

OPT Information and Eligibility

What is OPT?

- Optional Practical Training is an opportunity for F-1 visa to gain one year of practical work experience in their major fields of study. This information sheet is for F-1 students who wish to apply for one year of Post-Completion Optional Practical Training after graduating from North Park. If you wish to apply for Pre-Completion OPT, please contact the International Office.

Required Documents

A complete OPT application will include the following:

- **Form I-765: Application for Employment Authorization**
 - Download this form from <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>
 - If possible, type the form I-765 online and print it so the optical scanner will recognize all characters.
 - At item #16, write (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT.
 - List an address where you can receive mail for the next 4 months. If you do not know where you'll be living, you may list the International Office as your mailing address. If you wish to use the International Office as your mailing address, leave this portion of the form blank and the DSO will fill it out at the time of your OPT appointment.
 - Sign the form I-765 in **blue ink**, and be sure that the signature at the bottom of the page **does not touch the line**.
- **Form G-1145: E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance**
 - Download this form from <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf>
 - By submitting this form, you will receive an email or text when your application has been received.
- **Two passport-sized photographs** (available at most drug stores)
 - You must submit two identical color photographs of yourself taken within 30 days of filing your application. They must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and not be mounted or retouched. The passport-style photos must be 2" by 2". They must be in color with full face, frontal view. Head height should measure 1" to 1 3/8" from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8" to 1 3/8" from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order of which you are a member.
 - Using pencil or felt-tip pen, lightly print your name and your admission (I-94) number, if known, on the back of each photo.

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- **Application fee in the amount of \$380**
 - Payment in the form of a personal check is preferred, but you can use a bank check or money order if necessary.
 - Make check payable to “[U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#).” Do not abbreviate the payee information!
- **Photocopy of your valid passport**
- **Photocopy of your F-1 Visa or Change of Status Authorization**
- **Printout of your I-94 Admission Number**
 - Enter your personal and travel information on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection site: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html>
 - If the date that appears after you have submitted your information is incorrect, you will need to contact USCIS by phone or visit the Chicago office in person. The office is located at: 610 S. Canal St., Room 900, Chicago, IL 60607. The phone number is (312) 542-5700.
- **Photocopies of all previous forms I-20**
- **Photocopy of your most recent EAD** (only if you previously have been authorized by USCIS for off-campus employment)
- **Record of all previous periods of Curricular Practical Training** (provided by the International Office)
- **New form I-20, prepared for OPT**
 - This new I-20 will be issued at your OPT meeting.
 - You will sign the I-20 on page 1 in blue ink; the DSO will sign on page 1 and 3.
- **OPT Acknowledgment Form**
 - This form must be completed by you. You may wish to discuss the date section at your OPT meeting. This form is for North Park’s use only; you will not send it with your OPT application.
- **Copy of Graduation Audit**
 - You should have received your graduation audit via email; it provides confirmation that you will graduate in a particular term and indicates any courses you have left to complete.
 - This form is for North Park’s use only; you will not send it with your OPT application.

General Information about OPT

- Employment during the OPT year must be directly related to your major field of study.
- OPT gives you permission to seek employment. You are not required to have a job when applying for OPT.
- A total of 12 months of OPT is available after completion of each academic level. The OPT start date must be within 60 days of your program end date.
- If you complete one year or more of full-time CPT during the degree program, you are not eligible for OPT.

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- Your application for OPT must take place in cooperation with the International Office. It is not possible to apply for OPT without a new I-20 from the DSO and recommendation in SEVIS.
- You must apply for OPT with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); receipt of OPT is not guaranteed.

Applying for OPT

- Your responsibilities during the OPT application process:
 - Attend an OPT workshop or otherwise familiarize yourself with OPT processes and requirements.
 - Schedule a 30 minute OPT appointment with the International Office.
 - Collect all required documents and bring them to the OPT appointment.
 - Submit all documents to USCIS in a timely fashion.
- International Office responsibilities during the OPT application process:
 - Provide OPT workshops to educate students on OPT processes and requirements.
 - Meet with students to prepare Forms I-20 for the purpose of OPT application.
 - Review all documents and make a copy for the student's file.

Submitting the OPT Application

- You may apply for post-completion OPT no sooner than 90 days before and no later than 60 days following the program end date printed on your I-20 form. You must file the OPT application within 30 days of the date when an International Office staff member recommends OPT in SEVIS. Allow extra days for shipping so your application is received on time. **YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO LEAVE THE U.S. DURING YOUR GRACE PERIOD UNTIL AFTER YOU HAVE SUBMITTED YOUR OPT APPLICATION!**

Use the following address when sending by US Postal Service:

USCIS
P. O. Box 21281
Phoenix AZ 85036

If mailing by USPS use Certified Mail so you will receive a receipt of delivery.

Use the following address when sending by mail service (FedEx or UPS):

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034
Phone: 800-375-5283

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After Applying for OPT

- You can expect the OPT application process to take up to four months. You may track the status of your application by entering your receipt number at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>.
- If your application is approved, USCIS will send you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The EAD contains your photo and shows the beginning and ending dates of eligible employment. You may begin work only after you receive the EAD. As soon as you receive the EAD, please bring the card to the International Office so it can be photocopied for your file.
- While you are on OPT, you are still in F-1 visa status under the I-20 issued by North Park. Before traveling outside the U.S. during OPT, your I-20 must be signed by an International Office staff member every six months. During OPT you must present a signed I-20, your EAD, and a letter from your employer verifying employment to reenter the US after traveling abroad. **UNLESS IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, YOU SHOULD NOT TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE US BEFORE YOU RECEIVE THE EAD.**

Employment Guidelines

- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) gives specific guidelines about the nature of employment you may have while on OPT. OPT employment must be related to your major field of studies and may be full time (40 hours per week) or part time (at least 20 hours per week). Paid employment may include:
 - **Multiple employers**—student may work for more than one employer, but all work must be related to student's degree.
 - **Short-term multiple employers (gigs)**—performing arts student may complete several gigs. Maintain a list of all employers, dates, and duration of the gigs, and be prepared to provide evidence of all gigs.
 - **Work for hire**—an individual provides a service based on a contractual, rather than an employment, relationship. Students must keep records and be prepared to show the duration of the contract periods and the name/address of the contracting company.
 - **Self-employed business owner**—students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed, and work in this case must be full time. The student must prove that he/she has proper business licenses and is engaged in a business related to his/her degree.
 - **Employment through an agency**—students who choose this option must be able to prove they worked an average of at least 20 hours/week while employed by the agency.
- Post-completion OPT may also be unpaid (volunteer) employment. Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, as long as the employment doesn't violate labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week, and student must be able to prove that he/she worked that number of hours during the volunteer employment period.
- SEVP recommends that students maintain evidence for each job, whether paid or unpaid, concerning the position held, the duration of the position, job title/description, and supervisor contact

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information. If it is not clear from the job description that the work is in the student's field of studies, SEVP highly recommends that the student request a signed letter from the employer, stating how the student's degree is related to the work performed.

Unemployment Regulations

- Students on post-completion OPT may be unemployed for a maximum of 90 days. ICE counts as time unemployed each day during the period when OPT is authorized that the student does not have qualifying employment. A student who exceeds the allowable days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT has violated his or her status unless he or she has done one of the following:
 - Applied to continue his/her education by a change of education level or transfer to another school;
 - Departed the U.S.
 - Taken action otherwise to maintain status.
- The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), not the DSO, will determine if the student has violated F-1 status through unemployment. If DHS determines that the student has exceeded the allowable days of unemployment, the student may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on the student's maintaining valid F-1 status. Additionally, ICE/SEVP may examine SEVIS data for an individual, a selected group, or all students on post-completion OPT and terminate a student's record if it fails to show the student maintained the proper period of employment. In such cases, the student will be given an opportunity to show that he or she complied with all OPT requirements, including maintaining employment.

Reporting Requirements

- All students on OPT are required to report their activities to the North Park International Office. Students must report any of the following within 10 days: new job, end of job, multiple short-term gigs, work for hire, start of a new self-employed business, end of a self-employed business, change in U.S. home address, or decision to leave the U.S. prior to the end date of OPT. The DSO will immediately add the information to the student's SEVIS record.

OPT Extensions

- **CAP GAP EXTENSION:** This is a period in which an eligible F-1 student's status is automatically extended to bridge the gap between the end of F-1 status and the start of H-1B status. Please see the International Office for more information.
- **STEM EXTENSION:** Certain fields of study in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) make a student eligible for a 17-month OPT Extension if they have a job or a job offer from an eVerify employer. Only a few of North Park's degrees are designated as STEM fields by the U.S. Department of Education. Please see the International Office for more information.

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Acknowledgment of Optional Practical Training Responsibilities

To the F-1 student: This acknowledgment form is part of your application for Optional Practical Training. Please fill in your name, your NPU ID number, and the start and end dates and proposed employment for OPT. If you are not sure about dates or employment, an International Office staff member will help you fill out this information. Be sure to sign and date the form, and provide a current email address.

To be completed by the student:

Student's Name: _____ NPU ID# _____

Requested OPT Start and End Dates: From _____ to _____
(In most cases, your end date will be one day less than your start date for a total of 365 days, e.g. 05/15/2014 to 05/14/2015)

Proposed OPT Employment _____
(If you already have a job offer, write the employer's name here. If you do not already have a job offer, write "work in the field of _____" and list your degree field.)

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have applied for Optional Practical Training (OPT) at North Park University, Chicago, Illinois. I have been advised of the following OPT regulations and agree to abide by these regulations.

- I am responsible for submitting my OPT application and all required documents to USCIS. I understand that USCIS will make a decision about my application and that OPT is not guaranteed.
- My OPT application must be received by USCIS no sooner than 90 days before and no later than 60 days after the Program End Date listed on my I-20 form. Additionally, the application must be received within 30 days of the date when the International Office (IO) recommended OPT in SEVIS.
- Upon receipt of my OPT authorization card (EAD), I must provide the IO with a copy of the card.
- I must notify the IO within 10 days if there are any changes to my personal contact information or employment status.
- I must check regularly the e-mail address I have provided the IO, to assure that I receive updates and information that may affect my F-1 status.
- Any work I undertake during my OPT year must be directly related to my major field of study.
- If I am unemployed for a total of 90 days or more during authorized OPT, I am considered out of status.
- I understand that upon completion of OPT I have 60 days to leave the US or begin a new program of studies. I must follow transfer procedures in SEVIS when I begin a new program of studies. I certify that all information provided on this form and in my OPT application is correct. I agree to comply with the above-listed regulations.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Email Address: _____