F-1 12-Month Post Completion Practical Training

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Upon the completion of a degree or certificate program, international students who possess an F-1 visa may be eligible to apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) for authorization to participate in a program-related work experience. Under this provision, international students must meet certain Federal government and University of Hartford requirements to be eligible. Information posted here is current as of 04/05/2014, but is subject to change by the USCIS at any time. Please check with the International Center for the most up to date information.

Participation Guidelines

- Students must intend to complete all the course requirements of their degree or certificate program (including project, thesis or recital) before a recommendation may be granted by the International Student Advisor (ISA) for a particular graduation cycle.
- Students must have been in F-1 student status for a minimum of one academic year or 9 months.
- Students may apply for a Practical Training recommendation from the ISA and employment authorization from the USCIS 90 days prior to the completion of a program of study and up to 60 days following program completion. Completion of “course of study” is typically defined as the last day of your last final exam or the last day of a particular semester; not the official University date of graduation (i.e. commencement). The USCIS requires receipt of your training request within that application period. Any requests submitted to the ISA after the application period may be rejected for submission to the USCIS. Students are not required to have an employment offer to request Practical Training. A student will be granted a 12 month training period if found eligible for Practical Training by the USCIS. Students who have received USCIS permission for Practical Training, and who have not yet secured employment, must be employed within 90 days of the start of your Practical Training period.

Filing Procedures

Students who wish to participate in a Post-Completion Practical Training experience must request a recommendation from the ISA and authorization from USCIS.

The following documentation is required to process a request:

- All I-20 forms that have been issued to you either by the University of Hartford or another educational institution.
- A current I-20 AB form to be endorsed by the ISA to reflect that Practical Training is recommended for the student.
- A completed and signed USCIS I-765 Form
- Two passport type personal photographs, in color and white background. Photos should measure 2 X 2 inches.
- The USCIS charges a $380 fee (effective 2010 and subject to change) that must accompany this application. The fee must be paid in the form of a personal check, bank draft, or money order
(cash is not accepted by USCIS). Your payment must be made out to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security"

- A copy of your "Degree Application" that was submitted to the Registrar's Office.
- Departmental "Recommendation Form" for Practical Training indicating that you will complete your degree program at a specific time.
- A written statement from the student requesting a Practical Training work authorization to the International Center, including a description of the type of employment the student wishes to participate in.
- Photocopy of all "identifying" pages of your passport including your photo page and the U.S. visa page.
- Photocopy of your I-94 "Arrival/Departure Record."

Process

The ISA will review all documentation, then prepare and endorse the student's I-20 form to indicate that Practical Training is recommended and the date that the training will commence. Students will be instructed to mail (certified mail recommended) their request to the USCIS location having jurisdiction over the University of Hartford. The request packet should include a newly endorsed I-20 (note that the I-20 update recommending your OPT must be filed within 30 days of the date that your OPT was entered in to the SEVIS system), a completed and signed I-765 form, photocopies of all previously issued I-20 forms, photocopies of your passport, US visa and I-94 Arrival/Departure Record, a check for $380 made out to the "Department of Homeland Security," two photographs (signed on the reverse side, including your name, SEVIS ID number and birth date - in pencil, and a letter from the student requesting Practical Training approval. Upon approval of a student's request, the USCIS will return an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) the student.

It will typically take the USCIS 8-12 weeks to process a request (this is an estimated time frame which could be shorter of longer; there is no guarantee that your OPT request will be approved by USCIS or recommended by the International Center). Upon receipt of your EAD, students are required to present this document to the International Center so it may be copied and placed into your University record. Students who have employment offers may begin work once the USCIS has issued the EAD (but in no case before the completion of studies – see note).

Note: A Student who is enrolled in a Doctoral program and is in the process of completing their thesis or recital may apply for OPT if they have completed all course work with only the thesis or recital left to complete. This option does not apply to Masters students who are completing their final "project."

The USCIS Service Center located in St. Albans, Vermont (the office that will review all Practical Training requests for students residing in Connecticut) may require up to 8 weeks or more to adjudicate a Practical Training request. Regardless of the time it takes the USCIS to complete the process students may not begin employment until they have been issued an Employment Authorization Document by the USCIS.

Note:

- The University cannot guarantee the approval of a Practical Training experience for any international student. Final authorization may only be granted by the USCIS, provided the student meets all requirements and is found eligible (the University may only recommend, not authorize, Practical Training to USCIS on a student's behalf).
- Securing employment is the responsibility of the student. The International Center is not obligated nor will it seek employment opportunities for international students.
Students may apply for a Practical Training recommendation from the International Center and employment authorization from USCIS 90 days prior to and up to 60 days following the completion of a program of study. Completion of "course of study" is typically defined as the last day of your last final exam or the last day of a particular semester; not the official University date of graduation (i.e. commencement. Any requests submitted to the International Center and USCIS 60 days following program completion will not be adjudicated by the USCIS.

The maximum amount of time granted for Post-Completion Practical Training is 12 months. Generally, students may be authorized only one twelve-month training period although a student may be eligible for a second period of training following the completion of a new program of study. The new program must be at a higher level than the previous program, i.e. bachelor to masters, or masters to doctorate. Students who have completed a program of study which is identified as a STEM program by the USCIS may qualify for an additional 17 months of training.

On and Off-campus employment positions held by students while enrolled at the University will not generally affect the 12 month Practical Training benefit. Students who have engaged in a full-time Curricular Practical Training experience (CO-OP or internship) prior to graduation for 12 months or more will be prohibited from engaging in Practical Training following graduation. In some instances, Curricular Practical Training may be deducted from the 12-month training allowance. Please speak with the International Center if you have been employed under a COOP arrangement or participated in an off-campus internship.

Students will be required to secure a Social Security number that is valid for employment. Students may be required to pay Federal and State income taxes based on the amount of earned income. Generally, students are not required to pay Social Security taxes while employed under the F-1 visa category, though if you have been in the U.S. for five or more years you may be subject to the tax. International students are advised to become familiar with Federal and State laws regarding the payment of income and social security taxes.

Students will be required to complete an I-9 Form for their employer within 3 days of the start of work.

Generally, students who have requested Practical Training should not travel outside the United States until they have been granted employment authorization and have been issued an Employment Authorization Document by the USCIS. In addition students are required to have a letter from an employer specifying that they are either currently employed or have been offered employment. This letter must be on company letterhead and included a complete job description.

Students who leave the U.S. following their completion of studies without obtaining their EAD card from the USCIS or a letter of employment, may risk difficulty re-entering the U.S. to pursue Practical Training. You should speak with the International Center about your travel plans before they are made to insure there are no potential problems with your travel arrangements.

Students completing our ELI program or short-term certificate programs may not participate in Post-Completion Practical Training.

Though a student may no longer be enrolled in a program of study, the University still maintains certain reporting requirements to the USCIS. The USCIS considers a relationship to exist between the student and the University of Hartford while that student participates in a Practical Training experience; for example, students on Practical Training are still required to obtain a current signature from the Center for travel, must report any change of local or permanent address to us within ten days and must notify the Center in writing on the 6-month anniversary of their EAD start date.
Practical Training Sample Letter

An F-1 International Student who wishes to participate in a Post-Completion Practical Training work experience is asked to submit a written request to the International Center for its recommendation to the USCIS. In writing this letter you may wish to follow the suggested format below.

Date
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service
Vermont Service Center
ST. Albans, VT 05479-9765

RE: Request to participate in Post-Completion Practical Training

To whom this may concern:

My name is (insert), and I am currently enrolled as a full-time student at the University of Hartford. I am a matriculated student in the (name of degree program) and will complete my course of study on (insert date). I wish to apply for Post-Completion Practical Training work authorization.

This second paragraph should explain why you wish to apply for Practical Training, what type of training you are interested in receiving, and how this training will benefit you when you return home.

Please grant my request for Practical Training, so I may have the opportunity to apply the theory learned in class to the realities of a work environment. Upon completion of my Practical Training, I intend to return my home country, (insert country name).

Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address and Phone Number

Regulations Governing Practical Training

Once your application is approved, USCIS will issue you an Employment Authorization Document which looks similar in size to a CT driver’s license or CT State ID Card. Make a copy of your EAD and write your University of Hartford ID number somewhere on the page. Scan and email to the International Center with a note indicating you applied for OPT and have received your EAD.

Your F-1 status continues through the OPT period. You must stop your employment when the end date on the EAD card is reached, though you may remain in the U.S. for up to 60 days (grace period).

You may begin working once
  - you have obtained the EAD card
  - the start date on the card has been reached

The EAD is not employer specific, so you may change employers at will. However, employment must be directly related to your field of study. Any employment outside your field of study is unauthorized and is a substantive violation of your status. All changes to your employer must be submitted to the International Center immediately accompanied by a new employer letter.
OPT Employment Requirements and Reporting

You are expected to be employed in your field of study during OPT and you are required to submit employer information to the International Center. The International Center will electronically update your SEVIS record, thereby notifying the USCIS that you are employed. The International Center requires that you submit a letter from your employer, on company letterhead that includes the company’s name, address, and telephone number. This letter must indicate the date that you were hired and the position you will be employed in. The letter must contain a **complete job description** of your duties and responsibilities.

**Documenting OPT Employment**

It is recommended that you keep documentation of all your employment. In the future, you may be asked to provide proof that your employment during OPT was in your field of study. Specifically, you should maintain evidence — for each job — of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and description of the work. If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, we highly recommend that you obtain a signed letter from the employer’s hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work you performed. Keep this in your personal records.

**Types of employment allowed during pre- and post- completion OPT**

All OPT employment, including post-completion OPT, must be in a job that is related to your degree program. This employment may include the following (*does not apply to students on a STEM extension*):

- **Paid employment:** Students authorized for post-completion OPT may work part time (at least 20 hours per week) or full time.
- **Multiple employers:** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student’s degree program.
- **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists):** Students who are musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs.
- **Work for hire:** Work for hire means that an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. It is sometimes called “1099 employment” because people who “work for hire” receive Internal Revenue Service Form 1099-MISC – which shows how much money was earned for a particular year – from the contracting company. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner:** Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s degree program.
- **Employment through an agency:** Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Unpaid employment:** Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. Students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that they worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.
**Reporting Employment**

Students are required to report employer information or any changes to that information to the International Center as soon as possible. This information must be input and updated on the SEVIS system. We recommend that you report changes immediately but no more than 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a USCIS official may determine you to be out of status. On the 6th month anniversary of the start of OPT, students must obtain a new employment letter and submit it to the International Center. This update, required by USCIS, will be input into the SEVIS system.

**Periods of Unemployment**

Students on post-completion OPT are only allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment.

**What counts as “unemployment time?”**

- Unemployment time is counted each day during the OPT dates indicated on the EAD.
- Students who have OPT extended due to the cap gap provisions continue to accrue unemployment time and are subject to the 90-day limitation on unemployment.
- If you have a job offer that begins more than 90 days after your OPT begins, you will exceed your allowable unemployment time. Receiving a job offer within the 90 days is not sufficient; you must be employed in one of the employment types listed above.
- If you travel outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90 day limit (unless job related).
- Permanently leaving the U.S. without notifying the International Center may result in the accidental accrual of unemployment. For this reason, you must contact the International Center if you decide to abandon your OPT.

**What does not count toward “unemployment time”:**

- Periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed.
- If you travel abroad while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of your employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

**Consequences of exceeding allowable period of unemployment:**

If you exceed the allowable period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, you are considered to have violated your status. If you cannot find employment that meets the definition of OPT employment, you may have the following options:

- Apply to the University of Hartford or another university to continue your education by a change of level or transferring to another institution. See "Starting a New Program" below
- Depart the United States (be sure to notify the International Center if you abandon your OPT and leave)
- Change status to another legal status if possible

**Ending OPT Early / Abandoning OPT**

If you decide to abandon your OPT before the end date of your employment authorization and leave the U.S., you must notify the International Center so we can end your SEVIS record. Please send an email to
the International Center telling us that you have decided to abandon your OPT and the date you plan to depart the United States. We will end your SEVIS record effective the date you indicate you plan to leave the U.S. or the date you notify us, whichever is later.

**Starting a New Program and Concurrent Enrollment — at UHA or Another Institution**

During the period you are authorized for OPT you may decide to apply to another academic program, either at UHA or another University. Once you are admitted to another degree program, it is important to discuss the situation with an advisor at the International Center, as the issuance of a new I-20 will effect/terminate your OPT. Please call the Center to request an appointment. If you are admitted to a degree program at another University, the International Center must transfer your I-20 to that institution so they may issue a new I-20 for you.

- **Admission to UHA for a new degree program/change of level:** Once you have been admitted to a new degree program at UHA the Center will issue a new I-20 to you. The issuance of this new I-20 does not end your OPT immediately. Your EAD is terminated as soon as you enter the U.S. with the new I-20 or you check-in for the new program, whichever is earlier. Either one of these events will activate your SEVIS record for the new degree and deactivate your OPT SEVIS record. This means you must immediately stop employment regardless of the card's appearance of validity if you reenter with your new I-20 or check-in at the Center.

- **Transfer to another school in the U.S. in order to begin a new degree program:** Authorization for OPT is not transferable. Your authorization for OPT ends on the transfer release date. If you wish to complete OPT, set the release date for a date after the OPT ends. You can set the transfer release date to occur during the 60-day grace period following post-completion. On your transfer release date, you must stop employment regardless of your EAD card's appearance of validity. In order to maintain your F-1 status, a new I-20 for change of academic level, new degree program, or transfer must be issued before the end of your 60 day grace period.

- **Concurrent Enrollment** You may participate in OPT and attend school at the same time. However, you cannot be enrolled as a full-time student and may only attend part-time.

**Change of Status during OPT**

- If you change your immigration status (e.g. from F-1 to H-1B, F-2, or J-1) during the period of your OPT, your OPT ends on the effective date of the USCIS "action notice" and any unused OPT time is lost (you cannot have both F-1 OPT status and another status at the same time, nor can you return to OPT if your new status is terminated for any reason).

- The University of Hartford is required to notify SEVIS of your new status and requests that you notify the International Center immediately. To officially record your new status, the Center will need a copy of the approval notice you received from USCIS. Please mail a letter which includes your name, your current status, your UHA ID number and your signature asking for an update on your visa status. Include with the letter a copy of the documentation you received from USCIS.

**Travel outside the U.S. and Reentry**

You may travel outside the United States, for instance to visit your home country, once you have received your EAD authorization from USCIS and either have employment or have been offered employment. You must carry a current letter stating that you are currently employed or when you will be employed by your employer. You must also have your I-20 signed by the International Center prior to leaving the country. If your F-2 dependents travel outside the U.S. and reenter without you during your OPT period, they should carry their own original documents along with photocopies of all the documents you are required to carry for reentry.