

## F-1 STUDENT EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Updated November 2007

The regulations of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provide for five categories of employment benefits for students in F-1 status:

1. **On-Campus** employment
2. **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** employment
3. **Optional Practical Training (OPT)** employment
4. Employment authorized due to **Severe Economic Hardship**
5. Employment with an **International Organization**

### Definition of “employment”

Employment is any work performed or services provided in exchange for money, tuition, books, supplies, room and board, or *any other benefit or compensation*. Only if you will receive absolutely no benefit or compensation of any kind at any time is an activity considered by the USCIS to be “unpaid volunteering.” Based on input from immigration attorneys, OISS also cautions F-1 students about “volunteering” in a position which would normally be paid; “volunteering” should be restricted to true volunteer activities, for example with social service organizations, religious organizations, non-profit groups, etc. **Unauthorized employment is a serious violation of student status.** Please contact the OISS if you ever have any questions or any doubt about whether you are authorized to accept an offer of employment.

### 1. EMPLOYMENT ON CAMPUS

You do not need any special authorization to work on campus. You may work part-time (up to 20 hours per week) during the fall and spring semesters and full-time (up to 40 hours per week) during winter break, spring break, and in the summer if your I-20 is valid, you are in good academic standing, and you are enrolled full-time. Enrollment is not required during winter break or summer session, but you must not have graduated and must be eligible to and intend to enroll for the following semester.

**Students Transferring from U.S. School to Another:** Federal regulations allow on-campus employment only at the school whose I-20 is covering you: “In the case of a transfer in SEVIS, the student may only engage in on-campus work at the school having jurisdiction over the student’s SEVIS record.” [8 CFR 214.2(f)(9)(i)]

NOTE: “On-campus” employment also includes employment at an off-campus location **which is “educationally affiliated” with the UI** (i.e., the educational affiliation is either associated with your academic department's established curriculum or related to contractually-funded projects) **AND** is an integral part of your educational program. OISS will determine if you meet this criteria.

### 2. CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)

If you have been enrolled full-time for at least one full academic year (or are in a course of study requiring an internship at the beginning of your program) you may request OISS authorization for employment in an internship or cooperative education program that is “integral to the established curriculum” of your academic department. Required internships must be clearly identified and described in the course catalogue or similar publication.

Curricular practical training may be authorized on either a full-time (employment over 20 hours per week) or a part-time basis. Part-time CPT must be undertaken concurrently with a full course of study. **Students who have been authorized for one year or more of full-time CPT are no longer eligible for OPT.**

For more detailed information, see the OISS's information packet on Curricular Practical Training.

### **3. OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)**

After you have been enrolled full time at The University of Iowa for at least one full academic year, you may apply to the USCIS for up to 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization to accept employment related to your field of study. Full-time OPT is available:

1. **After completion** of a course of study, and
2. **Before completion** of studies if engaged in thesis or dissertation research.

Although full-time or part-time OPT authorization is also available during the summer and over winter break (and on a part-time basis during the regular academic year) before a student has completed all required coursework, it is rarely sought due to the lengthy time required for USCIS issuance of the required Employment Authorization Document (EAD) as well as the fact that most students are eligible for CPT authorization during these times instead.

For more detailed information, see the OISS's information packet on Optional Practical Training.

***Please be prepared to plan ahead for the fact that it may take the USCIS approximately three months to issue your OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD).***

### **4. SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP**

Should you suffer economic hardship due to "unforeseen financial circumstances beyond your control" **after you have been in F-1 status at the University of Iowa for one academic year**, you can apply to the USCIS for authorization to work off campus (or on campus for more than 20 hours) in any job you can find (i.e., even one unrelated to your studies). Examples of unforeseen circumstances include "loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate, inordinate increases in tuition and/or living costs, unexpected changes in the financial condition of the student's source of support, medical bills, or other substantial and unexpected expenses."

For more detailed information, see the OISS information sheet "Severe Economic Hardship." ***Please note that the USCIS application fee for Severe Economic Hardship is \$340, and it may take the USCIS more than three months to approve the application.***

### **5. EMPLOYMENT WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION**

If you are offered employment with an international organization, as defined by the International Organization Act, you may apply to the USCIS for employment authorization. ***Again, note that the USCIS application fee is \$340, and it may take the USCIS more than three months to issue the EAD.***