**Information on Pre-completion Employment for International Students on F-1 Visas**

**Pre-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT):** This provision allows F-1 students to apply to USCIS for permission to engage in off-campus employment for the purpose of acquiring "on-the-job" experience before graduation. Permission to engage in OPT employment is not automatic, however; certain conditions must be satisfied and certain restrictions apply. In particular:

- **OPT employment must be directly related to your major field of study and must be commensurate with your educational level.** (You may discuss with me the interpretation of those restrictions.)

- **OPT is limited to a total of twelve months for each degree level.** Any OPT time used prior to graduation ("pre-completion OPT") is subtracted from the time available after graduation ("post-completion OPT"). For instance, if you work two summers for a total of 5 months on pre-completion OPT you will only be eligible for 7 months of post-completion OPT.

  **Note:** Under a supplementary OPT provision known as the “STEM Extension,” students in certain specified majors **may** be eligible for an additional 17 months of post-completion OPT after the expiration of the initial 12-month period. The only Amherst majors covered by the STEM extension are: astronomy; biology; biochemistry/biophysics; chemistry; neuroscience, computer science; geology; mathematics; statistics; and physics. Eligibility for the STEM Extension is not automatic for these majors, however; there are additional, significant eligibility restrictions related to employers.

- **It is not necessary for you to have an actual job offer when you submit your application.** However, once you have submitted an application, it is almost impossible to rescind it. In general, it’s a “use-it-or-lose-it” system.

- **You may not begin any off-campus employment before receiving your “Employment Authorization Document”** (the “EAD card”: a photo identification card issued by USCIS and showing the specific beginning and ending dates of your OPT employment permission). You may be employed only during the approved OPT period on your EAD card.

- **Pre-completion OPT applications may be submitted to USCIS up to 90 days prior to the requested OPT employment start date.**

- **The processing times at USCIS for the approval of an OPT application and the issuance of the required EAD vary considerably, from 1-3 months, so it is recommended that students thinking of off-campus summer employment under the OPT provisions speak with me soon, to minimize the chance of problems caused by processing delays.**

- **The USCIS fee for OPT processing is $380.**

To apply for OPT, you need to meet with Lauren Clarke (lclarke@amherst.edu). Once you have mailed your application, allow for about 90 days for USCIS to process your application.