program and can apply as early as the beginning of the semester they will graduate.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE & IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Part #1: Bring the following to International Services and Student Affairs (ISSA – 4255 Ellsworth Hall):

1. Completed Form I-765 (available at ISSA or online at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)
2. Form I-20(s)
3. Passport
4. Form I-94
5. Completed ISSA Form "Optional Practical Training Recommendation" (attached).

After reviewing the material listed above, an ISSA adviser will prepare a SEVIS I-20 recommending OPT on the employment page.

Part #2: Since students may not legally begin working until an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) has been issued by USCIS, the student must send the following documents to the USCIS Nebraska Service Center (or to the USCIS

Service Center which has jurisdiction over your residence listed on Form I-765), for approval and issuance of an EAD:

1. Completed Form I-765 (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)
2. Check or money order for \$180 (or \$340 if postmarked on or after 7/30/07) payable to the Department of Homeland Security (must be drawn at a financial institution that is physically located in the U.S.)
3. Photocopy of Form I-20s, including the OPT I-20 with ISSA adviser's recommendation for practical training on Page 3
4. Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back)
5. Photocopy of passport and visa (clear copy of photo page and page of expiration)
-- *If you are a Canadian citizen, you may enclose a copy of your citizenship card, or a birth certificate and a government-issued photo ID.*
6. Two U.S. passport-style photos as follows (*Lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil*):

(1) full face, front view, eyes open; (2) make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm); (3) center head within frame; (4) make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 3 mm) from bottom of photo; (4) photo should be against a plain white or off-white background and there should be no distracting shadows on the face or background.

Part #3: Mail the above documents by certified mail with return receipt to the following address:

**USCIS/DHS
Nebraska Service Center
P.O. Box 87765
Lincoln, NE 68501-7765**

(or to the Service Center which has jurisdiction over your residence listed on Form I-765)

Part #4: Please do not wait to mail your OPT application as it must be **received** by USCIS within 30 days after the OPT I-20 was issued. In addition, USCIS will **not** entertain your OPT application if it reaches USCIS after your completion of study. So, please plan ahead and mail in your OPT application well before your completion of study.

Part #5: If you later decide **not** to mail your OPT application (Form I-765 plus supporting documentation) to USCIS for any reason, you must notify an ISSA advisor immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS as well. Failure to inform an ISSA advisor that you are not applying for OPT can cause problems for you in the future.

Part #6: Please submit a copy of your OPT card to ISSA immediately upon your receipt. USCIS requires that a copy of this document be kept in your file. **Please do not forget this step!**

Special Notes:

- Please keep in mind that ISSA will **not authorize CPT** after post-completion OPT has been recommended. Thus, if there is any possibility for CPT in your last semester, please hold off on your application for post-completion OPT.
- You may begin working on OPT after receiving the (laminated) OPT card **AND** (not OR) it is on or after the proposed OPT start date.
- While on OPT, your job should be directly related to your field of study and commensurate with your level of education. For example, if you are receiving a master's degree in mechanical engineering, you should find a job

that requires a master's degree in mechanical engineering.

- While OPT is pending, we strongly advise you against moving away from the address listed on Form 1-765 as USCIS has NOT been able to process change of address notifications properly. Changing your address while OPT is still pending can possibly result in filing a new OPT application with a new fee.
- Once you mail the post-completion OPT application to Nebraska, we recommend that you don't travel outside the U.S.
- Once you receive the post-completion OPT card, you may travel and re-enter the U.S. if you have a job to return to in the U.S.
- Your OPT will be automatically terminated when you start a new academic program or take classes toward a new program during your OPT. Please consult with an ISSA advisor prior to registering for any classes while on OPT.
- Upon receiving an OPT card from USCIS, immediately provide a copy to ISSA.
- If the dates on your OPT card differ from the dates on your OPT 1-20, please inform ISSA immediately.
- Immediately Inform ISSA of any immigration status change.
- Please update ISSA of your **name or address change** within 10 days from moving/changing.
- Students making a trip outside of the United States while on practical training after graduation will need a **travel signature** from an adviser in ISSA on their I-20 within the last six months for re-entry into the United States.
- ISSA recommends that you **always consult with an ISSA advisor prior to leaving the U.S.**

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) REQUEST AND RECOMMENDATION FORM

Optional practical training (OPT) for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience complementary to the academic program. An F-1 student is eligible for a maximum of 12 months of OPT. It is available to students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least nine consecutive months. The practical training sought by this student must be directly related to his or her field of study, commensurate with his or her educational level, and recommended by the academic advisor/chair.

To be completed by ACADEMIC ADVISOR (*not by student*)

Student's name: _____ WIN #: _____

Major: _____ Degree: _____

of credits remaining to graduate: _____ Expected date of completion: _____

The recommendation is based on the following (check only one):

Pre-completion (i.e. OPT will be done before graduation):

- Will be taking an annual vacation semester during the _____ semester and intends to register for the following semester
- Will be on practical training while school is in session (work must not exceed 20 hours per week)
- Has completed all graduate course requirements excluding the thesis or dissertation

Post-completion (i.e. OPT will be done after graduation):

- Is expected to complete the course of study on ____/____/____

Name of Advisor/Chair: _____ Signature of Advisor/Chair: _____
(please print)

Campus Phone #: _____ Campus Address: _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT:

Proposed OPT Start Date: _____ **and** **End Date:** _____

List all periods of previously authorized employment for practical training.

Curricular Practical Training	Optional Practical Training
<i>Example: full time -- 1/23/2002 – 5/31/2002</i>	<i>Example: part time -- 6/1/2002 – 12/31/2002</i>

Current address: _____ Phone: _____

Signature of Student: _____ Date: _____

ISSA USE ONLY: Part-time Full-time Optional Practical Training recommended by _____ on _____.

** Attach a copy of the student's I-765, passport, I-94, current and previous I-20s.*