

POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING GUIDE

Background Information & Pre-Application Process for F-1 Degree-Seeking Students

As outlined on studyinthestates.dhs.gov, "Optional practical training [OPT] is one type of work permission available for eligible F-1 visa students. It allows students to get real-world experience related to their field of study."

International students at NKU typically request authorization for **"post-completion"** OPT, meaning **the authorization and employment can begin only after graduation**.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- A student must have been enrolled full-time in a SEVIS-approved college/university for at least two consecutive semesters (one academic year), and the student must be in active status at the time of the OPT application.
- **Full-time CPT authorizations equaling one calendar year combined eliminate OPT eligibility at that level.** The combined length of part-time CPT authorizations has no effect on OPT eligibility.
- No offer of employment is required in advance of applying for regular post-completion OPT.
- Only one post-completion OPT authorization is available for each education level with an **upward** change of education level (Bachelor's to Master's, for example) necessary for a second post-completion OPT authorization.
- A double-major student must determine which major is to be used for OPT (and later STEM extension, if eligible) to be shown as Major 1 on the student's I-20 and in the NKU system.
- **The STEM OPT Extension application for eligible students is a later, separate process** that has no bearing on the post-completion OPT application process. The STEM OPT Extension application process is not included here.

OPT APPLICATION TIME PERIOD:

- NKU standardly uses **the last day of final exams in the semester of a student's graduation as the "Program End Date" in SEVIS** for reporting purposes, including OPT authorization requests.
- If a candidate for graduation has a program end date in SEVIS in a future semester, the program end date will be adjusted in SEVIS to the last day of final exams of the student's semester of graduation.
- A student may submit a complete OPT application **from 90 days before the last day of final exams** of the student's semester of graduation/program end date in SEVIS, and a completed application must be received by the USCIS processing center **no later than 60 days after this last day of final exams/program end date** in SEVIS.
- A student should plan for *at least* two months for authorization and receipt of Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from the Department of Homeland Security/United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. However, wait times for approval and receipt of EAD card vary considerably throughout the year, often following peak graduation times of May and December.
- An OPT authorization period can be no longer than twelve months from the authorization start date. The approved authorization period may be less than 12 months since an authorization period must end no more than 14 months after the student's program end date in SEVIS.
- A requested authorization start date is not guaranteed; **an approved start date can be later due to processing time.**
- **NKU ISSS generally recommends submission of complete OPT application at least one month before the student's program end date in SEVIS.** We also *generally* recommend requesting an authorization start date no more than one month after student's program end date for best chances of a full twelve months of authorization.

OPT PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS:

First, if a student is a candidate for graduation in a given semester, the student should request/complete two documents:

- A. Letter from student's academic advisor/program director to confirm student's upcoming or recent completion of degree requirements. Page 4 of this packet should be sent to academic advisor/program director for this request.
- B. OPT I-20 Request Form, page 5 of this packet, completed by the student.

Second, the two items above should be sent in a single e-mail by the student to both the NKU Associate Director of ISSS/PDSO and the International Student Advisor/DSO.

Typically, *at least* one week is required for processing time in ISSS, but the request queue in ISSS can vary considerably during the academic calendar. An e-mail will be sent to the student when the I-20 bearing the OPT recommendation is ready for pick-up in UC 305.

Third, the student must sign and date the OPT I-20 before scanning it for later upload with Form I-765.

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OPT Application Process & Responsibilities Following Application

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS:

NKU ISSS strongly recommends the online application over the mailed, paper application because of the overall greater reliability of the submission process and the shorter average processing time.

- In "File Online" at www.uscis.gov, a student must first create an account if the student does not already have one.
- A student should proceed to information for Form I-765 / Application for Employment Authorization. **All post-completion OPT applicants are category (c)(3)(B)** regardless of later STEM OPT extension eligibility.
- Student should read all of the directions for Form I-765/(c)(3)(B), including **the required documentation to prepare in advance.**
- Student should collect and scan older I-20s in order "to provide all previously used SEVIS numbers and evidence of previously authorized CPT or OPT and the academic level at which it was authorized," as applicable.
- **An applicant can now begin Form I-765 for the post-completion OPT category above.** The student should follow the on-line instructions for completing, uploading documentation, and reviewing the application.

Items on Form I-765 that are often confusing include the following:

- As reason for applying, first-time OPT applicants should select "Initial permission to accept employment."
- In the contact information section, a student should enter the personal email address that will be monitored before approval and during OPT. **Students should not enter their NKU email addresses.**
- The student must enter the current mailing address at the time of submitting the application.
- Most students do not have an A-Number.
- If a student does not already have a Social Security number, the student must check "No." The student can then answer "Yes" for the Social Security Administration to issue a Social Security card to facilitate this process.

After thoroughly reviewing and paying for the application, the student can now submit the application.

NOTE WELL: Completed applications must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of the student's OPT I-20 having been issued by the P/DSO.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES FOLLOWING OPT APPLICATION:

- **Following submission of Form I-765, a student is responsible for reporting any changes to email address, U.S. mailing address, or other information** through the student's USCIS on-line account within ten days of change. These same changes must also be reported by the student to the NKU P/DSO. **Failure to report these changes could result in EAD card not being delivered to student.**
- Student should be sent a notice of receipt of the completed OPT application by USCIS in the weeks after submission of Form I-765. This receipt of application notice is **not** approval of OPT authorization and does **not** allow the student to begin employment.
- If a student does not have an employment offer when applying for OPT, the student should use the time between the application and the authorization start date to search for employment.
- While awaiting OPT approval and the approved OPT authorization start date, a student should **not** travel outside of the U.S. because re-entry may be denied.
- When a student's EAD card has been issued and when the student's OPT start date has arrived, **the student should expect an email from "do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov" to create an SEVP Portal account.** The student must log in and register the account within 14 days of the email from SEVP.
- After OPT is approved and the student has registered the OPT Portal account, **the student must enter the employer information via the OPT Portal within ten days of the employment start date.** The student must then email the NKU P/DSO to request review and reprinting of the I-20 to reflect OPT approval and current employment.
- Following graduation, a student is no longer eligible for enrollment in the NKU international student health insurance plan. OPT students are responsible for their own insurance coverage through OPT employment or individual insurance plans.
- The student should contact the NKU PDSO if the student decides to cancel/withdraw the OPT application or end the authorization early.

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Allowable Employment & Student Responsibilities During OPT

ALLOWABLE EMPLOYMENT FOR OPT:

- A student's employment while on OPT must be clearly related to the student's major or program of study.
- NKU ISSS recommends regular paid employment, and **the employment must be more than 20 hours per week to qualify as full-time.**
- Multiple short-term employers (gigs), work for hire (contract), self-employment, and employment through an agency are all technically allowable under an OPT authorization, but the reporting/documentation burden lies with the student. A student should contact the NKU PDSO in advance of beginning any of these options to understand the reporting and documentation requirements.
- A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, if not in violation of local labor laws. A volunteer/unpaid intern has the same reporting/documentation requirements as for paid employment. With no payroll record to verify a minimum 20 hours of work per week, a volunteer/unpaid intern must keep an alternate form of evidence.

RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ON OPT AUTHORIZATION:

- A student may report for work only **on or after the approved authorization start date**, with the EAD card in hand.
- A student may be unemployed for no more than 90 days combined during an OPT authorization. **The student must enter employment details through the OPT Portal within ten days of the student's employment start date.** A student's active status may be terminated if the student has more than 90 days unemployment during an OPT authorization; termination of active status would require the student's immediate departure from the U.S.
- **Reporting and keeping documentation of employment are a student's responsibilities:**

— Personal information must be updated by the student through the OPT Portal and reported to NKU ISSS throughout the OPT authorization period. This information includes full legal name, U.S. residential and mailing address(es), personal email address, U.S. phone number.

— **Employment information must be entered by the student through the OPT Portal within ten days of the start of employment for each employer, followed by a request from the student to the NKU P/DSO for an updated I-20 showing new employment.**

— It is recommended that the student keep payroll records and copies of the documentation above in her/his own records in case the student is asked to provide record of employment during OPT.

- A student may change employers during an OPT authorization period, with the student responsible for subsequent reporting of changes through the portal and a request for updated I-20, as above.
- **During OPT authorization, continued employment is a student's primary responsibility; travel outside of the U.S. should be very carefully considered.** For the purposes of re-entry to the U.S. if a student chooses to travel, the student should be sure to have unexpired passport and visa, an I-20 with current employment information and an unexpired travel endorsement on page 2, unexpired EAD card, and a signed letter from current employer stating that the student is traveling on approved vacation with an expected return-to-work date specified.
- During an OPT authorization, a student may take classes on a strictly *part-time* basis and may not enroll in another degree program.
- A student may only *apply* for a new degree program while on OPT. However, the transfer of a student's SEVIS record to another school or an education level change in SEVIS to start a new degree program will immediately end the student's OPT authorization.
- A student eligible for the STEM OPT extension must submit that application in advance of the regular post-completion OPT authorization end date.
- Following the OPT authorization end date, if no STEM OPT extension application has been filed, a student has 60 days to initiate a change of education level in SEVIS, request release of SEVIS record to another school for transfer, or depart the U.S.

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Template for NKU Academic Advisors / Program Directors for Confirmation of Student's Program Completion

A Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization allows for a recently graduated F-1 visa international student to gain work experience in her/his field in a job related to the student's major/program of study.

A student requires a letter from his/her NKU academic advisor/program director to begin the OPT application process.

For immigration purposes, NKU ISSS standardly uses **the last day of final exams in a student's semester of graduation** as the day on which academic requirements are met, rather than the date of a commencement ceremony.

A student may submit an OPT application from 90 days before the last day of final exams and until 60 days after this date. Therefore, the wording in the template text below can vary from future tense to past tense.

Students are expected to request this letter from the academic advisor/program director, with the letter to be sent to the student in PDF format and on NKU letterhead. (The information below is provided as a letter template, not a form.)

Please provide a letter with the following content, with the italics text underlined and in parentheses to be specific to the requesting student:

"To: NKU International Student and Scholar Services
From: *Name of academic advisor/program director*
Date of letter

Full name of student is a (*currently enrolled/recently graduated*) student at NKU at the (*Bachelor's/Master's*) level with a (*major/program*) in *NKU name of major/program*.

Full name of student (*is expected to complete/completed*) all academic requirements for completion of degree program on *date of last day of final exams for student's semester of graduation*."

In addition, we ask that the academic advisor/program director please include the following in the letter:

Signature

NKU email address

NKU college/department

NKU phone number

Please note: If a student's completion of academic requirements by the end of the semester is in question, we ask that the letter above not be provided to the student until student's completion is reasonably certain.

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OPT I-20 Request Form to be Completed by Student

This completed form, along with the letter from academic advisor/program director confirming program completion date, must be submitted to the NKU P/DSO as the request for an OPT recommendation to be entered in a student's SEVIS record.

All questions below must be answered clearly and completely.

Full Name (as shown on passport) & NKU Student ID #: _____

Personal (**not NKU**) email address for use through OPT authorization: _____

Current U.S. Physical Address: _____

Current U.S. Mailing Address: _____

(Changes to addresses above must be reported by the student to USCIS through the OPT portal to prevent delivery of EAD card to incorrect address.)

If a double-majoring student, enter the major that you plan to use for OPT. If you have only one major, enter "NA."

Have you received any full-time CPT authorizations at NKU or another school? _____

If yes, provide specific dates for each full-time authorization: _____

Have you previously applied for OPT at NKU or another school? _____

What is your requested OPT authorization start date? _____

(A student must inform prospective employers that a requested authorization start date is not guaranteed.)

By signing below, I am stating that I understand and agree to the following:

I am confident in completion of my academic program as a pre-condition for requesting an OPT I-20.

I have read this OPT informational packet in its entirety. I understand the OPT process from beginning of application through approval and subsequent employment authorization period.

I understand that as the student OPT applicant, I am primarily responsible for all reporting and documentation of both personal information and employment information.

I agree to comply with all OPT rules and regulations, with specific responsibility for timely reporting for all OPT employment through the OPT Portal.

I understand that my non-compliance with OPT employment rules and regulations can lead to termination of my active status in SEVIS, which would necessitate my immediate departure from the U.S.

Signature of student: _____ Date: _____