

## Optional Practical Training (OPT) | Handout & Checklist for F-1 Students

*The following information pertains to a 12-month OPT. If you are interested in learning about the OPT extension available for certain Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) degree holders, please refer to the OPT Extension Handout & Checklist for F-1 students.*

### General Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment benefit extended to F-1 students who have been maintaining status. Its purpose is to give students the opportunity to gain work experience pre-or post-completion of their degree and is limited to 12 months total for each degree level in a field directly related to the student's course of study.

### Different ways to use OPT:

1. Part-time or full-time OPT during the student's annual vacation, when school is not in session and the student intends to register for the next semester.
2. Part-time OPT (no more than 20 hours per week) while school is in session.
3. Full-time OPT for up to one year after completion of the student's program.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Students must be in valid F-1 status at the time of the application.
- Students must have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year before making an application.
- Students registered in thesis or dissertation hours may apply and engage in OPT prior to completion of studies.
- Students are eligible for one year of OPT per level. This means you may apply for one year of OPT for the bachelor's level, one year for the master's level, and one year for the doctoral level.

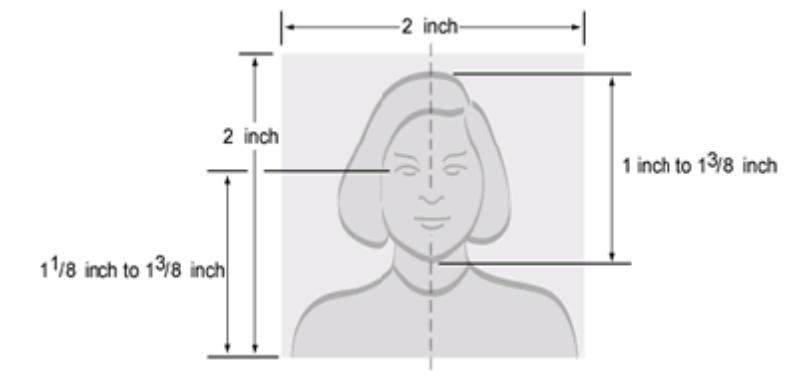
### How to Apply:

- First attend an OPT Information Session conducted by the FGCU International Services Office (ISO)
- **Apply in a timely manner –your application packet must reach USCIS well before the expiration of your current EAD card (ISO recommends to apply 90 days before graduation). USCIS allows you to apply up to 90 days prior to your graduation date and up to 60 days after your graduation date; provided that it is received within 30 days of your Designated School Officer at the FGCU International Student Office issuing a new I-20 recommending OPT. Your application will not be considered by USCIS if received after 60 days from your graduation date.**
- After attending an OPT information sessions, schedule an appointment with the Designated School Officer at the FGCU International Services Office. Student must initiate the OPT application process by requesting a new I-20 from his or her DSO. The student must then submit to ISO Form I-765, applicable fees and supporting documents and ISO will assist by sending the OPT packet to the USCIS Texas Service Center.

### Your application packet will include the following:

- During your meeting with the DSO, you will need to select a start date for your OPT. This start date must be within 60 days of your graduation date.
- I-765 Form (Please visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) Click on FORMS and Locate I-765 in the list or click here: <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>. When filling out the I-765 form ensure you use the correct eligibility category as listed on the instructions for I-765 application instructions (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765instr.pdf>). The correct OPT employment eligibility category is: **C-3-A for Pre-Completion** or **C-3-B for Post-Completion OPT**). Your Designated School Officer at the FGCU International Services Office can assist.

- Your DSO will recommend the OPT, indicated on the third page of your new SEVIS I-20.
- Your mailing address in I-765 form should be: **Intl. Svcs. 10501 FGCU BLVD South, Fort Myers, FL 33965**
- Review the OPT Application Documents in this **checklist** and **bring all items** to your appointment.
- E-filing your STEM OPT Extension application is not recommended at this time.
- Student’s Letter of Application (see sample below)
- Academic Advisor’s Letter of Recommendation (see sample below)
- Photocopy of your most recent **I-94 record** retrieved at: [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94)
- Photocopy of the **passport** page showing biographical data and expiration date
- Photocopy of your **U.S. F-1 student visa page**
- Photocopies of previous I-20s showing previous **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** authorization(s), if any.
- Two (2) passport **photos** (see example below). Gently print in pencil your name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.



- **\$410.00** personal check, bank draft, or money order made payable to: “**Department of Homeland Security**” (please do not abbreviate).
- Your application packet will be mailed for you via certified mail to the USCIS Service Center.
- Within several weeks of mailing your application, the ISO will receive a Notice of receipt. This is proof that you have an application pending with USICS. The Notice of Action/Receipt will contain your Receipt Number (“SRC number”). You can use this number to check your case status online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (in the top right corner).

### Your FGCU Academic Advisor’s letter

Request an Optional Practical Training recommendation letter from your academic advisor. If your advisor does not know what this is, he/she can contact our office for guidance. The letter will include: your name, major, degree completion date (which is last day of the semester, not graduation date), and verification that you will have met all requirements for graduation, and a recommendation that you be granted practical training experience.

### Your OPT Application Letter: Addressed to: USCIS, P.O. Box 660867, Dallas, TX 75266

1. Your Full Name and Today’s Date:
2. Explain that you are a student at FGCU, studying (title of your degree) to prepare for a career in (your field of study). Include the date you expect to complete your degree on (last day of semester) and would like to pursue employment for one year of Practical Training. You may want to add something about yourself, your plans, your student experience...but keep this to one or two sentences.
3. Sign your letter

### After Applying for OPT:

***You cannot start employment until you receive your employment authorization document (EAD) card and by the “valid from” date listed on the card.***

- USCIS will cash your application fee. When your check has cleared your bank, you will know that USCIS has begun processing your application.
- Once you have received your Receipt Notice from USCIS, you may check the status of your case online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>
- If you have not received your card within 90 days of your receipt notice date contact the FGCU International Services Office for further assistance with your application.
- Once the new EAD card is made, it will be mailed to the FGCU International Services Office address listed on your application (I-765). Please note the U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from the federal government to a different address.
- Upon approval and delivery to ISO, you will be notified to pick up your Employment Authorization Document/Card. Review your card for errors. If there are any errors, please make an appointment with the ISO, who will then determine whether or not you should send your card back for correction.

### **While on OPT:**

- You may only work within the dates authorized on your EAD card
- You are allowed to work for more than one employer or change employers provided that employment is directly related to your field of academic study.
- Travel outside of the U.S. is permitted **if you are employed.**
- You will need your I-20 (endorsed for travel by a Designated School Official at ISO), your EAD card, and a letter from your employer, as well as a valid passport and valid F-1 entry visa. If you are renewing your visa while on OPT, you may be subject to more scrutiny, as you will need to establish that your purpose in the U.S. is still temporary even though you have completed your studies. To obtain additional information on travel during OPT please visit [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq\\_f2.htm#\\_Toc81222041](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#_Toc81222041) or consult with the FGCU ISO.
- You are required to report changes of address, legal name, employer's name and address, and/or interruption of unemployment within • 10 days of the change. To report these changes please contact the International Services via e-mail at [Internationalservices@fgcu.edu](mailto:Internationalservices@fgcu.edu) and also update your current address with the FGCU Office of the Registrar by submitting this form [http://www.fgcu.edu/Registrar/files/Address-Name\\_Change\\_Form\\_04032008.pdf](http://www.fgcu.edu/Registrar/files/Address-Name_Change_Form_04032008.pdf) .
- Employer must agree to report termination or departure of the OPT employee to the FGCU International Services Office (ISO) within 48 hours.
- You must make a “validation report” via e-mail to ISO every six months from the date of the OPT extension to verify your full legal name, current address, current employer's name and address as well as the date you began working for the current employer.
- You may enroll at FGCU as degree-/or non-degree seeking student for up to 6 credits per semester.

### **Options After OPT:**

- You will have 60 days after your EAD card expires to make departure plans or other arrangements within the U.S. You may elect to do one of the following:
- Return to your home country
- Request a new I-20 for a new program at FGCU (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Transfer to another institution within the U.S. (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Apply for a nonimmigrant/immigrant status change

### **Optional Practical Training (OPT) | Application Checklist and Agreement**

Make an appointment with the FGCU International Services Office and have all items below completed and prepared BEFORE the appointment (incomplete OPT Packets will be delayed).

- New Form I-20 (issued by the Designated School Official at ISO with OPT authorization)
- I-765 (Please visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) > FORMS)
- Recommendation OPT letter from your college academic advisor
- Your OPT Application Letter
- ALL immigration documents (I-94 record, *valid* passport, and visa)
- Any correspondence with the Department of Homeland Security
- ALL previous I-20 forms
- Previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD Cards), if applicable
- Two recent 2 in x 2 in full frontal color passport photos with your name and I-94 record # written in pencil on the back. (See the [U.S. DHS specifications](#))
- Personal Check/Money Order/Bank Check for \$410, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security and indicate I-94 record number on check for identification reasons. Please note that USCIS fees are subject to change. To verify, please visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)
- Students must have filed an Application to Graduate Form on your GULFLINE or with the FGCU Office of the Registrar.

#### **Application Deadline**

**Apply early!** USCIS allows you to apply up to 90 days prior to your graduation date and up to 60 days after your graduation date, provided that it is received within 30 days of your immigration adviser issuing a new I-20 recommending OPT. Your application will not be considered by USCIS if received after 60 days from your graduation date.

#### **Agreement**

I, (your full name), \_\_\_\_\_ understand that while on OPT I will be required to abide by all immigration regulations governing the F-1 visa and accept the following items:

- I read and understand the ISO OPT Handout for F-1 Students found under [Forms Section](#)
- **I realize that although I may walk at the graduation ceremony, but if I don't satisfy all degree completion requirements by the intended graduation date, my OPT application will be cancelled/withdrawn by the Intl. Services Office.**
- I grant permission to the FGCU International Services Office to process all correspondence with the USCIS on my behalf regarding this case, and retain a copy of the employment authorization document (EAD) card for their records.
- I cannot start employment until I receive my employment authorization document (EAD) card **and** by the "valid from" date listed on the card has been reached.
- I cannot accrue an aggregate of more than **90 days** of unemployment during any initial post-completion OPT.
- **I will report any changes of address, employer's name and address, legal name change, and/or any interruption of employment within 10 days of the change.** To report these changes, please contact ISO at: [InternationalServices@Fgcu.edu](mailto:InternationalServices@Fgcu.edu) and fill out [Form AR-11 Change of Address](#) with the USCIS.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ FGCU UIN: 815 \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_