Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is work authorization available to international students who have been in valid F-1 status for at least two consecutive semesters and who plan to seek employment in the U.S. in their field of study.

The international student must receive recommendation by an international student adviser (DSO) at NPU in order to apply for OPT, but final approval is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

Application Deadline

The earliest you can apply for OPT is 90 days before your "program completion date." The latest date the USCIS will accept your application is 60 days after your completion date. In addition, OPT applications must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of receiving an OPT I-20 from the DSO.

What is Your Program Completion Date?

For OPT purposes, this is the day you complete your final degree requirements:

Points To Remember

- One year of OPT is available after completing a degree program. You may request for one OPT for each level of degree study (bachelor's, master's, doctoral).
- A job offer is not required to apply for OPT. However, once you find a job, you must notify an NPU DSO the following:
  - Your Name
  - Your Residential address (if changed)
  - Your Phone and email address (if changed)
  - Employer name
  - Employer address
  - Start Date of Employment

- Follow the instructions given in the NPU Online Service Center/Student Requests, item IS-06, to prepare the required documents and submit your request to the USCIS.
- **Unemployment** (see below) is allowed for no more than 90 days.
- The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.
- No special permission is required to change employers or terminate your employment. However, you must notify the DSO of your unemployment and/or new employer's information.
- During the period of OPT, a student continues in F-1 status.
- It can take the USCIS three to five months to issue the Employment Authorization Document (EAD, work permit card) that allows you to begin working on OPT. There is no way to expedite an application.
- Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you have the EAD in your possession and your chosen start date has arrived.
- Once the OPT application is submitted to the USCIS, it is very difficult to change or cancel the application.
- A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following the completion of study.
- OPT can only be extended beyond 12 months (for up to 17 months for a total eligibility of up to 29 months), if you meet the following three conditions:
  - Your OPT is based on a US Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) degree at the time of application for the extension.
Your employer subscribes to E-Verify. E-Verify is an Internet based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees.

E-Verify is free and voluntary and is the best means available for determining employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security Numbers.

- You are currently authorized for OPT and working in a job related to your field of study.
- The extension must be based on the same degree as the post-completion OPT (the 12-month OPT).
- The student must not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment in the initial 12-month period of OPT.

- OPT is available both before and after completing the degree program.

17-Month Extensions of OPT

Students who have received a U.S. Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields, are eligible for a one-time, 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months).

When To Apply for the 17-Month Extension?

The USCIS must receive your application before the expiration date of your EAD, but no earlier than 120 days before the expiration date. The USCIS recommends that students apply within 90 and 120 days of the expiration date of the current OPT.

Timely applications will automatically extend the 12-month OPT work authorization up to 180 days until you receive the 17-month OPT Extension EAD.

OPT 6 Month Reporting – during the 17-month extension period

Schools will be required to report that an F-1 student with an Approved status OPT extension is participating in the employment segment. The reporting due dates will be 6 months and 12 months after the employment start date. The schools will have two reporting periods which will be 15 days before plus 31 days after each reporting due date.

If the school does not report that the student is participating in the OPT extension, or does not update the OPT extension information within the reporting period, the student will automatically be set to Terminated status with a new reason of “Failure to Report while on OPT” 32 days after the reporting due date.

OPT Unemployment Allowances

How much time is allowed for unemployment?

- Students on post-completion OPT may not accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment or you will be out of valid F-1 status.
- Students who receive a 17-month extension are given an additional 30 days of unemployment for a total of 120 days of unemployment over their entire post-completion OPT period.
- Students who have OPT extended due to the H-1B cap gap provisions continue to accrue unemployment time and are subject to the 90-day limitation on unemployment.

What counts as time unemployed?
- Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.
- Periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed.
- Unemployment time accumulated prior to April 8, 2008 does not count towards the 90 days allowed.

**How does travel outside the U.S. impact the period of unemployment?**

- If the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits.
- If a student travels while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

**What is the effect on a student’s status if the student exceeds the period of unemployment?**

A student who has exceeded the period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT has violated his or her status unless he or she has taken one of the following actions:

- Requested a change of level or transfer from NPU International Office (prior to the 90-day limit)
- Departed the U.S. and has noted the exit date on the OPT employer reporting web site
- Taken action to otherwise maintain legal status (such as apply for a change of status)

**Other General Information:**

(A) The student may not begin optional practical training until the date indicated on his or her employment authorization document (EAD, a work permit card), Form I–766 or Form 688B. A student may submit an application for authorization to engage in optional practical training up to 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not begin until after the completion of the full academic year as indicated by the DSO. A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for optional practical training:

(1) During the student’s annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, and is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next term or session;

(2) While school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours a week while school is in session (when the student is enrolled as a full-time student); or

(3) After completion of the course of study (the program of study), or, for a student in a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent). Continued enrollment, for the school’s administrative purposes, after all requirements for the degree have been met does not preclude eligibility for optional practical training. However, optional practical training must be requested prior to the completion of all course requirements for the degree or prior to the completion of the course of study.

(B) **Termination of practical training.** Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level.

(C) **Employment authorization.** The total periods of authorization for optional practical training shall not exceed a maximum of twelve months. Part-time practical training, 20 hours per week or less, shall be deducted from the available practical training at one-half the full-time rate.

(D) **Decision on application for employment authorization.** The Service shall notify the applicant of the decision and, if the application is denied, of the reason or reasons for the denial, the applicant may not appeal the decision. An F–1 student authorized by the Service to engage in practical training is required to report any change of name or address, or interruption of such employment to the DSO for the duration of the authorized training. A DSO who recommends a student for optional practical
training is responsible for updating the student’s record to reflect these reported changes for the
duration of the time that training is authorized.

(E) **Temporary absence from the United States** of F–1 student granted employment authorization..

(1) A student returning from a temporary trip abroad with an unexpired off-campus employment
authorization on his or her I–20 ID may resume employment only if the student is readmitted to
attend the same school which granted the employment authorization.

(2) An F–1 student who has an unexpired EAD issued for post-completion practical training and who is
otherwise admissible may return to the United States to resume employment after a period of
temporary absence. The EAD must be used in combination with an I–20 ID endorsed for reentry
by the DSO within the last six months.