Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshop
What is OPT?
What is OPT?

**Optional Practical Training**

OPT is temporary work authorization. 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 of work authorization after graduation.

• You do not need a job offer to apply!

• All OPT information is available on our website.
  https://tinyurl.com/F1OPTinfo
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
How to apply for OPT

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/
How to apply for OPT

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/
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 instructions on how to collect or request shipping of OPT I-20s (2x)

• Upon receiving OPT I-20s, please sign both I-20s (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:
How to apply for OPT

Mail your application to USCIS as soon as possible.

- Plan to go to UPS/FedEx/USPS after meeting with OISS Advisor for application review.

- Students are advised to mail their entire application to USCIS no later than 15 days from receiving the “OPT Application Processed” email from their OISS Advisor.

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

Within 2-4 weeks:
• Receive receipt notice (I-797c) and/or G-1145 email
• These documents will have a unique application receipt number. \(\text{(starts with YSC…)}\)

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.
When to apply for OPT
When to apply for OPT

Determine your final quarter of enrolment.

• 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Days before I-20 end date: Earliest date you can apply with OISS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Days before your I-20 end date: Earliest date you USCIS can receive your application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Days after your I-20 end date: Latest date USCIS will accept your OPT application.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Choosing an OPT Start Date

<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 2020</td>
<td>12/8/2020</td>
<td>12/9/2020</td>
<td>2/6/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2021</td>
<td>3/20/2021</td>
<td>3/21/2021</td>
<td>5/19/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2021 (semester)</td>
<td>5/6/2021</td>
<td>5/7/2021</td>
<td>7/5/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2021 (quarter)</td>
<td>6/12/2021</td>
<td>6/13/2021</td>
<td>8/11/2021</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 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.
OPT Application Documents

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

• Follow the sample on our website.

• ALWAYS access this form with Adobe Reader ONLY!

• Mailing address must be valid at least 6 months into the future.
OPT Application Documents

- 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

- Current fee: $410 (verify on uscis.gov)
  - *possible fee increase in the future*
- 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 cashier’s check or money order
OPT Application Documents

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

Review documents with OISS Advisor before shipping.

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

Keep a copy of shipping receipt and tracking details.

**Record keeping is important!**
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 in order 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
I 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](#).
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](https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/).
All students will receive Alumni login instructions 3 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.
Career Resources

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

- A-B: taya.carothers@northwestern.edu
- C-J: stephanie.cisneros@northwestern.edu
- K-N: e-torres@northwestern.edu
- O-W: angelica.garcia@northwestern.edu
- X-Z: ryan.radebaugh@northwestern.edu
- Kellogg MBA: a-blough@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.