

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

## DEFINITION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) gives F-1 students an opportunity for work experience in the U.S. before and/or after completion of a degree. It is limited to a total of 12 months for each higher degree level in a field directly related to your course of study. Unlike Curricular Practical Training (CPT), OPT does not have to be included as a required internship or practicum listed in your curriculum.

## ELIGIBILITY

- F-1 students are eligible for Optional Practical Training after maintaining full-time student status for at least one academic year (2 semesters).
- Students are eligible for OPT: (1) full-time during the summer vacation semester, (2) part-time during the academic year, and, (3) full-time after completion of all course requirements.
- Students must complete the OPT within 14 months after completion of the course of study.
- Students who have engaged in one year or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are ineligible for Optional Practical Training.
- USCIS must receive the student's application for OPT within 60 days of their completion of degree requirements. i.e. You must apply for OPT within 60 days of your program completion date.
- It is not necessary to have an offer of employment before applying for OPT.

## OPT APPLICATION PROCEDURES

### 1. Come to an OPT session

OPT sessions are held at various times throughout the semester. Dates, times and locations can be found at: <http://www.oie.gatech.edu/>. At the session you will learn about the details of OPT, and receive all the necessary paperwork and application form.

### 2. Make an appointment with an International Student Advisor in OIE

Your advisor will check over the application, issue a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation, and make copies of all necessary documents for your files. After the appointment, you will mail the application to USCIS (Be sure to send through regular mail; if you send the application via express mail, be sure to select no signature required. Please note that the US postal service will not forward governmental documents).

### 3. Notice of Action

After you apply for OPT, you will receive a Notice of Action in a few weeks. You can check the status of your application by using the SRC number at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp>.

### 4. EAD Card

You will receive the EAD card 2-3 months after you submit the OPT application. If you do not receive the EAD 91 days after the date on your Notice of Action, you can request OIE to contact immigration on your behalf.

# QUESTIONS ABOUT OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

## WHEN TO APPLY

If you are completing your academic program, the earliest you can apply is 90 days prior to completion and the latest you can apply is 60 days after your completion date.

**For Undergraduate & non-Thesis Graduate students:** Completion date is the date of graduation.

**For Thesis option Graduate students:** Completion date is the date of graduation for the semester in which you meet the Thesis Submission Deadline. The date of defense cannot be used as the Completion Date for the purposes of OPT. Please note: You cannot apply for OPT while on the enrollment waiver. You must apply for OPT before the program completion date.

## EMPLOYMENT OFFER

You do not need to have a job offer in order to apply for OPT.

## START DATE OF EMPLOYMENT

You must receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card before starting to work. Working without a permit is a severe violation of your legal status. If you have not received your EAD card and it is 91 days past the due date of your Notice of Action, you can contact the Office of International Education for assistance.

## TRAVEL ON OPT

If you plan to travel while on OPT (after you have graduated from Georgia Tech) please note the following:

- 1. Valid visa:** If your F-1 visa stamp in your passport has expired, DO NOT make any travel plans without first speaking to an international student advisor at OIE. It is extremely difficult to renew an expired visa while on OPT.
- 2. I-20:** Get a travel signature on page three of the I-20 from OIE.
- 3. Passport:** Make sure it is valid at least six months into the future.
- 4. Employment Authorization Document:** Take the card with you to show to the immigration official upon your return to the U.S. You will not be able to reenter the U.S. without this card, so you should only plan to leave the U.S. *after* you have received it.
- 5. Letter from Employer:** It is recommended that you carry a letter from your employer stating your dates of employment, your job responsibilities, and the fact that you will return to the position.

## CHANGING OR CANCELLING OPT

If you apply for OPT, but have to delay your graduation, you cannot change your OPT application once you apply.

## GRACE PERIOD IN U.S. AFTER OPT

You may remain in the U.S. 60 days after the expiration of your EAD. This is a time for you to travel within the U.S., pack your things, relax, etc. You should not be working or studying during the 60-day grace period.