

PROCEDURES FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Optional Practical Training is paid off-campus work, related to the **major** field of study. **Students on F-1 visas who have been in status for at least 1 full academic year may participate in Optional Practical Training.** You do not need a job offer in order to apply for Optional Practical Training, but you cannot begin work until you have been approved by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. **YOU MUST BEGIN THE APPLICATION PROCESS AT LEAST 2-3 MONTHS BEFORE YOU EXPECT TO BEGIN WORK. Applications for OPT can be filed up to 90 days before your program end date and up to 60 days after the end of your program.**

1. Before meeting with Kimberly, ask your **academic advisor for a letter** which recommends Practical Training in order to complement your degree program. The letter should be addressed to Kimberly and include the date of completion of your degree requirements. (See sample letter below.)
2. Meet with Kimberly to review the OPT application process. Bring **ALL** of your **I-20's**, your **passport** and your **I-94 card** with you.
3. Kimberly will prepare a new SEVIS I-20 document for you that includes a recommendation for Optional Practical Training.
4. When you meet Kimberly will go over the "Application for Employment Authorization" (I-765) with you. Follow instructions carefully. There is a \$410.00 fee to apply.
5. Student will mail their completed application and all back up documentation to a lock box in Texas where it will be scanned before being mailed to Vermont.
6. Immigration will send you a receipt by mail once they have received and entered your application into the system. That notice will have a Receipt # which you can use to keep track of the progress of your application.
7. Immigration will send their decision no later than 90 days after you mail the application. You may not begin work until you have been authorized to do so. You may not contact immigration about the status of your application until a minimum of 90 days have passed.
7. If your application is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document. Bring the EAD card to the Office of International Program so that the card can be copied for the file. Kimberly must sign your I-20 again 6 months after you begin your Practical Training, assuming you have been authorized for more than that. (If you are doing your Practical Training outside of Portland, mail the I-20 back to the International Office with a note describing your work progress).

8. You may not leave the USA between the time you submit an OPT application and receiving your Employment Authorization Document. If you travel outside the USA during your authorized Practical Training period, you will need to be employed or you may not be admitted upon return to the US. **An absence of more than 5 months will void your F-1 status.**

- Once you have received your OPT approval you must notify the International Programs Office as soon as you have secured a job. You will need to provide the USM International Programs Office with the date of hire, the employer name, address, e-mail and phone number. You must also confirm how this position is relevant to your academic field of study.
- If this information changes during your one year of OPT you must notify the International Office at USM within 10 days of the change.
- Students may accrue NO MORE than 90 DAYS of unemployment during their one year of OPT.
- Some students in the STEM fields of study may be eligible for a 24 month extension of their OPT. Students should discuss this option with the Office of International Program. This request for additional OPT time for students in the appropriate majors must be made approximately 3 months before their 12 month period of OPT expires.

NOTE: Always be sure that:

1. The Office of International Programs has your current address and telephone number.
2. Your passport is valid.
3. The date in Item 5 of your I-20 has not passed, unless you have graduated.
4. You are maintaining full-time enrollment at USM, unless specifically authorized by Kimberly to enroll less than full-time, unless you have graduated.

LIMITS:

1. F-1 students are limited to a maximum of 12 months of Optional Practical Training.
2. Students are encouraged to submit an application for Optional Practical Training to USCIS **prior to completion of your academic program.** Students may also apply during the 60 days following the completion of their degree – however, this is not recommended.