This information will assist prospective employers in understanding some basic work options for internationals who may want to work for their company.

F-1 Visa Holders
The F-1 visa status is a temporary non-immigrant student visa. F-1 visa holders must obtain work authorization before beginning employment off-campus. Individuals holding F-2 visa status are dependents of the F-1 visa holder and are not, under any circumstances, allowed to earn income in the United States.

J-1 Visa Holders
J-1 student visa status is granted to students who participate in international exchange programs between Michigan State University (MSU) and universities in other countries, or whose education in the U.S. is financed directly or indirectly by the U.S. government, the government of the student’s home country, an international organization of which the U.S. is a member, or by another institutional sponsor. J-1s have some work authorization options that must be pre-approved.

Employers do not incur processing costs for employment authorization of international students while they are on F-1 or J-1 visas.

BEFORE GRADUATION

On Campus Limitation
Students in F-1 and J-1 status are required to be full-time students and may work on-campus up to 20 hours or in the “practical training” options below.

Practical Training Options
International students are eligible for temporary work authorization that permits them to engage in part- or full-time employment in their field of study.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
CPT is temporary employment authorization directly related to an F-1 student’s academic program and granted by the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS). CPT is typically authorized on a part-time (up to 20 hours a week) basis during the school year and can be authorized on a full-time (over 20 hours a week) or part-time basis during vacation periods. CPT gives students the possibility to work off-campus or to work for more than 20 hours a week on campus if certain qualifications are met.

TYPES OF CPT

Required for the degree program: In order for training to be considered “required”, all students in the degree program must be required to complete an internship or practicum in order to receive their degree. A few programs at MSU have such requirements.

Integral part of an established curriculum: If the internship/work experience is not required, then it must be taken for academic credit. Students will work with their academic advisor to fill out the “CPT Authorization Form” issued by OISS. Please see the following link for more information:

http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/documents/students/cpt.pdf

The student must receive a job offer before securing the employment authorization, and thus will be unable to provide documentation at the interview stage. OISS needs a signed, written offer of employment on the company’s letterhead as part of the CPT application requirements.

Proof of Work Authorization: The employer and dates for which the student is authorized to work will appear on the student’s Form I-20 (certificate of eligibility). Students cannot begin work before the start date on the Form I-20, or continue working after the end date. CPT authorization may be renewable if the student continues to be eligible.

J-1 Academic Training
J-1 students may apply for temporary work authorization called "Academic Training" (AT) either prior to or after completion of studies to accept positions within their field of study.

Students seeking or completing bachelor’s or master’s degrees are eligible for 18 months of AT. Students seeking or completing doctoral degrees are eligible for 36 months of AT. Non-degree (exchange) students are eligible for AT authorizations matching the length of time they have spent studying in the U.S. Example: A one-semester (4-month) exchange student is eligible for up to 4 months of AT.
AFTER GRADUATION

The U.S. government allows students to apply for authorization to gain practical work experience to supplement their academic programs. Many employers find this to be a useful opportunity to hire a student with valuable international perspectives.

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)
OPT is defined as “temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study”. F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of employment authorization under this category.

For students whose majors are given the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) designation, employment may be extended for an additional 17 months, if an E-Verify employer employs the student.

OPT is recommended by OISS at MSU and granted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The application process can take several months.

Proof of Work Authorization: Students on OPT will receive an employment authorization document or EAD card. USCIS issues the EAD and it specifies the dates of authorized employment.

J-1 Academic Training: see the “before graduation” section.

COMMON EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS FOR NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS

Beyond CPT, OPT, or AT, there are options for employing internationals.

Temporary Worker (H-1) Visa
The H-1B visa allows foreign nationals to work in the United States in specialty occupations. The H-1B visa category has the following key requirements:

Applicant must have theoretical and practical application of a highly specialized body of knowledge and must have a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree or its equivalent in a specialized field. The company is the petitioner of the H-1B and the international is the beneficiary. The company should consult their HR and legal counsel when completing these petitions.

The employer makes an H-1B visa petition to the Department of Labor and USCIS. An employer may petition for H-1B status for a maximum of 3 years at a time. An individual can hold H-1B status for up to a maximum of six years.

O-1 Visa: Individuals with Extraordinary Ability to Achievement
The O-1 nonimmigrant visa is for the individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts,