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."

F-1 undergraduate students may apply for post-completion OPT, which is authorized to begin after graduation. During OPT, you remain in F-1 student status and must follow reporting requirements.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:
As an F-1 student you must have been enrolled on a full-time basis in a SEVIS-approved college or university for at least one full academic year to be eligible for OPT. You must be in-status.

OPT is available for a maximum of 12 months 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. You are only eligible for OPT for your current degree.

No offer of employment is required to apply for OPT, but you are required to be employed during the OPT validity period. Students on OPT are limited to a maximum of 90 days of unemployment.

Authorization of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for one year or more eliminates eligibility for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility.

WHEN TO APPLY:
An application for OPT can be filed up to 90 days before the official end of the semester you are graduating or up to 60 days after. 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. If you think there is a chance you may not graduate, discuss this with your International Student Advisor.

For example:
Kim graduates May 10, 2012. 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.

RULES AND REGULATIONS:
Work can begin 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.

During OPT, F-1 status depends on employment and 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.

**Consequences of over 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.

Students on OPT can study only part-time, and non-degree. To enter a new degree program student needs to receive a new I-20 for that program and that will terminate I-20. If you wish to take a class or two on OPT discuss this with your international student advisor in advance.

**REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:**

Reporting Requirements while on OPT for ALL students (these include both the Homeland Security requirements and those needed by the CIE International Student Advisor):

1. Your legal name
2. Your residential and mailing address, if different
3. Your phone number/s
4. Your Email address
5. Employer/Company/Business name
6. Employer/Company/Business address
7. Start and end dates of employment
8. Dates of times unemployed
9. Supervisor’s name and contact information

You must report changes to your International Student Advisor within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a Department of Homeland Security official may determine you are out of status.

You must respond to any request for current information from your advisor, and check your NAU email account daily for such requests.

**ALLOWABLE EMPLOYMENT:**

- **Regular paid employment** for at least 20 hours per week in a position directly related to your major. You may work for multiple employers, as long as it is directly related to your major and commensurate with your educational level.

- **Payment by multiple short-term multiple employers.** If you are a musician or performing artist you may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). You should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. You must be prepared to provide evidence showing a list of all gigs, in case it is requested by the Department of Homeland Security.

- **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 at least 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 at least 20 hours per week and you must be able to provide evidence from the employer that you worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

**DOCUMENTING YOUR EMPLOYMENT:**
It is recommended 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. Specifically, you should 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. If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, we highly recommend that you obtain a signed letter from the employer's hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your degree is related to the work you performed. Keep this in your personal records.

**OPT REQUEST, APPLICATION, AND FILING:**
An application for OPT consists of four steps:
1) The student makes a request for OPT to the International Student Advisor and submits all required items (see the checklist, below). Call 928-523-2409 to request one-hour appointment only when you have all items;
2) After determining eligibility, the International Student Advisor submits an OPT recommendation in SEVIS and prepares a Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation;
3) The student files a Form I-765 (with fee), the OPT Form I-20 (copy), and supporting documents to the USCIS Service Center.
4) If the application is approved, USCIS will issue an EAD/EAC.

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**Request Checklist** – you must prepare all 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 academic advisor or department chair (sample letter is attached) verifying your expected graduation at the end of the current term.

2. Go to [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and click on “immigration forms” at the top of the page. Scroll down and click on **Form I-765** “Application for Employment Authorization”. Complete the form by typing in your information, save the form to a USB drive and bring to your appointment with international student advisor. If the form is not savable, type and print your form (do not hand-write the form).

**WARNING: Do NOT complete and submit the application online!!**

**I-765 Tips:**
- Use CIE address: C/O ISSS, PO Box 5598, Flagstaff AZ 86011-5598;
- The code for #16 is: (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT
- When you sign your name, make sure it doesn’t cross the upper or lower lines.

3. Photocopies of:
   - passport page/s showing number, name, birth-date, picture, and expiration date (must be valid for at least 6 months)
   - Your current or most recent F-1 visa;
   - Your I-94 card (front and back)
   - 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. Using a felt pen, lightly print your name and I-94 number (11 digits) on the back of each photo at the bottom. CIE does passport photos, you can request at the time of your OPT appointment.
Once you have all the paperwork listed above contact the CIE front desk (928)523-2409 to make a 1-hour appointment with your International Student Advisor. Your International Student Advisor will review your paperwork and, if everything is acceptable, will recommend OPT in SEVIS and print you a new I-20. Your International Student Advisor will photocopy page 1 and 3 of your OPT I-20 which you will mail, along with the paperwork listed above to the USCIS service center which has jurisdiction over your place of residence. It is highly recommended that you use certified mail, so you receive a receipt proving your application was delivered. Keep that receipt for your records.

**Where to mail your application if you are living in Arizona:**

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:
- USCIS
  - PO Box 21281
  - Phoenix, AZ 85036

For Express mail and courier deliveries:
- USCIS
  - Attn: AOS
  - 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100
  - Phoenix, AZ 85034

**USCIS PROCESSING TIMES:**

USCIS generally takes 3-4 months to adjudicate an OPT application. To find out what current USCIS processing times are, or check the status of a pending application for which you have a receipt number, use the USCIS website: [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp)

**CANCELLING YOUR OPT APPLICATION:**

Contact your International Student Advisor if you decide to cancel or withdraw your OPT application or quit earlier than the employment end date indicated on your EAD. Recovering all or part of a period of optional practical training that has already been granted by USCIS may be difficult.

**SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:**

You’ll need to apply for a social security number and card, if you do not have one already. Once the beginning date on your EAD card is reached, take your documents to the nearest Social Security Administration office (find in Google). On your employment application or other documents, if you are asked for a SSN before you have received one, put ‘Applied for’. You may begin working before you have an SSN (but not before you have your approval and employment authorization document).

**TRAVEL AND REENTRY 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, as long as:
- You present an I-20 signed by your International Student Advisor within the preceding 6 months, and
- You present an unexpired EAD, and
- You are returning to begin or resume employment (you should have an employment letter)
- You present a passport valid at least 6 months into the future
- You present a valid visa (unexpired)

**REMEMBER!**

While on OPT you are still in F-1 student status and must 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 Advisor

From: Name of academic advisor or department chair

Date: ____________________________

____________________________________ is currently an undergraduate student with a major in _________________.

____________________________________ 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 after 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 intended OPT employment start date? _______________________________________

   • 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 or I may have 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 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. ______

Signed: ________________________________ Date: ____________________________