

## Office of International Programs

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## Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students

What is OPT? OPT is a temporary employment authorization that is directly related to your major area of study Employment before completing academic studies (Pre-Completion) and/or can apply after completing academic studies (Post-Completion). You must have been enrolled full-time in F-1 status for at least one full academic year in order to be eligible to apply for OPT. Once approved you obtain an Employer Authorization Document (EAD Card) to allow you to work for 12 months. **If you have worked under Pre-Completion OPT period it will be deducted from your Post Completion OPT Period. F-1 students who are in a non-degree programs, SAELL, or who have worked under CPT full time for 12-month are not eligible.**

OPT is not required, it is an **OPTION**. To get the OPT recommendation on your I-20 you must follow the instructions from the OPT Workshop and/or go through this OPT Information Packet.

If you are **NOT** going to apply for OPT please sign the OPT Form to notify the Office of International Programs (OIP) of your future plans.

## OPT Basic Information:

- **You must be certain that you will be completing your degree by the end date stated on your I-20.** If you are not able to complete your degree in time you will need to request an extension your I-20 before your I-20 expires.
  - If you find out that your I-20 is expired and are within the 60-day grace period then you must apply for OPT. Those who received the End of Program Reduced Course twice will need to apply for OPT.
- You may apply for OPT up to 90 days before the end of the term in which you plan to graduate, and up to 60 days after the end of the term.
- You have a 60-day grace period after the end of the term in which you graduate. Your OPT start date may be anytime during the 60-day grace period. Consider factors such as USCIS processing time and job search time when determining your preferred start date.
- You do not need to have a job offer to apply for post-completion OPT.
- Your employment must be related to your field of study.
- If you applied for OPT and did not complete your degree requirements, then you may only work part-time until you complete the requirements for your degree.
- Valid employment is defined as working at least 20 hours per week in a field related to your degree, whether paid or unpaid.
- You are encouraged to look for employment before you receive your EAD card. **However, you may NOT WORK until you have your EAD card in hand and only within the start and end date on the EAD card.**
- **You have a total of 90 days of unemployed time while on OPT.** This is expected to be self-regulated, meaning that you must keep track of your unemployed time and notify your DSO accordingly. Failure to report your employment will result in termination of your I-20.

## **To apply for OPT, please must submit the following documents to the Office of International Programs (OIP):**

- 1) OPT Application** (attached to the back of this information packet).
- 2) Copy of your graduation application or academic advisor evaluation**, stating that you completed all requirements for graduation.
- 3) Form I-765 & Form G-1145**
  - a. This is a fillable form. You should fill it out all the information, print it out and sign: [https://www.uscis.gov/system/files\\_force/files/form/i-765.pdf?download=1](https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/i-765.pdf?download=1) .
  - b. For detailed instructions go to: [https://www.uscis.gov/system/files\\_force/files/form/i-765instr.pdf?download=1](https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/i-765instr.pdf?download=1)
  - c. **for Post-completion OPT: Make sure you write the correct code (c) (3) (B) in section #27 Eligibility Category.**
  - d. **in Part 6 Additional Information:** if you were previously authorized for CPT or OPT you will need to provide all previously used I-20 numbers showing the CPT/OPT approvals (page 2 of the I-20).
  - e. **Don't forget to sign, it will be rejected if not signed!**
  - f. Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application: [https://www.uscis.gov/system/files\\_force/files/form/g-1145.pdf?download=1](https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/g-1145.pdf?download=1)
- 4) Fee** for processing is \$410.00 (amount may subject to change)
  - a. Check or Money order
    - i. in the amount of \$410.00\* made payable to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. The check or money order must be drawn on a bank or other financial institution located in the United States and must be payable in U.S. currency.
    - ii. NOTE: Spell out U.S. Department of Homeland Security; do not use the initials "USDHS" or "DHS."
  - b. Credit Card
    - i. Form [G-1450](#)
- 5) Copy of your I-94 Card** indicating F-1 visa or go to <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/> for the most recent.
- 6) Copy of your Passport** (picture page).
- 7) Copy of your VISA or USCIS F-1 Change of Status Approval.**
- 8) Two** full color frontal/passport **photos** with your full name printed clearly on the back of each, DOB, I-20 # (using Pencil). You may want to put these in a small envelope.
- 9) If applicable, copies of any previously issued EAD cards** from USCIS.
- 10) Set up meeting with DSO and turn in steps # 1-9 for application review.**
- 11) I-20 OPT request:** OIP will review your documents, once approved you will get a new I-20, which you will submit with the application process to USCIS. Make sure to print your name, sign, and date before mailing.
- 11) Mailing:**
  - o Mail documents from steps #3-9 & 11. See page 3
  - o Make sure you make copies for yourself.

**YOU HAVE 30 DAYS TO SUBMIT  
YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS  
ONCE THE I-20 IS ISSUED.  
IF YOU SUBMIT THIS PAST THE 30  
DAYS YOUR REQUEST WILL BE  
AUTOMATICALLY DENIED.**

## **Mailing in Your OPT Request to USCIS:**

Your next step is to send your OPT request to USCIS Service Center. They must receive your OPT request and all necessary materials no later than 30 days after the date your new I-20 was issued, so don't delay mailing everything in!

It is strongly encouraged that you re-read the I-765 instructions from the USCIS website. There is a lot of important information on the instructions, including USCIS contact information. You will need to mail in the following documents:

If you mail your OPT request using **regular US Postal Service**, then please mail it to:

**USCIS  
P.O. Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036**

If you mail your OPT request using **UPS, FedEx, DHL or another courier service**, then please mail it to:

**USCIS  
Attn: NFB AOS  
1820 E Skyharbor Circle S  
Suite 100  
Phoenix, AZ 85034**



## **What's Next After Mailing Your Request:**

You will receive a LIN receipt number in the mail from the Service Center after they receive your OPT request. This indicates that your request is being processed, and you can use the LIN number to check the status of your OPT application by calling or online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

Once you receive your EAD card, you must submit a copy of both the front and back of the card to the Office of International Programs.

**YOU MUST BE PATIENT!** The process can take up to 90-120 days for notification of approval or denial. If you have not received anything during the 90-day mark call USCIS about the status of your case.

**RECEIVING APPLICATION BACK!** If you received the application back, because money didn't go through, or any other reason, make an appointment with your DSO. We will need to update the request to restart the 30 day cycle to turn in the I-20. Failure to do this will result in automatic denial.

# Travel Regulations:

There are different travel regulations while your OPT request is pending, versus while your OPT request is approved.

If your **OPT request is pending** at the Service Center, then you may exit the U.S. and re-enter in order to search for employment. However, this should only be done if you have already received the LIN receipt number indicating that the Service Center has received your OPT request. Even if you have received the LIN receipt number, **travel during this time is strongly discouraged** because you should be regularly checking your mailbox for your EAD card (Employment Authorization Document). If you need to leave, then make sure you have someone you trust check your mail so that they can mail it to you when it arrives.

If your **OPT request is approved but you do not yet have a job**, then you should **NOT** exit the U.S. You will not be allowed back into the U.S. unless you have a written job offer for employment.

If your **OPT request is approved and you do have a job** (your employer information must be listed in your I-20) then you may exit the U.S. and re-enter to resume working. However, you cannot re-enter after the end date of your OPT or if you have been outside the U.S. for more than 5 months. If you exit the country under the correct aforementioned circumstances, then please make sure you have the following four items:

- ◆ Form I-20 with one of the DSO's signature within the last 6 months endorsing travel on the third page.
- ◆ An unexpired EAD card.
- ◆ A letter from your employer stating that you are currently employed and that you must return to the U.S. to continue working.
- ◆ A valid F-1 visa & Passport

# Money Matters

In order to be paid by your employer, you need to have a **Social Security Number**, which is issued to track earnings over a worker's lifetime (Question #13a to #17b on I-765 will issue you SSN card if you do not have one). International students who are paid by U.S. employers must apply for a Social Security Number. In order to issue a Social Security number, the Social Security Administration requires evidence that you are eligible to work in the U.S., that you are a full-time student, and that you have received a formal offer of employment. The Social Security Administration must also verify your immigration documents and status with Immigration before issuing the Social Security number. Visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) for information regarding this.

In general, as an F-1 student you will be exempt from Social Security (FICA) **taxes** for your first five years in the U.S., as long as you continue to declare nonresident status for tax purposes. Unless you qualify under a tax treaty between the U.S. and your home government, your earnings as an F-1 student will be subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes, and employers are required to withhold those taxes from your paychecks. For more information on taxes, consult the Internal Revenue Service at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). You can also find out more from your future employer through the Human Resource department.

# **Health Insurance**

You are probably aware by now that the U.S. health care industry is a seriously controversial issue. The cost of medical care without insurance can be financially crippling for you and your family. It is very important for you to consider health insurance coverage during OPT. If you are not insured through your employer, then you should consider purchasing an individual plan.

You can find health information for F-1 students while on OPT, by the OIP office.

# **Study While on OPT**

While on approved OPT, you are permitted to take courses that are for recreational/leisure purposes only. If you begin a new degree program prior to the end of your OPT authorization, you must begin classes for the next available term, or within 5 months. If you transfer your record to another institution while on OPT, your authorization ends at the moment of transfer. Any remaining OPT eligibility is automatically forfeited.

The only exception is if you did not complete your requirements for your degree, you must complete your courses at NEIU prior to the end date of your OPT authorization.

# **When You Find a Job:**

Once you have been approved for OPT and have found employment, you must log in to your SEVP Student Portal <https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt/#/login> to report the following information:

- Short statement on how this job is related to your degree.
- The company/organization name.
- The company/organization's mailing address.
- Employment start date.
- Position
- Supervisor full name, contact phone #, email.
- EIN: Employer Identification number.

# **Your Reporting Responsibilities:**

Throughout your OPT, be sure to update your Student Portal within 10 days of any of the following changes:

- ◆ Your address changes
- ◆ Your phone number changes
- ◆ Your email address changes
- ◆ Loss of employment occurs
- ◆ You gain new employment with a different company/organization.

# 90 Day Rule

As of October 26th, 2018. SEVP will calculate 90 Day unemployment periods while on OPT/STEM.

- ◆ If you accrue 90 days of unemployment, SEVP can automatically terminate your I-20.
- ◆ Once you are terminated, you will be accruing 'unlawful presence'

## Unlawful Presence

As of August 9th, 2018. If you failed to maintain your status you will start accruing unlawful presence on that date based on that failure.

- ◆ If you are accruing time as unlawful presence, you may be barred from the United States.
  - If you have accrued less than 180 days then you may be barred for 1yr.
  - If you have accrued more than 180 day but less than 12 months you may be barred for 3 yrs.
  - If you have accrued more than 1yr you may be barred for 10yrs.

For more information about the Unlawful Presence and Bars to admissibility go to:

<https://www.uscis.gov/legal-resources/unlawful-presence-and-bars-admissibility>

## After Your OPT Expires

You have a 60-day grace period after your OPT expiration date. During this time, you may do one of the following options:

- ◆ Applied and been admitted to NEIU for a new degree to have your I-20 updated to reflect admission to a new degree-seeking program at NEIU.
- ◆ Have your I-20 record transferred to another university for a new degree-seeking program.
  - After your OPT ends, you have a 60-day grace period. If you are admitted to another degree program either at NEIU or elsewhere, then your SEVIS record should be updated or transferred to another school during the 60-day grace period so it doesn't affect your OPT. After your SEVIS record is updated or transferred, you must begin classes for the next available term or within 5 months.
- ◆ Formally apply for a change of status through the USCIS Service Center.
  - For those who their employer filed the H1B visa, do not call us for the updates, your employer filed on your behalf they should be giving you the update of your status.
- ◆ If your Change of status has been approved notify your DSO and submit copies of approval to close out your I-20.
- ◆ Exit the U.S.

STEM majors (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) can apply for the STEM Extension 120 days **before** your OPT expires. You can request the application process with the DSO.

After the 60 Day grace period your I-20 will be automatically Completed. This means your I-20 will no longer be active. Starting August 9, 2018 if you pass the 60 Day grace period and are still in the U.S. you will accrue Unlawful Presence. This means if you are still in the U.S. with an inactive I-20 and accrued 180 days, that will be a 1-year ban from re-entering the U.S. If you are inactive for 1yr, that is 10-year ban from re-entering the U.S.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of International Programs if you have questions regarding OPT

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Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID #: \_\_\_\_\_ SEVIS ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree Obtaining: BA / BS / MA / MS

Major or Program: \_\_\_\_\_

OPT employment must relate to your academic degree program or major.  
Please write a brief statement on your proposed employment for your practical training:

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*You may request an OPT start date anytime during the 60-day grace period after the end of the term in which you graduate. Consider factors such as USCIS processing time and job search time when determining your preferred start date. You cannot change the start date on your OPT once you submit the application to USCIS.*

**Proposed OPT Start Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **OPT End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*I have read and reviewed the OPT packet. I have submitted all required documentation for OPT request. I am responsible for submitting all given information to USCIS. I understand that I cannot start employment until I have physically received the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and on or after the start date on the EAD. I understand that I am subject to the 90-day unemployment grace period. I will report employer information through the SEVP Student Portal to stop unemployment grace period.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_