Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshop
Disclaimer

The Northwestern University Office of International Student & Scholar Services (OISS) offers guidance on Optional Practical Training (OPT) and OPT STEM applications as a courtesy to NU students. We make every attempt to ensure that we provide you with the most up to date information available. However, any advice provided to you by our office does not constitute legal advice. You should always independently check all deadlines and all OPT and STEM OPT application documents for accuracy before mailing them or submitting them online to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The OPT application is a personal application for which you are responsible. The application preparation and USCIS case decision will vary depending on the facts at issue in your particular case. While OISS exercises best efforts to provide you with the most current guidance, please be aware that USCIS may change its interpretation of applicable policies, procedures, regulations, and eligibility requirements at any time. OISS is not responsible for, and expressly disclaims liability for, any errors or omissions relating to your OPT application and any decisions made by USCIS. For legal advice, students are encouraged to consult with a licensed and experienced immigration attorney at their own expense.
Workshop Agenda:

- What is OPT
- How to apply for OPT
- When to apply for OPT
- OPT Application Documents
- Travel - U.S. & International
- How to maintain F-1 status during OPT
- Options after OPT
- Questions?
Contact Us

Email your advisor based on the first letter of your family name!

A-B, K: Taya.carothers@northwestern.edu

C-J & EMBA: stephanie.cisneros@northwestern.edu

L-S: angelica.garcia@northwestern.edu

T-Z: ryan.radebaugh@northwestern.edu

Kellogg MBA: international-advising@kellogg.northwestern.edu
What is OPT?
What is OPT?

**Optional Practical Training**

OPT is temporary work authorization (permission to work).
Most students use OPT to authorize work after completing an academic degree.
What is OPT?

OPT ≠ VISA

• OPT (optional practical training) is work authorization for F-1 students only.

• OPT grants you 12 months permission to work after graduation.

• You do not need a job offer to apply!

• All OPT information is available on our website.

https://tinyurl.com/F1OPTinfo
What is your visa category after your I-20 end date, and you have a *pending* OPT application or *approved* OPT application?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPT</th>
<th>J-1</th>
<th>F-1</th>
<th>H-1B</th>
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</table>

How to apply for OPT
OPT Application Process

OISS assists with authorization

- Complete your Degree
- Apply through the OISS Portal
- Obtain your OPT endorsed I-20

USCIS* Adjudicates

- Send OPT application To USCIS
- Receive your EAD**

*USCIS = United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
**EAD = Employment Authorization Document
IMPORTANT NOTE

DO NOT...

....Mail or Submit OPT Application ONLINE, with USCIS, until you receive an updated I-20 with OPT Recommendation on the 2nd page.

The updated I-20, with OPT recommendation on page 2, is only valid for 30 days from the day the OISS processed your OPT request.
How to apply for OPT

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Optional Practical Training (OPT) - for F-1 students requesting work authorization (after completing their program).
How to apply for OPT

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Instructions
OPT is temporary employment authorization allowing F-1 students the opportunity to gain practical experience in their field of study. The OPT application is a two-step process; the first requires an application to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services, and the second is the completed application must be submitted to USCIS. Please see the OPT Checklist for the required documents to be submitted to USCIS. A sample I-765 can be found here. If you wish to upload a copy of your I-765 to have an advisor review, please upload to the "Attached Documents" section below.

Questionnaire(s)
Click the following to view and complete the following online questionnaire(s). You may begin a questionnaire and save it for later completion, but note that you must click Submit in order for the questionnaire to be logged as complete and ready for review.

Title: Completed
OPT Employment Information

Signature Documents
Click the following to view and digitally sign important documents to indicate your agreement and understanding.

Title: Completed
OPT Statement of Understanding

Recommendations
Optional Practical Training (1 required) To apply for optional practical training, you must request a recommendation from your academic advisor. Please click the "Request Electronic Recommendation" link below and enter the full name, email address, and phone number of your academic advisor. They will be emailed with instructions to complete this form online.

- Request Electronic Recommendation

Attached Documents
The following files have been attached. Click the filename to download the attached document.

No documents have been attached.
You can attach documents to this application by choosing the file from your drive, selecting the type of document you are attaching, and clicking on the "Upload" button.

- Request Electronic Recommendation
How to apply for OPT

Who is your recommender (academic advisor)?

- Graduate students: Program Director, Dept. Chair, P.I.
- Undergraduates: Advisor from your major

- “Academic advisor” is defined as a person associated with an academic college that has advisory responsibilities and can verify your course enrolment & academic plan or degree audit.
How to apply for OPT

OPT recommendation request is sent to your academic advisor via email.

Academic advisor certifies:

• You have completed all your course requirements
• You are going to graduate in the term you have indicated (or ABD)
• You are in good academic standing (no academic probation)
How to apply for OPT

After recommendation received:

• OISS Advisor processes OPT Recommendation: Processing time is **one week**.

• Student will receive I-20 by email or instructions on how to collect/request shipping of OPT I-20

• Upon receiving OPT I-20s, please remember to sign on the bottom of page 1.
How to apply for OPT
https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Schedule an appointment to review OPT Application materials with your OISS Advisor.

Make an appointment
Through the OISS Portal:

OR

Email Documents for Review!
How to apply for OPT

Mail OR Submit your application to USCIS as soon as possible.

- Plan to go to UPS/FedEx/USPS after meeting with OISS Advisor for application review OR Submit Application online with USCIS (https://www.uscis.gov/i-765).

- Students must mail or submit online application to USCIS no later than 15 days from receiving confirmation your OPT request, through the OISS Portal, has been processed.

- OPT application must be mailed from within the U.S.
After Submitting OPT Application

Online ONLY - Immediately Upon Submission
• Download receipt notice (I-797C)

MAIL & ONLINE - Within 2-4 weeks:
• Receive receipt notice (I-797c) and/or G-1145 email
• These documents will have a unique application receipt number. *(starts with YSC or IOC…)*

MAIL & ONLINE - Within 3 to 4 months (hopefully):
• Receive approval notice (I-797) and EAD!
• **WAIT** to start working until you receive your EAD and the until start date indicated on your EAD.
After Submitting OPT Application

After your I-20 program end date you are still in status.

While you wait for your OPT Approval and Employment Authorization Document (EAD):

**Students Can:**
- Take a break! You earned it!
- Travel in the U.S. or internationally.
- Search, apply, and interview for jobs.

**Students Cannot:**
- Work (paid and un-paid).
- Re-enter the U.S. - must have EAD.
OPT Trends – April 2021

OPT Online Filing Available

- https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

- Remember - do not file online, until you obtain your OPT recommendation I-20 from the OISS.
OPT Trends – September 2021

New Mailing Address
USCIS Chicago Lockbox
https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses
When to apply for OPT
When to apply for OPT

Determine your final quarter of enrollment.

- This will be your program end date, as listed on your I-20.
- Graduating early? OISS Advisor will shorten your I-20 end date.

Plan ahead! Average OPT processing time, with USCIS, is 3-4 months.
When to apply for OPT

- **100** days before I-20 end date: Earliest date you can apply with OISS.

- **90** days before your I-20 end date: Earliest date you USCIS can receive your application.

- **60** days after your I-20 end date: Latest date USCIS will accept your OPT application.
Choosing an OPT Start Date

Remember!
After mailing your application to USCIS students cannot change/alter their selected OPT start & end dates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your final quarter of registration is...</th>
<th>And your I-20 currently expires on, or will expire on...</th>
<th>You can choose an OPT start date as early as...</th>
<th>Or you can choose an OPT start date as late as...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2021 (quarter)</td>
<td>12/11/2021</td>
<td>12/12/2021</td>
<td>2/9/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2021 (semester, law)</td>
<td>12/22/2021</td>
<td>12/23/2021</td>
<td>2/20/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2022 (quarter)</td>
<td>3/19/2022</td>
<td>3/20/2022</td>
<td>5/18/2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choosing an OPT start date

Important Reminders:
• You do not need a job (offer) to apply for OPT!
• Still job searching? Choose a later start date.
• Traveling? Consider your travel plans.
• Applying late? Choose a later start date.

Still not sure?
Ask your OISS advisor by email, phone or scheduling an appointment in the OISS Portal!
Choosing an OPT start date

For PhD & thesis-based Master’s students:
- You can apply for OPT before officially graduating (before defense)
- For PhD → ABD status

- You must complete your thesis or dissertation before the end of the OPT period

- Finishing early? Once you apply for OPT, we shorten your I-20 to match term end date, and you cannot apply for an I-20 extension
OPT Application Documents
OPT Application Checklist

• Review - OPT Instructions & Checklist

• Collect your OPT documents and email to your OISS Advisor for review.

• Schedule appointment through the OISS Portal.
Filing Online

- Visit - https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

- Online application does not require as many documents to be uploaded.

- OISS working on updating website and instructions for online filing with USCIS.

- Questions - Contact your OISS Advisor
OPT Application Documents
Mail ONLY

Form I-765
(download directly from uscis.gov)

• Follow the sample on our website. (https://tinyurl.com/PostOPT-NUOISS)

• ALWAYS access this form with Adobe Reader ONLY!

• Mailing address must be valid at least 6 months into the future.
  • Sign up for USPS "Informed Delivery"
OPT Application Documents
Mail & Online

• Most recent **I-94 number** (not the travel history)

• If you cannot retrieve the number or details are incorrect, contact your **OISS advisor**.
OPT Application Documents

Application fee (Mail ONLY)

Current fee: $410 (verify on uscis.gov) *possible fee increase in the future*

- Personal Check or Money Order payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”
- Personal Check - must have your name & U.S. address
- No checks?
  - Do NOT use a friend or family member’s check!
  - Visit your bank or post office for a money order
OPT Application Documents

Application fee (Online ONLY)
Current fee: $410 (verify on uscis.gov) *possible fee increase in the future*

- Students can now pay online with USCIS.
- Only use U.S. Based Accounts – Credit, Debit, or Direct Bank Withdrawal.
OPT Application Documents
Mail ONLY

2 U.S. passport sized photos
• Photos cannot match your passport or visa stamp photos
• Photos must be less than 6 months old
• Please do not take your own photo!
• Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo
OPT Application Documents
Online ONLY

Passport Photo:

Use Photo Composition Tool:
• Linked in online application

Confirm your photo (jpeg) is accepted.
Review documents with OISS Advisor before shipping.

- Email review is OK

Copy entire application **BEFORE** mailing to USCIS.

Keep a copy of shipping receipt and tracking details.
OPT Application Documents
Online Reminders

Students may request review of online application - be prepared with online application completed and to share your screen.

Download ALL documents from USCIS - draft documents, confirmation pages, payment confirmation, and receipt notice (I797-C).
Travel - U.S. & International
Travel - U.S.

Students are welcome to travel in the U.S.

You may travel, in the U.S., while waiting for your approval and/or when your OPT is approved.
Travel - International

Before I-20 end date

International Travel is permitted!

Travel with standard documents:
• I-20, Passport, F-1 Visa Stamp

After I-20 end date

International travel is permitted!

New documentation required!
• **You must have EAD** to re-enter the U.S.
• Along with your I-20, Passport, and F-1 Visa Stamp
• *Eventually - travel with your offer letter.*
Travel - International

Remember:
While on OPT - your I-20 travel signature is only valid for 6 months.
• Request a reprint through the OISS Alumni Portal!

Students may renew F-1 visa stamp!
• Plan accordingly! Always a risk of delay or denial
• Travel with a copy of your NU transcript, status letter, and job offer letter
• Talk to your supervisor! Tell them you are travelling for your visa renewal and there is possibility of delay

ALWAYS Re-enter in F-1 Status!
How to maintain F-1 status during OPT
You applied for OPT!
Now what?
Potential Outcomes for OPT Application

1. OPT Approved

2. **Request for Information**

3. **OPT Rejected or Denied**

**If #2 or #3 happen**: 
Do not panic!
Contact your OISS Advisor and email them a copy of the notice.
OPT Document Reminders:

- Confirm your name is spelled correctly on EAD.

- Check your EAD dates - should be one year minus a day.

- **EAD is not a form of identification.** Only needed when requested by employer, SSN Application, Driver’s License, or international travel.

- Make copies - physical and electronic scans.
Appropriate OPT Employment

**Must be** 20+ hours per week

**Must be** directly related to your field of study at NU
- Can be paid or unpaid (including internships)
- Can be work for multiple employers
- Can be contract work or through an agency
- Can be self-employed

Keep accurate records of all employment!
90 Days of Unemployment

- 90 days are **cumulative**.

- Unemployment days begin on OPT start date (printed on EAD). OPT start date is not always the same as the requested OPT start date.

- **No grace period after reaching all 90 days** - make plans to depart the U.S. as soon as possible and contact your [OISS Advisor](https://www.northwestern.edu/oiss/).
SEVP Portal
https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

SEVP will email you a link to create your SEVP Portal account – on OPT start date.

Contact your OISS Advisor if:
• You do not receive an email from SEVP on OPT start date.
• Your login password expired.
• Your account is locked.
Reporting is required:

- Update your US address within 10 days of moving.
- Update your US employment information within 10 days of starting/stopping a job.
- Report brief 3 to 4 sentences on how job relates to your major area of study.

Reporting late?

- Submit update through OISS Alumni Portal.
All students will receive Alumni login instructions 4 to 5 months after graduation.

• Please do not create a new account

Use OISS Alumni Portal for:

• Reporting Employment Updates
• STEM Extension Application
• Transfer Requests
• I-20 Reprint Request and more!
After OPT
After the OPT End Date

• You cannot work.

• You have a 60-day grace period to stay in the U.S.

• You can transfer to another U.S. university to begin a new academic program.
STEM OPT Extension:

24 Months

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs qualify for 24 additional months of OPT.

Eligible students may apply for the STEM OPT Extension approximately 3 months before your Post Completion OPT end date.

Employer must be E-Verified & position must be paid.
Other Visas

H-1B and other visas:

- Students are advised to consult with their employer and/or an immigration attorney to learn more.
Contact your career advisor:

- All students: Northwestern Career Advancement
- McCormick students: Engineering Career Development
- Medill students: Medill Career Services
- Communication students: EPICS
Networking works!

Attend career fairs and company presentations.

Connect with Northwestern Alumni:
• **Our Northwestern** and **LinkedIn**

Talk to your professors.
Contact Us

Email your advisor based on the first letter of your family name!

- **A-B, K:** taya.carothers@northwestern.edu
- **C-J & EMBA:** stephanie.cisneros@northwestern.edu
- **L-S:** angelica.garcia@northwestern.edu
- **T-Z:** ryan.radebaugh@northwestern.edu
- **Kellogg MBA:** international-advising@kellogg.northwestern.edu
Questions?

Please ask your OISS Advisor any OPT questions.

Google/Yahoo/Baidu/WeChat is full of false information, so please ask us instead!

Please do not ask your friends (they may also give you incorrect information)!

We are here to help you through the OPT process.
Questions?