

## Optional Practical Training (OPT)

### Definition:

As an F-1 student you are eligible for a maximum of 12 months of optional practical training (OPT) that is directly related to your program of study at NOVA. To be eligible, you must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least one full academic year and be maintaining good academic standing. OPT can be used in the following time periods:

- ❑ During summer vacation (full-time or part-time)
- ❑ While classes are in session (part-time)
- ❑ After completing a degree program (full-time)

You can apply for less than 12 months of OPT, but the total of all OPT requests cannot exceed the 12-month maximum. Exception: When you have been authorized for part-time OPT one calendar month of part-time OPT equals 50% of a month from the 12.

USCIS permits one year of OPT at each degree level that is higher than the most recently completed program (i.e. associate's, bachelor's, master's, PhD). However, unused OPT does not carry over to the next academic level. One year of OPT is the maximum at each level of education. Note: ESL students are not eligible for OPT.

If approved for post completion OPT, **you will have 90 days** to find an appropriate job or volunteer opportunity otherwise your F-1 status will be terminated. You must inform OIS when you are or are not working. Employment may be full time or part time and paid or unpaid. OIS will need to update your I-20 and failure to do this will result in loss of your F-1 status.

*ASSOCIATE DEGREE APPLICANTS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR 18 month STEM OPT EXTENSION*

### How to Apply for Optional Practical Training

You may apply for OPT **up to 90 days before** completing your associate's degree program and **no more than 60 days after** completing your degree. We highly recommend that you apply as early as possible since applying near the end of your 60-day grace period may create delays that will keep you from receiving approval for the full 12 months.

Permission to work under OPT requires an **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** from USCIS. To obtain the EAD you must first have a recommendation from your International Student Advisor.

### STEP 1: COMPLETE OPT REQUEST FORM

- ❑ **Submit the NOVA on-line F1 Request for Services Form 125-061 with the necessary documents.** Your international adviser will need to update your I20 and verify your eligibility for OPT status. When do you want to pursue OPT (summer, during classes or after you complete your degree)? Will it be full-time or part-time? USCIS will not accept a request for both part-time and full-time. If the request is for post-completion (after your program ends), you need to state the date when you expect to complete your program. Provide a description of your proposed training and explain how it relates to your current major. *(Note: You do not need a job offer to submit your application).*

### Office of International Students

## **STEP 2: PREPARE OPT PACKAGE AND MEET WITH ADVISER**

- **Completed form I-765** - make sure you are using the most recent version and sign in ink
- ❑ **Completed form G-1145** USCIS Electronic Notification of Application Acceptance
- ❑ **Check or money order with the appropriate filing fee written to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”** (Do not abbreviate or shorten the name)
- ❑ **Copy both pages (ID and travel history) of your most recent I-94**
- ❑ **Copies of both sides of any previously issued EAD cards**
- ❑ **Copy of the identification page of your passport.** If the expiration date of the passport is on another page, be sure you include a photocopy of that page as well.
- ❑ **Copy of your F1 visa**
- ❑ **Two recent photos:** USCIS requires the photos are passport style and not be more than 30 days old. Do not use same photo as in passport.
- ❑ **Copies of pages 1 & 2 for all I-20s issued to you** since you first received F-1 status. (Include all previous schools and NOVA with OPT recommendation)
- ❑ **Schedule Meeting with your International Student Adviser:** Bring OPT documents to review with adviser before mailing out.

## **STEP 3: MAIL OPT PACKAGE TO USCIS**

You must mail all of the above documents to USCIS **within 30 days** from the date your adviser/DSO recommended OPT. Send your completed application package to the correct address below. It is highly recommended that you send the application **by certified mail** and get a **return receipt** for tracking.

If sending by USPS:  
USCIS  
P.O. Box 805373  
Chicago, IL 60680

If sending by Express mail (UPS/FEDEX/DHL):  
USCIS Attn: I-765 C03  
131 South Dearborn- 3rd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

## **STEP 4: USCIS APPROVAL AND JOB CONFIRMATION**

If approved, you will receive an email from USCIS instructing you to create a **log in for the OPT Portal within 90 days of receiving your EAD.**

•**Find Employment:** If you are unable to find appropriate employment or a volunteer opportunity during the 90 day grace period, your F1 status in SEVIS will be terminated.

•**Log onto OPT Portal:** This must be kept up to date in case you change jobs or take on more than one at the same time. If you have trouble accessing the Portal contact your adviser for assistance.

Employer & Supervisor contact (name, address, telephone, e-mail)

Job Title

Employer EIN

Start and End date

Explanation of how this employment is related to your program of study

•**Receive Updated I-20:** You must send your adviser a copy of your EAD card and employment offer letter so they can provide you with an updated I-20. You will still need to have this signed if you travel out of the country during OPT.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the processing time?** USCIS will send you a receipt in three to four weeks if you request electronic notification. Keep this receipt in a safe place. The Employment Authorization Document should arrive about 90-120 days later.

**What is the latest date that my EAD can begin/end?** You are permitted a maximum of 12 months of OPT within a 14 month period which begins when you complete your degree. Your EAD must begin no later than 61 days after your completion date and end no later than 14 months after you completed the degree.

**Can I go home after I graduate and apply for OPT when I come back?** No.

**Can I travel outside the US after I complete my program and I am waiting for my EAD?** It is not advised to travel abroad until you have your EAD approved and a job offer.

**Can I travel with the EAD?** Yes, but you will need to have your I-20 endorsed by the international student advisor and you will need a valid F-1 visa and a letter showing that you have a job offer and have been approved for time off from work.

**Can I volunteer with a company before I get my EAD?** No, you cannot provide a service for which an individual would generally be paid.