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# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR CARLETON STUDENTS

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Students who have been enrolled at Carleton **on a full-time basis for a full academic year** previous to OPT are eligible for **optional practical training (OPT)**. This is temporary employment **in their field of study** for purposes of gaining practical experience.

- Students must be in lawful F-1 status (full course of study, good academic standing) for an entire academic year in order to become eligible for OPT. Students may apply during the winter/spring terms of their freshman year.
- USCIS (Immigration Service) defines *employment* as the rendering of services for compensation, **financial or otherwise**.
- Any time a student performs a service for compensation (either full time or part time) in an off-campus setting **within the United States** s/he **must apply for Employment Authorization**.
- Students may attend school **part time** during OPT.

Students are eligible for a **maximum of only twelve months** of practical training. (*Students get twelve months OPT for each degree or program*) Students may apply for authorization for OPT directly related to their major area of study and commensurate with the student's educational level in the following cases:

- During the student's annual vacation as long as the student registers for the next semester
- While school is in session, provided that OPT does not exceed twenty hours a week including on-campus employment
- After completion of course requirements except thesis, project, or portfolio
- After completion of the course of study. The start date of **post completion practical training** must be **no later than 59 days** after the completion of the program and the end date of OPT **may not be more than 14 months** after completion of study. The immigration service does not view the graduation ceremony as completion of studies; completion of studies means completion of coursework or the date the final thesis has been submitted.
- **Off Campus Study (OCS)**
  - OCS is counted as enrollment in the U.S. and as long as students are not absent more than 5 months they may apply for and engage in OPT
  - There is a considerable 'grey' area about the temporary absence rule (5 months or more) in the regulations; students who are outside the U.S. for more than 5 months **might** have difficulty in having their OPT application approved. Students might apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) under those circumstances.Please see the director of International Student Programs for details.

**Please note:**

- Applications for OPT should be filed as early as possible, **but not later than 90 days prior to the starting date of employment**.
- Applications for OPT cannot be filed outside the U.S.
- Students do **not** need to have a firm job offer in order to apply for OPT.
- Employment may not commence until the OPT participant has been issued **and is in possession** of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the Immigration Service.
- **Adjudication of an EAD takes anywhere from four to 12 weeks**. It is the student's responsibility to apply in a timely fashion.
- EAD holders may **change jobs** as long as the new employment continues to be directly related to the field of study and commensurate with the student's educational level.
- F-1 status is maintained for 60 days following completion of OPT. Students must then depart the U.S. or apply for a change of status with the immigration services.
- OPT is automatically terminated if you transfer to another college or university, which means you are not allowed to work.

## Travel

- Students performing **Post-Completion OPT (after graduation)** with a valid EAD may depart and re-enter the US for the duration of the authorized period, provided that:
  - The student's I-20 form has been re-certified in the last 6 months by the director of International Student Programs
  - The student has a valid passport
  - The student has a valid F-1 entry visa
  - The student has a valid, un-expired EAD
- Because regulations allow for reentry "to resume employment" only, students attempting to reenter the U.S. while on **post completion practical training**, who have not yet secured jobs, may encounter difficulties, and may be denied entry at the discretion of the inspecting officer at the port of entry. Students should have a signed work contract, or letter from the employer stating terms of employment.
- If an applicant for Post-Completion OPT leaves the U.S. after completion of degree requirements but before receipt of an EAD, he/she might be viewed as having abandoned the application and to have no provision for employment authorization.

### **Please note:**

- Applicants for **pre-completion OPT** who leave the US during the adjudication period (before obtaining the EAD) **may not be able to obtain permission for practical training upon return to the U.S.** The immigration service may determine on reentry that leaving the U.S. constitutes abandonment of the OPT application. This depends on the Port of Entry officer and is not necessarily enforced.

## Application Procedure

- The student should make an appointment with the director of International Student Programs (the designated school official DSO) to confer and pick up immigration application forms
  - The student should submit the following documents to the director:
    1. The original form I-20 ID and all other copies – where applicable
    2. A completed I-765
    3. A signed I-765 signature card (to be signed during appointment)
    4. A valid passport with I-94 card
    5. 2 passport type photos (white background)
    6. \$340 check made out to the USCIS
    7. Previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) – where applicable
    8. Letter from faculty advisor (see memo to Faculty Advisor)
    9. **Remember that a student does NOT have to have a job offer or letter from employer for the application**
  - The director of International Student Programs will help the student complete and process the application forms according to immigration regulations.
  - The director of Intl. Student Programs at Carleton is the Designated School Official (DSO) who will **recommend** students for OPT. This endorsement is made on the applicant's I-20 form after the DSO verifies that the student has correctly followed the application procedures. The DSO does **not** grant authorization for OPT; only USCIS has that authority.
  - The review by USCIS varies from one service center to another. In most cases, the EAD will be sent by mail to the address given on the application. Because the post office does not forward government mail, the address used on the I-765 should be valid for at least 90 days. Students may use the Intl. Student Programs Carleton address.
  - The EAD is sometimes sent to the local or district INS office for student pick-up.
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