OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING – Post-completion
Employment authorization following graduation

What is OPT?
Optional practical training (OPT) is defined in the F-1 regulations as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study."

OPT can be pre-completion, or post-completion (after graduation). This handout is about post-completion OPT. Post-completion OPT is authorized to begin after graduation, and authorizes full-time employment if approved.

Am I eligible for OPT?
To be eligible:
- You must have been a full-time F-1 student in a degree program for at least one year
- You must be in Active F-1 status, and have a valid passport
- You cannot have done 12 months or more of full-time CPT (curricular practical training)

How much OPT can I do?
- You can do 12 months of full-time OPT per educational level (including any pre-completion OPT).
- You become eligible for another 12 months of OPT when you change to a higher educational level.
- If you are in a STEM field, you may be eligible for an extension of 24-months of your OPT, with certain requirements met.

Do I need a job offer to apply for OPT?
- You do not need an offer of employment to apply for OPT, but you are required to be employed during the OPT validity period.

When should I apply?
- Your application for OPT can be filed 90 days before the official end of the semester you are graduating or up to 60 days after. See the diagram below for the ‘application window.’
- Apply as soon as possible because it often takes 3-4 months to receive OPT authorization from the Department of Homeland Security/United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

For example:
Kim graduates in May 2016, and the ending date of his I-20 is May 20, 2016. He can apply for OPT and have his OPT work permission according to the diagram below:

So, depending on Kim’s plans, he should select a start date that will allow him to begin his OPT as soon as possible after his program completion, and allow him to work the full 12 months.

What are the OPT Rules and Regulations?
1. You can begin work only after receiving the Employment Authorization Card (EAD) issued by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and only on or after the start date on the EAD/EAC. Your EAD must be correct with all data, or you must request a replacement.
2. During OPT, your F-1 status depends on proper employment. You may not be unemployed for a total of more than 90 days. Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment (even time outside the U.S.) counts as a day of unemployment. If you travel while employed either during a period of leave authorized by your employer or as part of your employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

3. You must be employed full-time (more than 20 hours per week) in a job (or more than one job) that is DIRECTLY RELATED to your field of studies (your major).

4. You must report your employment (all employment), address, and other information directly to your international student advisor, to be reported in SEVIS. See below, ‘Reporting Requirements.’

5. You cannot begin another academic program as a full-time student, either at NAU or any other school.

Consequences of 90+ days of unemployment: You may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on your valid F-1 status if the Department of Homeland Security determines that you exceeded the limitations on unemployment. Additionally, Immigration and Customs Enforcement may examine SEVIS data and terminate your SEVIS record if it fails to show that you maintained the proper period of employment. In such cases, you will be given an opportunity to show that you complied with all OPT requirements, including maintaining employment.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:
These are the reporting requirements while on OPT for ALL students (these include both the Homeland Security requirements and those needed by your international student adviser). Please report directly to your international student adviser from your NAU email address within 10 days of any change. Report all 9 items each time you have any change to report:

1. Your legal name
2. Your residential and mailing address, if different (you must also keep your address updated at inau.nau.edu)
3. Your phone number/s
4. Your Email address
5. Employer/Company/Business name
6. Employer/Company/Business address
7. Job Title
8. Hours per week
9. Start and end dates of employment
10. Dates of times unemployed
11. Supervisor’s name and contact information (phone number and email address)

You must send your international adviser a copy of your employment letter (see ‘Documenting your Employment’ on the next page). You must also respond to any request for current information from your adviser, and check your NAU email account daily for such requests.

What is ‘ALLOWABLE EMPLOYMENT’?:
- Regular paid employment for more than 20 hours per week in a position directly related to your major. You may work for multiple employers, if all work is directly related to your major and appropriate to your educational level.
- Payment by multiple short-term employers. If you are a musician or performing artist you may work for multiple short term employers (gigs).
- Work for hire. This is employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by the Department of Homeland Security, you must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
• **Self-employed business owner.** Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, you must work full time. You must be able to prove that you have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to your major.

• **Employment through an agency.** You must be able to provide evidence showing you worked an average of more than 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

• **Volunteers or unpaid interns.** You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be more than 20 hours per week and you must be able to provide evidence from the employer that you worked more than 20 hours per week during the period of employment. **NOTE:** ‘Volunteer’ work for a business or any organization that operates for profit is not allowable. Also, note that unpaid volunteer work will NOT qualify a STEM student for a STEM OPT extension.

**What else do I need to do while I’m on OPT?**

You must properly DOCUMENT YOUR EMPLOYMENT:

• For your protection, we require that you keep documentation of all your employment. In the future, you may be asked to provide proof that your employment during OPT was in your field of study, and that you were working full-time.

• Specifically, you must maintain evidence — for each job — of the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for your supervisor or manager, and description of the work.

• You must obtain a signed letter on letterhead from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work you performed, your duties, and your working hours. Keep this in your personal records, and also send a copy to your international student advisor. If you travel, carry this letter with you (and your EAD card).

**How do I apply for OPT?**

An application for OPT consists of these steps:

1) You must gather ALL the items on the checklist below.

2) You must make a one-hour appointment with your international student adviser only when you have all items as listed in the checklist below:

3) Your ISSS adviser will examine all documentation, and issue an OPT I-20

4) We will prepare the application for mailing, and provide mailing instructions

5) You will immediately send the application packet yourself, using a courier service such as FedEx

6) You will send your advisor the tracking number for the mailing

7) If the application is approved, USCIS will issue an EAD/EAC.

**Request Checklist** — you must prepare all the following items, including required photocopies, before making your OPT appointment with your international student advisor. DO NOT MAKE YOUR OPT APPOINTMENT UNTIL THIS LIST IS COMPLETE:

1. Memo from your academic adviser or department chair (sample letter is attached) verifying your expected graduation at the end of the current term.

2. Completed Form I-765 “Application for Employment Authorization,” available at USCIS.gov. Complete the form by typing in your information, then save the form to a USB drive and/or email the completed form to your advisor. **DO NOT COMPLETE THE ONLINE FORM AND SUBMIT IT!**

3. Photocopies (paper copies) of:
   • passport page/s showing number, name, birth-date, picture, and expiration date
   • Your current or most recent F-1 visa;
   • Your electronic I-94 record (printout from [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html))
   • Your current and previous I-20s (from all schools), clearly showing any stamps
   • Your NAU ID and/or AZ driver’s license

4. Check or money order for the I-765 filing fee or $380 made out to ‘U.S. Department of Homeland Security’

5. 2 passport type photos taken within 30 days of the filing of this application.
Where do I send my OPT application?

If you are in Arizona, you must send your application via FedEx or another courier service to mail your application if you are living in Arizona:

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

How long does the approval take?
USCIS generally takes 2-3 months to approve an OPT application. Use your receipt number to check your case status online. Your receipt should be available in about 7-10 days.

What do I do if I change my mind about OPT?
If you decide to cancel or withdraw your OPT application or quit earlier than the employment end date indicated on your EAD, contact your international student adviser. Recovering all or part of a period of OPT that has already been granted by USCIS may be difficult.

Do I need a social security number?
Yes, you will need an SSN to work. If you do not already have one, you can apply as soon as you have your EAD card and the employment start date is current. You may begin working before you have an SSN (but not before you have your approval and employment authorization document).

What about health insurance?
If you are not enrolled at NAU at all, the NAU policy will not be available to you. If your employer does not offer a health plan or you do not yet have employment, you should purchase one on your own. Ask your international student adviser for more information if you are in this situation.

Can I travel outside the U.S. during OPT?
During OPT, you can travel outside the United States and be readmitted to begin or resume employment for the remainder of the period authorized on your EAD card, if the following are all true:

- You have an I-20 signed by your International Student Advisor in the last 6 months, and
- You have an unexpired EAD, and
- You are returning to begin or resume employment (you must have an employment letter)
- You have a passport valid at least 6 months into the future
- You have a valid visa (unexpired)

**IMPORTANT** – Before you travel on OPT, request from your International Student Advisor an update of your I-20 that shows your OPT ‘Approved’ and has your reported employment information included. Make sure your I-20 is signed every 6 months.

*If you plan to travel out of the U.S. during OPT, contact your international student adviser for advising.*

REMEMBER!
While on OPT you are still in F-1 student status, and you must follow all OPT regulations and report to your International Student Advisor to maintain your F-1 status.
SAMPLE LETTER FROM ACADEMIC ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENT CHAIR

DEPARTMENT LETTERHEAD

To: NAU International Student Adviser
From: Name of academic advisor or department chair
Date:

_________________________________________ is currently an undergraduate student with a major in
official name of student

_________________________________________ and is expected to graduate on _________________.
(official end of the semester: MM/DD/YYYY)

Signature (must be original): ____________________________________________________________

Email: ____________________________________________________________________________

Phone: ____________________________________________________________________________
OPT I-20 Request

Name: ___________________________________________ NAU ID: __________________________

Your OPT request will be considered using the following information. Your international student advisor may ask for further information during your OPT appointment.

1. Are you 100% certain that you will graduate on schedule? ________________________________

2. Have you had any previous OPT (at NAU or other school)? ________________________________
   If yes, give the dates of OPT and type (full or part-time)

3. Have you had any previous CPT (at NAU or other school)? ________________________________
   If yes, give the dates of CPT and type (full or part-time)

4. Are you planning to travel outside the U.S. during your OPT? ________________________________
   (If yes, discuss with your advisor)

5. Do you have a job offer already? _______________________________________________________

6. Do you have more than one major? _______________________________________________________
   If yes, is the major that appears on your I-20 the major that you intend to use OPT for?

7. Are you planning to apply for graduate school or another academic program (at NAU or any other school) during your OPT?
   ____________________________________________________________

8. Are you planning to take classes during your OPT? ________________________________________

9. What is your requested OPT employment authorization start date? ____________________________

PLEASE READ/INITIAL EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO SHOW YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT:

- I agree to the reporting requirements as outlined on page 2 of the OPT information packet. ____ (initial)
- I understand that during OPT I cannot be unemployed more than 90 days, and unemployment of more than 90 days may result in future negative immigration consequences. ______
- I understand that during OPT I cannot work until I have my employment authorization card AND the dates of employment are active. ______
- I understand that my employment during OPT must be directly related to my field of studies, as on my I-20. ______
- I agree to check my NAU email address regularly, and to respond immediately to my advisor’s requests for information needed to maintain my F-1 status. ______
- I also understand that I can study only part-time during OPT, (6 or fewer credits -or equivalent- per semester), and cannot enter a new degree program of any kind. ______
- I understand that failure to follow the OPT regulations will result in the termination of my OPT and my F-1 status. ______
- I understand that I must submit my OPT packet within 30 days of the issuance of the OPT I-20, or the application will be denied. ______
- I understand and agree that I absolutely cannot begin working until my employment authorization has been approved, the beginning date has arrived, and I have my EAD card in hand. ______

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________