OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR F-1 STUDENTS  
(Pre-Completion and Post-Completion)

Optional Practical Training may be authorized:

1) pre-completion of studies during your annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session if you are currently enrolled and eligible and you intend to register for the next semester.
2) pre-completion of studies while school is in session, provided that your training does not exceed 20 hours per week.
3) post-completion of studies full-time after completion of all course requirements for your degree (excluding your thesis or the equivalent).
4) post-completion of studies full-time after completion of all courses for your degree.

What is post-completion Optional Practical Training?
It is employment directly related to your field of study, following the completion of your academic degree or the earliest date your department can verify that you have finished all coursework and any projects/thesis/dissertation for the degree. IT IS NOT YOUR GRADUATION DATE, which is the date when PACE UNIVERSITY recognizes those who have recently completed their studies.

Who is eligible for Optional Practical Training?
You are eligible to apply for optional practical training authorization prior to completion of your degree if you:

1) have been a full-time student for at least one academic year;
2) are currently in lawful F-1 status;
3) have not been previously authorized for 12 months of optional practical training during continuous study in the U.S. at the same educational level (unless you completed the 12 months of training, departed the U.S. for more than 5 months and re-entered in F-1 status to begin a new program); and
4) have not been authorized for 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training
You are eligible to apply for post-completion optional practical training if you:

Meet the requirements of Items 1-4 above and:

5) have completed all course requirements for your degree

What type of work can I do while authorized for post-completion Optional Practical Training?

The work must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone with your level of education. You do not need a specific job offer to apply for optional practical training, but it is important to remember that time spent searching for employment is deducted from your authorized time. The work may be full- or part-time and may occur anywhere in the United States.

What will be my non-immigrant status while on post-completion Optional Practical Training?

You will retain F-1 status even though you have completed your studies and are working full-time. Optional Practical Training is viewed as an “extension” of the program of study you have completed. It gives you an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge you have learned to a practical work experience.

May I start working as soon as I file my application for Optional Practical Training with USCIS?

NO, you may not begin legal employment until it has been authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (previously INS) and you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

When could my work begin?

On your Filing Procedure form, you may request that your beginning date be the day following your completion date. For example, if you completed your studies on May 15, you could request for employment to begin on May 16 and until the 60th day following your completion date.
When should I apply for Optional Practical Training?

If you are applying for authorization prior to completion of your studies you may do so at any point after you have been in lawful F-1 student status for at least one academic year.

If you are applying for authorization for post-completion Optional Practical Training, you MUST apply prior to completion of your studies. USCIS allows you to apply up to 120 days prior to the requested start date of the employment. As USCIS can take between 2 – 3 months to approve your application, it is important that you plan your application so that you have the authorization prior to your planned start date of employment. Also, you will need to plan any international travel so that you are certain to have received the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from USCIS prior to your departure.

How do I apply for Optional Practical Training?

Please follow the instructions on the OPT Filing Procedure Form attached here.

Can I travel while on Practical Training?

You may travel as long as you are holding an unexpired EAD, a valid F-1 visa, a Form I-20 that is endorsed with an Optional Practical Training recommendation, and proof of a job offer or secured employment. This proof of employment should be a letter from an employer offering you a position or for which you are currently working. Without such evidence, it is possible that the immigration officer at the port of entry may not allow you to reenter with your F-1 status to resume OPT.

A Designated School Official must have endorsed your Form I-20 within the last 6 months in order for you to reenter in Optional Practical Training status.

If you have completed your studies and leave the U.S. before Optional Practical Training is authorized, your application will be considered abandoned. It is also important to note that time spent abroad during authorized Optional Practical Training is deducted from your Optional Practical Training time.

If your F-1 visa stamp is expired, it may be difficult for you to obtain a new one based on your Optional Practical Training permission. In this case, you should not plan to travel outside the U.S. without first discussing your case with an International Student Advisor.

While you were studying, the endorsement signature was valid for 12 months. HOWEVER, WHILE ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING, THE ENDORSEMENT IS VALID FOR ONLY SIX (6) MONTHS.
What happens after the “end” date of my Post-Completion Optional Practical Training?

You have a 60-day period in which to:
1) depart the U.S.
2) apply to continue in another educational program at Pace or another school
3) change to another non-immigrant status

What if my employer wishes to extend my employment beyond the “end” date?

You may not continue your employment in F-1 status. A change to H-1b (temporary worker) non-immigrant visa status must be approved before continuing your employment. Consult with your company lawyer or a private attorney specializing in immigration for more information.

What is the maximum amount of time that can be authorized for Optional Practical Training?

Although you may engage in Optional Practical Training before and after completion of your degree, the maximum amount of time that can be granted is 12 months of full-time authorization per educational level. You may elect to use a portion of this time prior to completion of your degree and a portion post-completion so long as the total does not exceed 12 months. Additionally, the 12 months of Optional Practical Training may be split between two separate educational programs.

How many times is it possible to get Optional Practical Training while studying in the United States?

If you complete 12 months of Optional Practical Training and go directly to a higher educational level, you will be eligible for another 12 months of OPT.