F-1 Practical Training
Information & Guide

What is Practical Training?

Many international students are interested in obtaining working experience in their field of study before returning to their home country. The F-1 regulations allow international students the opportunity to obtain work experience in their field by providing an employment authorization option known as *practical training*. Practical training refers to any type of salaried employment, paid internship, or practicum, which is related to an F-1 student's field of study. Unpaid volunteer work may be used for optional practical training, but does not require work authorization for curricular practical training.

Practical training is divided into two training options: curricular practical training and optional practical training. Curricular practical training requires that the training be an integral part of the academic program of study, and it may only be utilized while a student is still in school. Optional practical training allows more flexibility as the training may be taken either during the course of study, or after completion of the course of study. It is limited to a 12-month training period for each degree program. A student becomes eligible for another 12-month period when changing to a new degree program at a higher educational level. Most students choose to utilize this training after completion of their course of study.

Students must meet strict eligibility requirements in order to be authorized for one of the practical training options. Before the training can begin it must be authorized by either the International Student Advisor (ISA) or the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) depending on the type of training. All applications for practical training must be submitted to the ISA who will either authorize the training, or send the application to the DHS to obtain the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

A detailed explanation of the specific requirements and the application procedures for each type of training is listed below. Please read the information thoroughly, and follow the directions for each type of training carefully. You may obtain needed forms at the International Student Center (ISC) or on the USCIS web site at: http://uscis.gov. If you have specific questions, or need additional information, feel free to contact the ISC.

Practical Training Eligibility Requirements for All Applicants:
- Valid Passport
- Valid I-20 Form
- Must have I-94 Form
- Must be in valid F-1 status
- Must have been in full time F-1 status for **one full academic year**. Graduate students whose program **requires** immediate participation in a paid internship may waive this requirement. Time spent in another immigration status may count toward the academic year requirement under certain circumstances.

Social Security Number and Taxes
All persons must have a Social Security number in order to be employed in the US. This is not the Red ID number assigned by SDSU. To apply for a Social Security number, present a valid passport, I-94, I-20, the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) or I-20 with CPT authorization to any Social Security office. The nearest office to SDSU is located at 7961 University Ave. Students in F-1 status are exempt from Social Security tax (FICA), however they are generally subject to federal and state income taxes. Federal tax forms and information are available on the Internal Revenue Service website at www.irs.gov . California forms and information are available on the CA Franchise Tax Board website at http://www.ftb.ca.gov/.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Background

Curricular practical training is defined as any required or optional internship that is an integral part of the established curriculum for a program of study. Only internships that are directly related to the course curriculum qualify as curricular practical training, and can be either an optional or required part of the program.

Requirements Specific to Curricular PT (In addition to requirements on page 1)

- The training **must** be an integral part of the curriculum. It is only authorized during a course of study.
- Internships that are **optional must** be taken for units. Not all majors at SDSU offer courses that meet the CPT eligibility. Students should check with their department for information.
- If it is a **required** part of the program, it does **not** have to be taken for units.
- The training is authorized for a specific job at a specific company.
- If **full time** CPT authorizations total one year or more, you are **ineligible** for Optional Practical Training.

Eligibility

Student must have been in F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year. Graduate students whose program **requires** immediate participation in a paid internship may waive this requirement as long as the Grad Advisor verifies the immediacy of the internship. Graduate students must have the internship course listed on their Master Plan. Students wanting to take an internship as part of the thesis research must demonstrate to their advisor the relationship between the proposed internship and the thesis research. Graduate students in Computer Science must be enrolled in the CS 798 Practical Training course.

Application and Processing Time Periods

- There is no specific application period for CPT. Students must allow enough time after obtaining the job offer to obtain the recommendation letter from their department, enroll in the course and **schedule an appointment** with an ISC Advisor. Plan ahead! There are no same day appointments!
- CPT does not require an application to the USCIS or an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). It is made directly to the International Student Advisor who will authorize the training and print a new SEVIS I-20 with the training validity dates during the appointment.
- The employment may **not** begin until the training has been authorized. **Under no circumstances** will CPT be backdated to include illegal work done before it was authorized.
- If the basis for the CPT is enrollment in an internship course, the CPT authorization will only be valid for the length of the semester in which the internship course is being taken.

Application Steps

1. Receive employment offer from company
2. Obtain recommendation letter from the department chair or graduate advisor.
3. Enroll in the internship course, if necessary
4. Make an appointment with one of the ISC Advisors. Bring to the appointment: 1) Valid passport, 2) I-94 Form 3) SEVIS I-20 4) Letter from the chair/advisor 5) Complete address of the company and 6) Job offer letter, if possible (not required for renewal).

Changes in CPT Employer or Dates of Employment

Any changes in the CPT authorization require another appointment with an ISC Advisor. Changes in the employer require a new letter from the department advisor, as well as an appointment.

Renewal of CPT Authorization

Allow yourself enough time to obtain a new letter from the department advisor and make an appointment with an ISC advisor before the present authorization expires. **Do not procrastinate!** CPT cannot be backdated.

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING INFORMATION
FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AND GRADUATE ADVISORS

International students on the F-1 status are allowed to work in paid internships during their course of study that are an integral part of the established curriculum for their major. This type of employment authorization is called Curricular Practical Training (CPT). The regulations for CPT require that internships that are an optional part of the course curriculum be taken for unit credit. Internships that are a required part of the course curriculum do not have to be taken for unit credit. Students engaged in CPT must be enrolled every semester.

To verify that students meet the requirements to do a paid internship through CPT, the ISC requires a letter from the department chair or graduate advisor that certifies the training opportunity is an integral part of the established curriculum, and that if optional will be taken for unit credit. At the graduate level, it is required that an optional internship be listed on the student's Master Plan. Students may also be authorized for an internship that is part of their thesis research. Graduate students in Computer Science must enroll in the CS 798 Practical Training course.

It is recommended that advisors discuss the training opportunity with their student before writing the letter. In cases where students wish to take an internship as part of their thesis, advisors should confirm the relationship between the proposed internship and the thesis research before writing the letter.

Although students are often very insistent that their internship proposal meets the necessary requirements, not all majors have this type of requirement as a part of the curriculum. If you find the student eligible for this type of internship, please write a letter on the student's behalf following the sample letter below. If the student's request does not meet the above requirements, they are not eligible for this type of training, and a letter is not required.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions please contact the International Student Center at 619/594-1982 to speak with one of the ISC advisors: Jane Kalionzes or Sallie Edmondson.

SAMPLE LETTER

SDSU Department Letterhead   DATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,

I am writing in regard to _____ a _____ student pursuing a
                                      name of student   graduate/undergraduate

degree in _____ The student will train in the area of _____
              field of study
at_____. The training will be _____
    Name and Address of Company   Full Time (21 + hrs)/Part Time (20 hrs or less)

I certify that the proposed training is an integral part of the established curriculum for this major field of study, and _____.
                    (Choose either A, B, or C)
             A. the training is a required part of the program.
             B. the training is optional, and will be taken for unit credit
             C. the training is optional, and will be taken as part of the thesis

Name & Title

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Background
There are two types of Optional Practical Training, pre-completion OPT and post completion OPT.
All pre-completion OPT takes place prior to the program end date in SEVIS. Post-completion OPT
begins after the program end date. Optional practical training is utilized for any type of work
experience in a student's field of study, and may be used in any of the following ways:

Pre-Completion OPT
- During the student's annual vacation, and at other times when school is not in session
- While school is in session provided that the training does not exceed twenty hours per week
- After completion of all course requirements for the degree, excluding thesis or equivalent

Post-Completion OPT
- After completion of the course of study.

Students may choose to utilize their 12 months of available optional practical training using a combination of the
four options, or they may use it all at once such as after their course of study.

Requirements Specific to OPT
- The total OPT shall not exceed a maximum of 12 months. Each period of OPT used deducts from the
  total of 12 months of authorization. It is not possible to renew OPT for more than 12 months.
- Part-time practical training, 20 hours per week or less, shall be deducted from the available practical
  training at one half the full time rate.
- A student must complete practical training within a 14-month period following the completion of study.
- A job offer is **not** required to apply for optional practical training. However, if applying for OPT before
  completion of the course of study, it is recommended that students have a job offer.
- OPT requires an application to the DHS for the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Eligibility
Student must have been in F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year. Students become eligible for an
additional 12 months of practical training when changing to a new degree program at a higher educational level.
A student who wishes to do a study abroad program outside the US for less than 5 months may count the time
spent abroad toward the academic year requirement.

Application and Processing Time Periods
OPT applications are processed at the OPT Application Meetings at the ISC. Check with the ISC front desk for
a meeting schedule. Students may apply no more than 90 days before the date of completion, and no more than
60 days after the completion of their program. The CA Service Center currently takes a <u>maximum</u> of 90 days to
process the papers for the EAD. Employment may not begin until the student has received the card, and it is
within the employment period designated on the card. It is not possible to work without pay, and then receive
pay retroactively when the EAD is received. You may check the status of your OPT application at
https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp. Be sure to enter WAC before your receipt number.

Document Checklist - Take the following to the OPT Application Meeting:
_____ Valid passport with I-94 and all I-20 forms – **The passport is required to apply for OPT**
_____ Check made out to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" for $380
_____ 2 U.S. passport style photos (see next page for specifications)
_____ I-765 (download at http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis or obtain the form at the meeting)

Completing Form I-765
Complete items #1-16. Use the following to assist you:
- At "I am applying for:" Put a check in the box next to "Permission to accept employment".
- At #2, put other names you might use or have used such as an American name, or a maiden name.
- Print only real Social Security numbers, not the SDSU Red ID.
- If your answer is yes to #11, and the application was granted, write "Granted", the name of the USCIS office (probably CA Service Center), and the date it was issued. If denied, write "Denied".
- For #12 & 13, this information is listed on the red stamp on your I-94 form.
- For #14, it is the status you had when you last entered the US. It is only different from #15 if you changed your status after entering the US.
- At #16 the answer is (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT
- Sign the form, keeping your signature small, and well within the space provided.

Reporting Requirement
While on OPT, students are required to report any change in name or address to SEVIS within 10 days. Enter your new address in the SDSU web portal then send an email to the ISC front desk at ISC.Reception@sdsu.edu with your change of address information. This information will then be updated in the SEVIS system. Students who plan to return home permanently before their OPT ends are also required to report this information to the ISC before leaving the US.

Employment Requirement
For students on post completion OPT, the regulations limit unemployment to 90 days. Employment information must be entered into the SEVIS system and kept current at all times. You must enter your information at www.isc.sdsu.edu/OPT when you begin or end employment to update your record in SEVIS. You may update your address at the website also.

Leaving the U.S. Temporarily during OPT
Students on OPT are still in F-1 status and will need a valid passport, valid F-1 visa, the EAD card and the I-20 signed within 6 months to re-enter the US after a temporary absence. **A job offer or proof of current employment is now also required.** Leaving the US while the EAD application is still pending is not advisable, as you run the risk of not being re-admitted to the US. In addition, students with expired visas may find it extremely difficult to renew their F-1 visa for practical training purposes. Students on OPT are advised to plan carefully before leaving the US.

EAD Photo Requirements
Two photos must be submitted with all mail-in EAD applications. The photos must be US style passport photos. Passport photos you had taken in your country are not acceptable. The photo must have been taken within the past 30 days. Lightly print your name on the back of each photo. Bring your photos to the OPT Application Meeting.

Refer to the back page of this handout for photo information. For exact specifications go to:
http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/composition_checklist.html

The following stores do photos to the required specifications:
Ritz Cameras, 6083 El Cajon Blvd. San Diego 619/265-1281   **Cost for 2 photos = $ 9.99**
Max Photo and Camera, Mission Valley Center, 619/296-6575 **Cost for 2 photos = $ 8.90**
Fromex Photo Systems, 6325 El Cajon Blvd., 619/287-5346   **Cost for 4 photos = $ 8.95**
Costco (must be a member)   **Cost for 2 photos = $ 5.00**
Cal Copy, 5131 College Ave, Suite E, 619/582-9949   **Cost for 2 photos = $ 7.49**

Composition Checklist

7 Steps to Successful Photos

☑   Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open

☑   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)

☑   Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below)

☑   Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo

☑   Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background

☑   Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
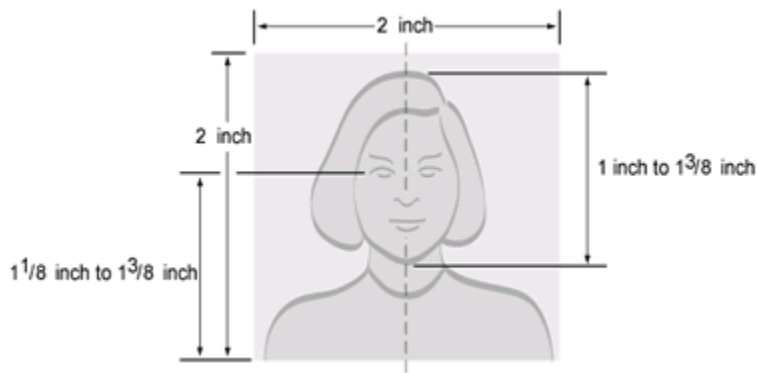
☑   Encourage subject to have a natural expression

Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-Composed Photos

http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html, 10/17/2008