

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 is not considered practical training, and does not require work authorization.

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) if applicable, and a letter from the ISC 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. Tax forms are available at the ISC from February through April of each year. Check on the Internal Revenue Service website at www.irs.gov for information on federal taxes, and the CA Franchise Tax Board at <http://www.ftb.ca.gov/> for California tax information.

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.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Background

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 four ways:

1. During the student's annual vacation, and at other times when school is not in session,
2. While school is in session provided that the training does not exceed twenty hours per week,
3. After completion of all course requirements for the degree, excluding thesis or equivalent,
4. 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.
- 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 spend 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 must apply for OPT before completion of their last semester of study.** Students may apply up to 120 days before the date of completion, and are encouraged to apply as early as possible. The CA Service Center currently takes a minimum of 100 days to process the papers for the EAD, and may take as long as 120 days. 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. The status of an OPT application can be checked on line at: <https://egov.immigration.gov/graphics/cris/jsps/caseStat.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 Form, I-20ID Student Copy or SEVIS I-20
- _____ Check made out to "Department of Homeland Security" for \$180
- _____ 2 US passport style photos (see next page for specifications)
- _____ Form I-765 will be given to you at the Meeting or it can be obtained at <http://uscis.gov>

Temporary EAD

A temporary EAD may be obtained 90 days after the "received date" on the receipt. It is required that you go in person to the San Diego USCIS office. The USCIS only see students one day a week for interim EADs. It is currently on Mondays. Make an appointment with one of the ISC International Student Advisors to obtain the necessary paperwork to apply for the temporary card.

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 INS 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)(i).
- 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.

Leaving the US 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:

<i>Ritz Cameras</i> , 6083 El Cajon Blvd. San Diego 619/265-1281	Cost for 2 photos = \$ 9.99
<i>Max Photo and Camera</i> , Mission Valley Center, 619/296-6575	Cost for 2 photos = \$ 8.90
<i>Fromex Photo Systems</i> , 6325 El Cajon Blvd., 619/287-5346	Cost for 4 photos = \$ 8.95
<i>A-1 Broadway Foto</i> , 148 W. Broadway, San Diego, 234-5876	Cost for 2 photos = \$ 10.95
<i>Costco (must be a member)</i>	Cost for 2 photos = \$ 5.00
<i>Cal Copy</i> , 5131 College Ave, Suite E, 619/582-9949,	Cost for 2 photos = \$ 7.49