

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.**

1. Before meeting with Domenica, ask your **academic advisor for a letter** which recommends Practical Training in order to complement your degree program. The letter should be addressed to Domenica and include the date of completion of your degree requirements. (See sample letter on back.)
2. Meet with Domenica to review the OPT application process. Bring your **I-20 ID, passport** and **I-94** with you.
3. Domenica will prepare a new SEVIS I-20 document for you that recommends you for Optional Practical Training. (This will take 24 to 48 hours to complete so you will need to come back and pick up this new document in a few days.)
4. Domenica will give you an "Application for Employment Authorization" (I-765) which will contain the form and instructions for completing your application to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Follow instructions carefully. There is a \$340.00 fee to apply. As noted in the instructions, your documents, photos(per instructions in the I-765 package) and fee must be sent to USCIS in St. Albans, Vermont.
5. Immigration will notify you by mail with 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.
6. If your application is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document. Bring the EAD card to the Office of International Exchange so that the card can be copied for the file. Domenica 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 Domenica with a note describing your work progress).
7. 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.**

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 Domenica 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 must submit an application for Optional Practical Training to USCIS **prior to completion of your academic program.** Once you have completed your academic program you are no longer eligible to apply.