Disclaimer

The Northwestern University Office of International Student & Scholar Services (OISS) offers guidance on Optional Practical Training (OPT) and OPT STEM processes 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.
What is OPT?
What is OPT?

**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 a work authorization benefit 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/NU-OISS-OPT
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 2-4 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. |
How to apply for OPT?

Step 1: Apply for an OPT I-20 with OISS
OPT Application Process

**OISS assists with authorization**
- Be in your final term
- 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
Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Name: [redacted]
Visa Type: F-1
Student ID: [redacted]
SEVIS ID: [redacted]

Education Level: Master's
Campus Site: Evanston Campus
Program Dates: 09/07/2021 - 12/10/2022
SEVIS Status: Active

Please review the following reminders to help you maintain your F-1 immigration status during your time at Northwestern.

Please check your NU e-mail account frequently to read important reminders and regulatory updates from the OISS.

ENROLLMENT
Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

- Add Dependent
- Change of Degree Level
- Contact Information Update
- Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- Financial Information Update
- Leave of Absence or Withdrawal
- Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- Optional Practical Training (OPT): Past 30 Days OR Change Recommended Dates
- Program Extension
Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Read Eligibility for Post-Completion OPT & Maintaining F-1 Status on OPT, click "next" after each section. Type in your information in the Academic Program Details questionnaire.

Select "post completion OPT" under OPT employment type, choose your requested OPT start and end dates, and select "full time". Click next and add your academic advisor's contact information.
Choosing an OPT Start Date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Program End Date</th>
<th>Apply for OPT 90 days before program end date (Earliest date USCIS will receive application)</th>
<th>Earliest OPT Start Date</th>
<th>Latest OPT Start Date (End date of grace period &amp; last date USCIS will accept OPT application)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer Quarter 2022</td>
<td>08/27/2022</td>
<td>05/29/2022</td>
<td>08/28/2022</td>
<td>10/26/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Semester (Law) 2022</td>
<td>08/19/2022</td>
<td>05/21/2022</td>
<td>08/20/2022</td>
<td>10/18/2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Quarter 2022</td>
<td>12/10/2022</td>
<td>09/11/2022</td>
<td>12/11/2022</td>
<td>02/08/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Semester (Law) 2022</td>
<td>12/15/2022</td>
<td>09/16/2022</td>
<td>12/16/2022</td>
<td>02/13/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Quarter 2023</td>
<td>03/18/2023</td>
<td>12/18/2023</td>
<td>03/19/2023</td>
<td>05/17/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Quarter 2023</td>
<td>06/10/2023</td>
<td>03/12/2023</td>
<td>06/11/2023</td>
<td>08/09/2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remember!**

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

- 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 once you apply for OPT.
Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

Who is your “Approver” for OPT purposes?

- 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 enrollment & academic plan or degree audit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approver Name *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approver Email *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approver Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approver Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approver Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approver Role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

200 characters remaining
Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

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)
### Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

After recommendation received:

- **OISS Advisor processes OPT Recommendation:** Processing time is **one week**.
- Student will receive I-20 in the portal for download & email instructions
- Upon receiving OPT I-20, please remember to sign on the bottom of page 1 in ink.
Don't forget step 1!!

DO NOT...

…. 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.
Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

- Review - OPT Instructions & Checklist
- Have specific Questions? Connect with your OISS Advisor via email or by appointment.
Use our website!
Northwestern.edu/international
Use our website!
Northwestern.edu/international

F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12-month work authorization available to F-1 international students who have been full-time students for at least one academic year and plan to seek employment in the United States in their fields of study.

Looking for information about the 24-month STEM OPT Extension? Go to the STEM OPT Extension page.

The Basics
Step 2: Send your OPT application to USCIS:

• Visit - https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

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

• Full online application instructions found on our website

• $410 Fee

https://my.uscis.gov/
Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

Form I-765: Mailing Address

- Input U.S. mailing address that is valid 6 months into the future
- Sign up for USPS Informed Delivery – Free Service
- If you are moving:
  - Ask a friend, family, peer is they can help receive mail for you.
  - Rent a Post Office Box (PO Box) from USPS or UPS
Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

- 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
Online ONLY

Passport Photo:

Use Photo Composition Tool:
• Linked in online application

Confirm your photo (jpeg) is accepted.
OPT Application Documents

Application fee

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.
Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

Submit your application online to USCIS as soon as possible after receiving your updated OPT endorsed I-20

- Students must submit online or mail OPT application to USCIS within 15 days from receiving confirmation your OPT request has been processed
- Make a copy of all your application documents
After Submitting OPT Application

Online application:
• Download receipt notice (I-797c) immediately upon submission

Within 2 to 4 months (hopefully):
• Receive approval notice (I-797) and EAD!
• Do not start working until you receive your EAD and the start date arrives.
Possible 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.
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
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 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!**
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.
SEVP Portal

https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

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

- Submit an SEVP Portal Reset Request in the OISS Portal if:
  - You do not receive an email from SEVP during the first week of OPT
  - Your SEVP Portal account is locked
SEVP Portal
https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

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 OPT Employer Update through OISSL Portal.
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.
After the OPT EAD 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.
Contact Us

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

- A-D: hongji.wang@northwestern.edu
- E: mark.zajac@northwestern.edu
- F: rkrein@northwestern.edu
- G-L: stephanie.cisneros@northwestern.edu
- M-T: angelica.garcia@northwestern.edu
- U-Z: ryan.radebaugh@northwestern.edu
- Kellogg MS: international-advising@kellogg.northwestern.edu
Questions?

Please ask your OISS Advisor any OPT questions.

Google, WeChat, Reddit are full of false information, so please ask us or consult northwestern.edu/international 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?