Optional Practical Training (OPT)

INTRODUCTION

F-1 Optional Practical Training allows you, as an F-1 student, to accept paid, professional-level employment that is directly related to your field of studies. Optional practical training may be undertaken from the New York Academy of Art only in Post Completion and must be on a full-time basis only once all degree requirements have been fulfilled.

You are granted a maximum of 12 months of optional practical training. You must also meet certain eligibility criteria as indicated below.

COMPLETION OF THE MFA PROGRAM & EXPIRATION OF YOUR FORM I-20

- You have 60 days to stay and travel within the US before returning to your home country.
- If you leave the US to travel during that time, there is a chance you may not be allowed back into the US because you completed your program.

OPT APPLICATION

- The earliest MFA Students can apply is April 15. The earliest CFA students can apply is May 20.
- The latest MFA students can apply is June 10. The latest CFA students can apply is July 1.
- You may use this window of time to start interviewing for potential art-related job opportunities.
- Potential employers may not officially hire you until your OPT is approved by USCIS.
- You are responsible for all your application materials and forms.
- Once your OPT application is complete, make color copies of all the documents for yourself and the Academy. Keep them safe!

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT

- You must have been a full-time student at the New York Academy of Art for at least one academic year before you can engage in OPT.
- You must currently be in F-1 status.
- You must be in good academic standing at the time of application, and you must have made normal, full-time progress toward degree completion.
- You must not have used more than 12 months of pre-completion OPT in the past at your current degree level.
- You do NOT need to have a job offer in order to apply for OPT, although once you are approved for OPT, the time is deducted from your 12 months regardless of whether you actually work.

> **IMPORTANT: YOU MUST APPLY FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT NO LATER THAN 3 WEEKS BEFORE YOU COMPLETE YOUR DEGREE REQUIREMENTS , TO ALLOW FOR ADEQUATE PROCESSING TIME. UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS) WILL NOT ACCEPT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR STUDIES.**

PROCESSING TIMES

OPT requires an application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. **After you have signed your new I-20, we will send your application to USCIS,** certified mail (or FedEx), return receipt requested. USCIS may take up to 3 months to process an application for OPT. Please plan accordingly.

Processing times vary widely depending on the time of year, but the USCIS can take up to 90 days to process this type of application. Approval is NOT guaranteed, and you may not begin employment unless you have received written approval from the USCIS. Written approval will come in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

USCIS will communicate with our office about your application. If they request additional information, we will contact you. If your application is approved, the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be sent to the address on Form I-765.

IMPORTANT:
YOU CANNOT BEGIN WORKING UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR EAD CARD.

To check on the progress of your EAD card go to:
https://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp

RESTRICTIONS

If your application for OPT is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from the USCIS granting you permission to work off-campus.

- Post-completion Optional Practical Training presupposes that you will pursue full-time employment, regardless of whether your actual training position is full-time or part-time.
- While engaged in OPT, you are expected to engage in professional-level employment in your field of study. However, you may switch employers or hold multiple employers while on OPT.
- You may not start employment until you have received an EAD and not before the start date indicated on the EAD. You must stop employment by the EAD expiration date. Once your EAD expires, you have a "grace period" of 60 days to remain in the U.S. to prepare for departure or change to another immigration status.
- Your EAD becomes invalid If you obtain another I-20 to begin a new full-time program, or if you depart the United States for more than 5 consecutive months.

ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS ON POST-COMPLETION OPT

If you are engaged in post-completion OPT, you are still considered an F-1 student under the New York Academy of Art's sponsorship.

- You must notify the Office of International Student Services by e-mail ssager@nyaa.edu of any change of address or if you decide to terminate your employment / practical training for any reason, for example by returning to your home country, changing your immigration status, or returning to another full-time program of study
- Travel while on post-completion OPT requires a valid F-1 visa (except for Canadian citizens), passport, EAD card, and SEVIS I-20. You should also carry a letter from an employer, and make sure that your SEVIS I-20 is signed every six months (instead of one year); refer to the section below for further information about travel procedures.

TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT

If you plan to leave the U.S. and re-enter while on post-completion Optional Practical Training (for F-1 students), you will need the following documents:

- an unexpired passport valid at least six months into the future
- a valid F-1 visa stamp
- an I-20 or DS-2019 that has been signed for travel by the Office of International Student Services; note that F-1 students should have their I-20s signed every six months instead of every year while on

post-completion Optional Practical Training

- an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card issued by the USCIS for F-1 students on practical training
- F-1 students: Obtain a letter from your employer stating your job title, job description, begin and end dates (must fall within the practical training period), and verifying that your employer knows you are traveling and expects you to return to complete your job. If you do not have a job, you are advised not to travel as you may not be permitted to re-enter the U.S.
- If your F-1 visa has expired, speak to the Academy before making travel plans. It is more difficult to obtain an F-1 student visa while on practical/academic training, as the issue of intent to return to your home country is harder to prove once you have finished your degree and are working in the U.S.

PENDING OPT APPROVAL & TRAVEL
- You may stay in the US until you receive word back from US Homeland Security of your OPT approval.
- Once you complete your application, you will receive a new "OPT requested" I-20 from the Academy.
- If you must travel while your OPT application is pending, we strongly recommend having an official letter from the Academy. This will assist you in returning to the US.

OPT APPROVAL
- Once your EAD Card arrives, let the Academy know immediately! We will issue you a new "OPT approved" Form I-20.
- Make color copies of your card and the approval letter for yourself and the Academy.
- Once you have a job, provide the Academy with an official employment verification letter.
- If you are not working for 90 consecutive days, it must be reported to SEVIS.
- You may be self-employed or start your own business.
- Pay taxes on any income! (Please consult with a tax professional.)
- Get authorization letter from employer whenever you need to travel.
- When traveling outside the US, bring your valid OPT I-20, passport, VISA and employment verification letter.
- If your visa and/or passport are about to expire you should go to your home country with your EAD card, approved OPT I-20 and supporting documentation to apply for a new visa.

AFTER OPT ENDS
- You may stay in the US for an additional 60 days before you must return to your home country.
- You can no longer work in the US legally after your EAD Card expires.
- During this time, you may:
  - Apply and transfer to another I-20 sponsored school or program.
  - Apply for green card application, other visas, etc.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON USCIS PHOTO REQUIREMENTS
USCIS may reject photos for failing to meet the required specifications. To avoid this, be sure to follow the instructions below. Carefully review your photos before submitting them with your application. Expect to pay $6 to $15 for two photos.

The photo should not be larger than 2 by 2 inches, with the distance from the top of the head to just below the chin measuring about 1-3/8 inches.

- Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- Make sure the photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25mm to 35mm)
- Center head within the frame of the picture

- ➢ Make sure eye height is from between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28mm and 3mm) from the bottom of the photo
- ➢ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
- ➢ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- ➢ Compose your face in a natural photo
- ➢ There must be no spots, shadows or reflections on the photo
- ➢ **No Glasses** should be worn in the photos

OPT APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Collect the following documents:

- Academy OPT request form
- Scanned PDF I-94 card (front and back) or a screenshot converted to PDF of I-94 record from the internet. https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home#section
- Scanned PDF of F-1 visa and border control entry stamp
- Scanned PDF of Passport identification page
- Scanned PDF of any previously-issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- Scanned PDF of Form I-20s from the Academy and all other schools you have attended
- JPEG of passport photos

Verify documents are appropriately titled: LastName_FName_NameofEvidence.
For example: Sager_Sarah_PassportIdentificationPage

Email ssager@nyaa.edu your documents for review and double checking.

Set up an account with USCIS:
https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up

Book an appointment to file online with your PDSO:
https://calendly.com/ssager-nyaa/opt-filing