

OPT



International Student & Scholar Institute, 405 Ell Hall
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An International Student's Guide to Optional Practical Training: ISSI Form 202

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 field of study**.

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. OPT may be full-time after completion of studies **or** course work **or** during the annual vacation, but must be part-time (no more than 20 hours per week) while still enrolled in courses. Once OPT has been authorized, it is difficult to have it changed or rescinded, i.e. the full period of time granted is considered to be used up, regardless of subsequent occurrences.

Who is eligible?

Aside from being in F-1 status, the student 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. If you have done 12 months or more of co-op or full time Curricular Practical Training within the U.S. you are not eligible for OPT. English Language students are not eligible for OPT.

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, which appears on the new I-20 issued in conjunction with the application for 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 more than 90 days prior to completion of studies, but no later than 60 days after completion of the program** (completion of program does not necessarily coincide with a graduation ceremony). **Pre-completion OPT:**

Pre-Completion OPT

Students may apply to 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, in this instance, it is usually advantageous to obtain a definite employment prospect.

Where does Optional Practical Training take place?

OPT employment can occur anywhere in the United States. The student 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. In the case of unpaid or volunteer employment, the student is required by federal regulations to work for at least 20 hours per week and is 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 visa classification).

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What reporting responsibilities do students have during Optional Practical Training?

While on OPT, the student is 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. 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.

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 optional practical training (limits on days of unemployment do not apply to pre-completion OPT). The 90 days starts from the start date of employment 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. Please note that periods of 10 days or less between different employers will not be counted towards the 90 days of unemployment.

Can one travel during Optional Practical Training?

For pre-completion OPT, there are no travel restrictions. For post-completion OPT travel guidelines, please refer to ISSI Form 216, *Travel Advisory*. The student will have up to 60 days after the end of OPT in which to depart the U.S., requests a transfer to another school from ISSI, or to obtain an I-20 form for a new program at Northeastern University program, or to change immigration 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 option. Please feel free to drop in and speak to an ISSI Counselor on Duty (COD) or make an appointment with an ISSI advisor.

17-Month STEM OPT Extension and Cap Gap Extension

Please see an advisor at the ISSI for further information about these extension possibilities that went into effect on April 8, 2008.