F-1 students are eligible for a total of 12 months of optional training during and after study. There are allotments of practical training at each academic level – associate, bachelor’s master’s and Ph.D. Unless you go home for five months or more, you are limited to 12 months of this kind of training during each course of study. All practical training must be in jobs related to your field of study, and must demand the education you have received as a minimum requirement for knowing how to do the work. You are not required to have a job offer before being authorized for practical training, though all time during which you are authorized will be deducted from the 12 months available to you, whether or not you are working.

You are eligible for optional practical training if you are in good academic standing and if you have been a full-time student in lawful status for at least one school year at the college level, counting authorized vacation periods and school breaks. Full-time study in another status prior to changing to F-1 counts towards the nine months.

Students who have been authorized for 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training are not eligible for optional practical training. However, students who have used less than 12 full months of full-time curricular practical training are eligible for the full 12 months of optional training. Previous optional training is deducted from the 12 months available. Part-time OPT training is deducted at a rate of 50-percent. In other words, if you have been authorized for six months of part-time training, three months will be deducted and you will have nine months available to you. These deductions include practical training authorizations you may have obtained through previous schools.

During your course of study you may apply for practical training at any time after one school year of full-time college study. You may not work for more than 20 hours a week except during intercession or authorized vacation, during which there is no limit on your hours. Exception: If you are in a bachelor’s or master’s program, you may apply for part-time or full-time optional practical training during thesis work if you have completed all course requirements for graduation.

After your course of study, you must apply for optional practical training prior to completion of study. Since it can take many weeks to gain work approval, it is wise to apply early. Applying late can reduce your OPT to less than 12 months. You may apply for it up to 90 days before graduation and up to 60 days after graduation.

You may apply for as little practical training time as you wish or for all of the time available to
you but training before completion of studies cannot be authorized past the expected date of completion of your current program.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE APPLYING

Practical training after graduation is a valuable privilege. Before applying for optional practical training during your studies, think carefully. Training you do during study will not be available after you graduate.

The higher the degree, the higher the pay. Each degree will probably make you eligible for a higher salary. If you plan to study for another degree, take your practical training now, and again after you graduate.

There are special opportunities for students with professional degrees during practical training after graduation as your employer may want to offer to sponsor you for H-1B status for up to six years, or for permanent resident status. A master’s degree is better than a bachelor’s degree for this purpose, and a doctorate is the best of all.

You can’t change your mind after your application is mailed. Be sure you really want to work now. If the employment is authorized, you cannot change it after the beginning date of work on the card. Sometimes, the authorization can be canceled if your international student advisor helps you return the card to the Immigration Status before the first day of work authorization, but this does not always work. Since the first day of work authorization is noted on your card, the training time available to you is gone whether or not your work.

You may apply for post-completion Optional Practical Training if you are in your final semester, enrolled in 12 or more hours, and taking all courses for graduation on the SWAU campus. If for some reason you do not complete all your classes to graduate, your OPT will be cancelled and you will be given a one semester extension in SEVIS to complete your degree.

If you are authorized to take a reduced load (below 12 hours) because it is your final semester, taking all classes on the SWAU campus, apply for OPT, and do not complete all classes to graduate, your OPT will be cancelled and
you will be Out of Status and will have to apply for Reinstatement in order to enroll for another semester.

If in your final semester, you are taking some, or all, of your classes to graduate off-campus, you will not be allowed to file for Optional Practical Training until the International Student Office has copies of your transcripts and you have been verified by the Records Office as having met all the graduate requirements. (This process will probably result in your OPT being less than 1 year.)

IMPORTANT! SPECIAL RULES

TAKING CLASSES DURING OPT – OPT is for full-time employment for one year after graduation. If you plan on obtaining OPT plan on using it for employment purposes only. You may take one class during each semester while on OPT, but that class must be avocational or recreational, not leading to a course of study.

IF YOU TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S. while you are authorized for practical training, you must take your Employment Authorization card with you and show it to the Immigration Inspector when you reenter the U.S. You also get a new Form I-20 from the International Student Services Office. If you have completed study and have optional practical training authorization, you may not return to the U.S. unless you have an actual job. If you leave the U.S. after completing study but before receiving the work authorization card, you may not enter the U.S. as an F-1 student and your opportunity for practical training will be gone.

YOU MIGHT NOT GET A NEW VISA if you travel during practical training after graduation. We advise against travel during this period if you do not have a valid F-1 visa, except to neighboring countries from which you may return without a visa. There is no rule that says you cannot have a new visa but they are difficult to get during practical training after graduation.

YOUR WORK AUTHORIZATION STOPS if you complete the transfer procedure at a new school, even if your employment card has not expired; if you reenter the United States with a Form I-20 from another school; or while on OPT you are unemployed for more than a cumulative of 90 days. You may attend a new school during practical training after completion of studies (but only if you are working and working is your principal activity), as long as your I-20 for transfer is not processed. Tell the foreign student advisor at your new school that you do not want the new I-20 until your training expires. However, you must be sure to obtain the new I-20 and complete the transfer procedure within 60 days after the work authorization expires. You may never continue to work in practical-
training during studies after starting classes at another school. You must stop working on the day before the first day of classes, though you may apply for a new work authorization through a new school.

Your Form I-20 may expire during your optional practical training. If you have completed your studies, this is perfectly normal and has no effect on your legal status. However, if you have not completed studies or are working on a thesis or research project during optional practical training, DO NOT LET YOUR I-20 EXPIRE. You must apply to the ISO for an extension no more than 30 days before the card expired and no later than the day on which it expires (see item #5 of your I-20).

You are responsible for notifying the SWAU Records Office of any new address within 10 days of the change. You must include the physical address and mailing address, if different. Also give Records Office your phone number.

MEDICAL INSURANCE

You must be covered by medical insurance at all times during OPT. Insurance coverage may be purchased from SWAU.

IMPORTANT! SPECIAL RULES

These are two steps in the application process. First, you must complete the attached form I-765 according to the instructions below and deliver them to the office of the International Student Services, along with the following items: (1) Your Form I-94, (2) Your last Immigration Employment Authorization card issued to you (if any), (3) You must sign your name on a special signature card, which is available in the office. DO NOT FORGET TO DO THIS. (4) Two color passport photographs. The photographs cannot be larger than 1 ½ x 1 ½. You can get these in Cleburne at the Walgreens drugs across from Wal-Mart. Print your name and I-94 number on the back in pencil. (5) A $340 money order payable to: Department of Homeland Security. If writing a personal check, make sure you have sufficient funds in your account. Second: if you are eligible for the training you request, we will issue you a new Form I-20 and mail your application to the nearest Immigration Service Processing Center. Then we must wait for the Immigration Service to process your application.

If the Immigration Service sends an approval and work authorization card, we will contact you. You may not begin work until you have the card.
Answer all questions and sign the form.

PAYROLL WITH HOLDING

Social Security (FICA) and Medicare Taxes are not withheld from F-1 student wages, provided you have been in F-1 status for no more than 5 years.

WORK PERMIT CARD

Make sure your employer gets a copy of your work permit for all employment which you get paid.

EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENT

**Employment Requirement** – In the ideal situation, it would be best, of course, for you to maintain uninterrupted employment during the course of OPT. Situations are not always ideal, however, especially in today’s employment marketplace. About the only thing we can recommend to the student who is having difficulty finding a job, or who has lost his or her OPT job, is that they dedicate their full effort to looking for a job, and to keep documentation that can demonstrate the job search. For example, student should keep a list of employers they contacted, resumes they sent, calls they made, time they spent researching companies, etc. If the Department of Homeland Security ever evaluates gaps in employment, such documentation would be expected. Department of Homeland Security might also inquire about the circumstances of a student leaving a job; for example, if a position was eliminated it may be more justifiable in the eyes of the Department of Homeland Security than if the student voluntarily stopped working. Lastly, the amount of time the student is not working might also be considered; for example, being in transition for 3 weeks might be viewed more favorably than being in transition for 3 months, etc.

Please consult your F-1 International Student Handbook for complete information.

ADDRESS CHANGE

Please inform the Records Office of any address changes during your OPT. This must be done within 10 days of each change of address. You must maintain medical insurance coverage at all times while on OPT.
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Please bring the following documents with you to the ISO to file for your Work Permit.

- Complete I-765 with signature.
- 2 PASSPORT photographs with your name and I-94 number printed on the back.
- Any previous work permit cards you may have.
- Passport - copies will be made of the passport, visa, I-94.
- $340.00 check or money order made out to “Department of Homeland Security.”
- Copies of all prior I-20s
- Get new I-20 from the ISO (with OPT request)
- Choose the date you would like to begin employment: __________________________
- Write your current contact information clearly below:
  
  Address: ________________________________________________________________
  ________________________________________________________________

  Phone: ____________________________
  E-mail: ____________________________

Please bring all these items on time to the ISO for fastest service. It takes approximately 2 - 3 months to receive your card. You cannot work off campus until you have received your Work Permit approval from the Department of Homeland Security.

Link to:
Download I-765 (104KB PDF)