General Information
Optional Practical Training for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience related to the academic program. An F-1 student is eligible for a MAXIMUM OF 12 MONTHS. However, if a student begins a new academic program at a higher level (e.g. master’s after bachelor’s degree), the student is eligible for another 12 months of OPT.

STEM Students: Students in approved STEM majors are eligible for a STEM extension for their OPT. The 24-Month STEM OPT Extension is an additional benefit from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that allows international students in F-1 status who receive a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in an approved STEM field to apply for a 24-month extension of their standard 12-month Post-OPT period, twice in a lifetime. This allows international students, the opportunity to gain additional off-campus work experience in their field of study after completion of course studies.

Eligibility Requirements
To be eligible for Optional Practical Training, you must:

☑ have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one full academic year;
☑ currently be maintaining a full-time program of study and valid F-1 status; and
☑ proposed work in a job directly related to your major field of study.

If you are uncertain whether you meet the eligibility requirements, please contact the International Student Admissions & Programs Office located in Mandeville Hall.

Optional Practical Training
OPT is available in the following cases:

☑ part-time or full-time during the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student intends to register for the following semester (Pre-Completion OPT)
☑ part-time while school is in session (Pre-Completion OPT)
☑ full-time after completion of the course of study (Post Completion OPT)

Reporting Requirements While on OPT
Students on OPT are required to report to the International Student Admissions & Programs Office any change of name or address, or any interruption of such employment, within 10 days. Report the change on our website at westga.edu/isap/employment. Look for Submit Copy of EAD Card.

Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status
During post-completion OPT, the F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the post-completion OPT authorization.
OPT Filing Window

A student will be able to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the degree completion date, and up to 60 days after the degree completion date. However, the OPT application must be submitted to the USCIS within 30 days of the date on which International Student Advisor issues an OPT I-20. Processing times for OPT applications can be found on the USCIS web site. In general, expect that the OPT application will take two to three months to be approved. ISAP recommends applying for post-OPT at least 104 days prior to the degree program completion date so that you will receive you EAD card before you have completed the program. This will allow the ISAP 10 to 14 days to process and will allow USCIS their standard 90 days to process.

Selecting OPT Dates

If you are applying for post-completion OPT, you are given a 60-day grace period following the completion date of your studies. Therefore, for post-completion OPT, the beginning date must be within the 60-day grace period. Be sure to carefully consider you work date as you are not able to begin work until that day and until you physically have your EAD card.

Application Process

Step One:
- Obtain and complete the UWG F-1 OPT Recommendation and Request Form. Return to the International Student Admissions & Programs Office.
- Request an I-20 recommending OPT from the International Student Admissions & Programs Office. You may request an OPT I-20 by meeting with the International Student Admissions & Programs Office with the following items:
  - OPT Recommendation & Request Form (completed by you and your academic advisor)
  - Copies of your current and previous I-20(s)
  - Copies of passport pages (biographic data, photo, and expiration date)
  - Copy of your current I-94 card (front and back)
  - Copy of any previous EAD card(s)
- After reviewing the material listed above the International Student Admissions & Programs Office will make a recommendation for OPT in SEVIS and prepare an I-20 indicating the recommendation for OPT, located on Page 3 of I-20 form.

Step Two:
Once the OPT I-20 form is generated, the student can pick up the form from the International Student Admissions & Programs Office. An email will be sent requesting the student to pick up the OPT I-20 at the International Student Admissions & Programs Office. The student will then need to have an OPT appointment with the International Student Admissions & Programs Office.

Step Three:
Bring all of the following, completed to the ISAP office and be sure to ensure all information is correct, and then mail the OPT application along with all requested documents to the USCIS Service Center.

- OPT Application Checklist
- Completed Form I-765 (Questions 1-16 only)
  - Check the box: permission to accept employment
  - I-765 Question 3: Make certain the address you put in item #3 will be valid for the next 90 to 120 days as that is where your receipt and employment card will be sent. Mail from USCIS will not be forwarded by the USPS.
  - For post-completion OPT, enter "c3B" under Item 16.
- Form G-1145
- I-765 Application Fee, payable to the US Department of Homeland Security ($410.00)
- Photocopies of all previous and current I-20s, including a copy of the new OPT I-20
- Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back)
- Photocopy of passport (biographical data, photo, and expiration date)
- Two US passport-style photos (lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil)
- Copy of any previously issued EAD card(s)
Check all documents for completeness and accuracy. Be sure to sign Forms I-20 and I-765. Make sure your certification signature is in blue ink and does not touch any text or lines. The ISAP Office will make a complete copy of your application for your student file.

**Mailing Your OPT Packet**

Beginning NOW, I-765 application must be sent to a designated USCIS Lockbox facility. Applications will be reviewed and sorted at the Lockbox facility, and complete applications will be forwarded on to the appropriate Service Center for processing.

USCIS has also announced the ability to request an E-Notification of the receipt of the application at the Lockbox facility by including the Form **G-1145**, “E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance” to the first page of the application.

Please read the full announcement on the USCIS website, including links to the new Form I-765 application form and a chart of "Direct Filing Addresses for Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.”

**Change of Filing Location for Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced revised filing instructions and addresses for applicants filing an Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765). The change of filing location is part of an overall effort to transition the intake of some benefit forms from Service Centers to USCIS Lockbox facilities. Centralizing form and fee intake allows USCIS to provide the public more efficient and effective initial processing of applications and fees.

Beginning February 24, 2010 applicants must now submit Form I-765 to one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities or the USCIS Vermont Service Center, based on the classification under which they are filing. Detailed guidance can be found in updated Form I-765 instructions as well as at www.uscis.gov.

The Service Centers will forward incorrectly filed applications to the USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox facilities for the first 30 days, until March 26, 2010. After March 26, 2010, applications incorrectly filed at USCIS Service Centers will be returned to the applicant, with a note to send the application to the correct location.

When filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, you may elect to receive an email and/or text message notifying you that your application has been accepted. You must complete an E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Form G-1145), and attach it to the first page of your application.

For more information on USCIS programs, visit www.uscis.gov or call the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

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*We highly recommend that you mail your application by Federal Express Mail or by USPS Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, so you will have a record of its delivery. It is important for you to be able to track your application.*

**Travel Information**

It is important to consult the International Student Advisor prior to leaving the US as immigration regulations can change at any time. Currently the following are required to return to the US:

- [ ] A valid passport
- [ ] A valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except Canadian and Bermudian citizens)
- [ ] Your OPT I-20 endorsed for reentry by an International Student Advisor within the last six months
- [ ] Your valid EAD for OPT
- [ ] Evidence of employment such as a job offer or employment verification letter
If you do not have all of these documents listed above please do not leave the US. Please see the International Student Admissions & Programs Office before traveling abroad.

**For more information regarding traveling abroad, go to: [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm).**

**Please note:** Your EAD will have a notation “not valid for reentry to US.” This is printed on all EAD cards issued for OPT and simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for reentry to the US.

### H-1B Cap-Gap Extension

Duration of F-1 status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed, non-frivolous H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following federal fiscal year (October thru September). The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

### Special Notes

Your program end date on your I-20 may be shortened if deemed appropriate by the International Student Admissions & Programs Office. If you later decide not to mail your OPT application (Form I-765 plus supporting documentation) to USCIS for any reason, you must notify the International Student Advisor immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS. Failure to inform the International Student Advisor that you are not applying for OPT can cause problems in the future.

Please email (isap@westga.edu), fax (678-839-5509), or submit online (westga.edu/isap/employment) a copy of your EAD card immediately upon receipt.

- While OPT is pending, we strongly advise against changing the address listed on Form I-765 as USCIS has not been able to process change of address notifications properly. Changing your address while OPT is still pending may result in filing a new OPT application with a new fee. We suggest to use the address of someone who can receive mail on your behalf – remember to put “c/o”, followed by the person’s name and address, on Line 3 of Form I-765. The US Postal Service will not forward USCIS mail.

- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please inform the International Student Admissions & Programs Office immediately.

- Your OPT will be automatically terminated when you begin study at another educational level or transfer to another school.

- If you find any errors by USCIS on your OPT/EAD card, please inform USCIS & the UWG International Student Admissions & Programs Office immediately.

- Immediately inform the International Student Admissions & Programs Office of any immigration status change.

### Options available after OPT

Once your OPT is complete you have 60 days to depart the US and return home. Another option is that an employer can decide to sponsor an employee for the H1B visa. This is an employment based visa that allows you to remain in the US and work for the sponsoring employer. The employer will be able to offer counsel on the H1B visa.