

OPT



Northeastern University
*International Student &
Scholar Institute*

An International Student's Guide to Optional Practical Training: ISSI Form 202

PART 1: ABOUT OPT

What is Optional Practical Training?

Optional Practical Training or OPT is temporary employment for students in F-1 visa classification. Its purpose is to allow the student to gain **practical experience directly related to the student's major field of study**.

Who is eligible?

A student must currently be in F-1 status and must have been in lawful student status (i.e. enrolled full-time) for at least one academic year by the start date of the OPT. Students who have been authorized for 12 months or more of Co-op or full time Curricular Practical Training within the U.S. are not eligible for OPT. Students in language training programs or preparatory programs are not eligible for OPT.

How long may Optional Practical Training last?

Students can engage in up to 12 months of OPT for each higher level degree, i.e. 12 months after a Bachelor's, 12 more after a Master's etc. In addition, some students may be eligible for the Cap Gap Extension of OPT or the 17-Month Extension of OPT. Once OPT has been authorized by USCIS (U.S Citizenship and Immigration Service), it may not be changed or rescinded. Any employment time authorized is considered to have been used whether or not the student engages in employment.

When should one apply for Optional Practical Training?

When to apply for OPT depends upon whether the student intends to engage in OPT before or after completion of studies. Please note that students must send their application for OPT to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) within 30 days of the date of recommendation for OPT by the International Student Advisor at the ISSI. This is the date of issuance of the I-20 that bears the recommendation for OPT. Students may apply for pre-completion OPT as early as 90 days before the desired start date of employment authorization. Students may apply for post-completion OPT as early as 90 days before completion of their studies and the application must be at USCIS no later than 60 days after completion of studies. It is usually recommended that students apply earlier rather than later during the application period.

When may one engage in Optional Practical Training?

Students may engage in OPT either after a program of study (Post-completion OPT) or in certain circumstances during a program of study (Pre-completion OPT). In addition, some students may be eligible for the Cap Gap Extension of OPT or the 17-Month Extension of OPT. Following are descriptions of the types of OPT.

Post-Completion OPT

The majority of students engage in OPT after completion of their studies, otherwise known as "post-completion OPT." An F-1 student applying for post-completion OPT **should apply for OPT no earlier than 90 days prior to completion of studies, but no later than 60 days after completion of the program** (completion of a program does not necessarily coincide with a graduation ceremony).

Pre-Completion OPT

Students may engage in OPT during their academic program. This is known as "pre-completion OPT." Any authorized pre-completion OPT will be subtracted from the available time for post-completion OPT. **Any graduate student who is requesting pre-completion OPT must first obtain clearance (Form ISSI 217) from their graduate school before applying.** A student is eligible to apply for OPT prior to completion of studies under the following circumstances: 1) during the annual vacation (full- or part-time); 2) if you have completed all course work except for a thesis or dissertation (full- or part-time); 3) while school is in session, if the employment does not exceed 20 hours per week (part-time only). To qualify for pre-completion OPT, a student must be registered full-time. Students are not required to have a job offer to apply; however, it is usually advantageous to obtain a definite employment prospect for pre-completion OPT since any time authorized for pre-completion OPT is subtracted from the time available for post-completion OPT, as previously stated.

OPT



Northeastern University *International Student & Scholar Institute*

When may one engage in Optional Practical Training? (continued from previous page)

Cap Gap Extension

The Cap Gap Extension of OPT employment or extension of stay may be available to students whose employers have applied for an H1B working visa. The Cap Gap is meant to bridge the gap that exists between the OPT employment authorization and October 1, the date at which the H1B goes into effect. Additional information is available at www.northeastern.edu/issi in the “Cap Gap” section of OPT information.

17-Month Extension

The 17-month extension of OPT may be available in certain STEM degrees as designated by the Department of Homeland Security. Also, to be eligible for the 17-month extension of OPT students must have an employer who is enrolled in the E-Verify program. Students may apply for the 17-month extension as early as 120 days prior to the end of their original 12 months of post-completion OPT. Applications must be at USCIS prior to the end date of the OPT. Additional information is available at www.northeastern.edu/issi in the “17-Month Extension” section of OPT information.

Where may Optional Practical Training take place?

OPT employment can occur anywhere in the United States. Students may even change employers after beginning authorized employment provided that the job is directly related to the student’s major field of study. OPT employment may be either paid, unpaid/volunteer employment, or contract employment, provided that the employment is directly related to the student’s major field of study. It is required by government regulations that OPT employment be least 20 hours per week and students are advised to keep records of employment and hours worked in case this information is requested in the future (such as during the process for change of non-immigrant visa classification).

What reporting responsibilities do students have during Optional Practical Training?

While on OPT, students are required to report any change of name or address to the ISSI. This should be done within 10 days of such change. Additionally, when students obtain employment, they must report their employment start date, name of employer, and address of employer, preferably by email (issi@neu.edu), to the ISSI within 10 days of start of such employment. You may use ISSI Form 210 on the ISSI’s website for reporting and updating your address and/or employment information (please download, scan, and email to issi@neu.edu). Likewise, within 10 days, students must report this information for a new employer in the case of change of employers. Students must also report the start date of unemployment if their employment ends. There are additional reporting responsibilities for students who have been authorized for the 17-month extension of OPT. Please see the information sheet on the 17-month extension for complete details.

Limits on unemployment during Post-completion Optional Practical Training?

Federal regulations that went into effect on April 8, 2008 limit days of unemployment to 90 days during the 12-month period of post-completion OPT (limits on days of unemployment do not apply to pre-completion OPT). The 90 days begins from the start date of employment authorization as indicated on the Employment Authorization Card. Students will not be considered to be maintaining F-1 status once a total of 90 days of unemployment is reached. Days spent outside the U.S. once the start date of employment on the EAC occurs are included in these 90 days if the student has not yet started employment. Students who have been authorized for the 17-month extension are limited to a total of 120 days of unemployment.

Can one travel abroad during Pre-completion Optional Practical Training?

During pre-completion OPT, there are no travel restrictions.

OPT



Northeastern University *International Student & Scholar Institute*

Can one travel abroad during Post-completion Optional Practical Training? (continued from previous page)

During post-completion OPT, students must observe the following government regulations. Please read the information under the situation that applies to you.

If you have received your Employment Authorization Card (EAC) for post-completion OPT and wish to travel before or during your approved OPT:

- Be sure to carry proof of employment or a job offer letter along with your EAC and other immigration documents. It is not necessary to have started your employment prior to your departure, ***provided that you have already secured a job or a job offer***. However, if you have not yet begun employment, unemployment time will begin accruing from the start date of employment authorization indicated on your EAC.
- Be sure that your EAC and F-1 visa stamp are valid beyond your planned re-entry date. If your F-1 visa has expired, you will need to apply for a new F-1 visa stamp while you are abroad. Be certain to consult with one of the ISSI advisors before you depart the U.S.
- Be sure that the signature from the ISSI on page 3 of your I-20 will be less than 6 months old when you re-enter the U.S.
- Ask your current or prospective employer to issue a letter stating that you are/will be working for that employer during your OPT.
- If your OPT application has been approved, but you depart the U.S. before you obtain a job or a job offer, you will ***not*** be allowed to re-enter the U.S.

If your post-completion OPT application is pending:

- The ISSI strongly advises you not to travel abroad since a valid EAC and proof of employment are among the required documents for re-entry to the U.S. (Please note that those students who have a post-completion OPT application pending, but who have not yet completed their program and who will return to the U.S. to resume their program should be able to travel and return without being in possession of the EAC and proof of OPT employment.)

After Completion of Optional Practical Training?

Students have up to 60 days after the end of OPT in which to depart from the U.S., request a transfer of their SEVIS record to another school from ISSI, or to obtain an I-20 for a new program at Northeastern University program, or to change non-immigrant status.

Who can one speak to about OPT?

The advisors at the ISSI are available to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about OPT or any other employment options. The ISSI holds regularly scheduled OPT Seminars to give students the opportunity to learn about all regulations pertaining to OPT as well as application procedures. Attendance at an OPT Seminar is the first step required for students who plan to apply for OPT.

PART 2: PROCEDURES FOR APPLYING FOR OPT

Step 1: Attend an ISSI OPT Seminar

It is mandatory for all international students who wish to apply for OPT to attend a seminar during the last semester/quarter of their studies. ISSI OPT Seminars are offered regularly by the ISSI and last for approximately one and a half hours, with an additional half hour question and answer period at the end of the seminar. Seminars cover government regulations specific to OPT and application procedures. Also, the OPT application forms described below will be distributed and reviewed during the seminar.

- **Form I-765 - *Application for Employment Authorization***: This form may be downloaded from: www.uscis.gov. Either type or neatly print this form and sign in blue ink. Please note that in item #16, the code for Eligibility Category should be entered as **(C) (3) (B)** for those applying for post-completion OPT, **(C) (3) (A)** for those applying for pre-completion OPT, and **(C) (3) (C)** for those applying for the 17-month extension. Please see **Form ISSI 209 - *Guide to Completing Form I-765***, available at www.northeastern.edu/issi for detailed instructions on completing the Form I-765.
- **Form ISSI 210 - *Request for SEVIS I-20***: This form is required since a student will be issued a new I-20 bearing the OPT recommendation. Please complete this form including the section which requests the dates you desire for the OPT recommendation.
- **Form ISSI 133 - *Certification of Program Completion for International Students***: This form is for confirmation of the expected date of program completion for those intending to engage in post-completion OPT. Please allow adequate time for your college/graduate school to sign this form.
- **Form GS-1145 (optional)**: You may include this form with your application if you would like email confirmation from USCIS of receipt of your application for OPT. This form may be downloaded from: www.uscis.gov.

Step 2 – Submit OPT Application Documents to the ISSI

The student must bring the following documents to the ISSI so that the ISSI can issue a new I-20 with a recommendation for OPT. Students will receive an email from the ISSI when their I-20 with OPT recommendation is ready for them to pick up.

1. Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional)
2. Form I-765 (original)
3. Photocopy of new I-20 with the OPT recommendation— be sure to sign and date the new I-20 first
4. Photocopy of **ALL** previous I-20s (1st and 3rd pages)
5. Photocopy of your last Employment Authorization Card (front and back), if applicable
6. Photocopy of identity pages of your passport, including correction and extension pages
7. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp; if you do not have an F-1 visa stamp due to change of status, you must send in your approval notice from USCIS
8. Photocopy of your I-94 card(front and back)



Step 3 – Mailing the Application to USCIS

After attending one of the seminars, submitting requests for a new I-20, and obtaining a new I-20 with a recommendation for OPT, the student must assemble the following documents for mailing:

1. Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (optional)
2. Form I-765 (original)
3. Photocopy of new I-20 with the OPT recommendation— be sure to sign and date the new I-20 first
4. Photocopy of **ALL** previous I-20s (1st and 3rd pages)
5. Photocopy of your last Employment Authorization Card (front and back), if applicable
6. Photocopy of identity pages of your passport, including correction and extension pages
7. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp; if you do not have an F-1 visa stamp due to change of status, you must send in your approval notice from USCIS
8. Photocopy of your I-94 card(front and back)
9. Check, Money Order, or Bank Check for \$380 made payable to the Dept. of Homeland Security
10. Two passport photos (white background)—print your name and SEVIS ID# on the back of each photo

Mail the items above through the U.S. Postal Service **Certified Mail with return receipt** to the USCIS service center that has jurisdiction over your district of residence.

If you reside in Massachusetts send your application to (students who live in other states should refer to page 10 of Form I-765 instructions or see ISSI Form 208 for the correct mailing address):

U.S. Postal Service
USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Express or Courier Service
USCIS
ATTN: AOS
2501 S. State Highway 121
Business Suite 401
Lewisville, TX 75067

Step 4 – Processing of the OPT Application by USCIS

Receipt Notice (Form I-797): After the student has mailed the OPT application to the USCIS, he or she will receive a confirmation of receipt, Form I-797. *Please keep this form.* This confirmation notification contains a case number assigned to you by the USCIS that you can use to track your case status online at www.uscis.gov.

Address Changes While OPT Application Is Pending: While the OPT application is pending, any changes in address **must be reported to two different places:** 1) the ISSI 2) the USCIS at the Immigration Service Center processing your OPT application at www.uscis.gov using the receipt number on Form I-797. Please note that the U.S. Postal Service does not forward USCIS documents. They will be returned to USCIS in the case of incorrect address information.

IMPORTANT: Form AR-11 does not need to be filed in the case of change of address by students on OPT.

OPT



Northeastern University
*International Student &
Scholar Institute*

PART 3: MAINTAINING STATUS WHILE ON OPT

EAC: After having received permission to work from the USCIS in the form of an Employment Authorization card, the student must **submit a copy of the card to the ISSI** for their records. *Students may work when and only when they have the EAC and only work within the dates specified on the employment card. (for students authorized for post-completion OPT, pre-completion OPT)*

Address Changes: Any **change of address must be reported within 10 days to the ISSI** (*for students authorized for post-completion OPT, and 17-month extension; students on pre-OPT should update their address on their myNEU*)

Discontinuing OPT: If the student decides to discontinue his or her OPT, the ISSI must be informed as soon as possible, including if you have H1B approval or have a pending H1B status. (*for students post-completion OPT and 17-month extension*) If you have been granted a change of status to H1B, please provide the ISSI with a photocopy or scanned copy of the I-797 H1B approval notice. If you need a Cap Gap Extension, please see the ISSI information on Cap Gap Extensions.

Termination of OPT Authorization: If the student transfers to another school or begins studies toward another degree, the OPT will automatically be terminated.

Additional Reporting Requirements for Students on 17-month Extension of OPT: Students who are on the 17-month extension of OPT have additional reporting requirements. Please see the ISSI website for additional information on the 17-month Extension of OPT.

Please see **PART 1** of this form for additional information on maintenance of status during OPT.