



## Optional Practical Training



One of the benefits of F-1 visa status is the opportunity to apply for Optional Practical Training – authorization to work in your field of study for up to 12 months – for each program level completed. This means you may apply for 12 months OPT for an undergraduate degree and another 12 months OPT for a master’s degree. You may apply to work part-time (20 hours per week or less) during your studies (pre-completion OPT) or full-time after you graduate (post-completion OPT). Most students prefer to reserve their 12 months for after graduation. English Language Program students are not eligible for OPT.

*Apply for graduation early!* If you are applying for post-completion OPT, **make sure WINGS shows the current semester as your graduation term.** If it does not, go to the Registrar’s Office to apply for graduation or find out why your graduation term is not showing before you make an appointment with the Immigration Specialist.

Submit your OPT application at least 2 months before graduation to ensure there is time for you to receive the full 12-month employment authorization. ***U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will not process your application if it is received after your graduation date!***

Be sure to watch your Georgia Southern E-mail for announcements of OPT workshops. Due to the amount of information you need to know about OPT, you will not be able to apply for OPT without attending a workshop. The Immigration Specialist will verify that you have maintained F-1 visa status and are eligible to apply for OPT, will review your paperwork, and will make a *recommendation* to USCIS that you be approved for OPT. A “Notice of Action” (receipt) should be received within a few weeks after the application is mailed. **It may take 3 to 4 months to receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).** The Immigration Specialist will notify you by E-mail when each document is received.

The regulations on documentation for returning to the U.S. from a trip abroad while the OPT application is being processed and after OPT approval are complex. These issues will be discussed during the workshop.

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