

Global Education Office (GEO)

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F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING ONLINE APPLICATION

I. EXPLANATION

This handout explains one type of off-campus work authorization for F-1 students called Post-Completion “Optional Practical Training” (OPT) which allows for up to 12 months of full-time employment.

II. SUMMARY OF RULES & LIMITATIONS

Employment Rules

- A job offer is NOT required to apply for OPT.
- The employment must be in the student’s field of study and in the U.S.
- Students on “post-completion” OPT MUST be engaged in employment, self-employment, or volunteer work in the field of study listed on the I-20 for a minimum of 20 hours per week in order to be considered “employed.”
- On the start date of your OPT, you will have access to the SEVP Portal – you must log in and update your profile within 10 days.
- Students on post-completion OPT MUST report employment information (and physical address) at the beginning of the work period and within 10 days of change in their SEVP portal.
- The 12-month OPT authorization begins on your “start date” (appearing on your EAD card), even if you have not yet found employment. You cannot begin employment until you have received the EAD card and the start date is reached.
- All days of unemployment during post-completion OPT are limited to **90 days in total**, and unemployment begins on the date of your employment authorization, unless you have reported your employer through the SEVP Portal
- Changing employers while on OPT is authorized if the new employment is within your field. Changes in employment must be reported to the SEVP Portal within 10 days of the change.
- Previous authorization for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) affects OPT *only* if you were authorized for a TOTAL of 12 months or more of full-time CPT during your program.
- Students must have OPT authorization to work on-campus after the program end date on their I-20, even if they are still enrolled as a UNM student.

Additional Periods of OPT

- Your OPT is issued based upon completion of a specific degree level. Once OPT has been granted for that level, it is no longer possible for you to receive a new period of OPT for completion of a program at the same or lower degree level.
- Students who start a higher educational level after completing one 12-month period of OPT may request another 12 months of OPT upon completion of the higher degree level.
- Students whose academic degree is in a qualifying STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) field may request a 24-month STEM OPT extension if the student meets the regulatory criteria described in the STEM OPT handout and is completing an authorized period of OPT. To apply for a 24-month STEM OPT extension, students should make a STEM appointment with a GEO advisor and prepare their application 90 days before their initial 12-month OPT expires.

Application Deadlines and Considerations

- A student may apply for post-completion OPT up to **90 days** before the student’s academic program completion date (this may be before your graduation date) and up to 60 days after completion of the program. Apply as soon as possible to avoid delays in work start dates.
- We recommend students make an appointment with an international advisor at GEO 95 days before you complete your program of study for the best chance of receiving the work authorization in time.

Lawful Status Requirements

- During OPT, you are still in F-1 immigration status; you are required to report through the SEVP portal: home address, employer's name and address, dates and changes of employer, and any changes in your immigration status. You must also obtain a travel signature on your current I-20 from GEO for international travel.
- If you leave the US for any reason after completing your program without an OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) and written proof of a job in your field of study, you will **not** be able to reenter to engage in OPT.
- To reenter the US to start or resume OPT after a temporary absence from the US, you will need: proof of employment, a valid EAD card, valid I-20 with a current travel signature, a valid passport, and a valid visa (some visa exceptions exist for travel to countries bordering the US – check with an advisor).

Costs

- The USCIS filing fee for OPT applications is **\$470**. Premium Processing is available for an additional **\$1685**.
- Premium processing can be added at any time and will expedite the process to one month from the time of premium processing payment.

III. Employment Eligibility Verification

When you begin to work, you and your employer must complete an "Employment Eligibility Verification" form (I-9 form), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. You will also need a Social Security number. If you do not have a Social Security number, you may apply for one with your OPT application. If you have a Social Security card which is marked "not valid for employment," take your passport, I-94 Departure Record, I-20, employer letter, and your EAD card to the office of Social Security Administration and apply for a new Social Security card. Note that your number will remain the same if you already had one, but the notation on the card should change to indicate that "employment is valid with authorization".

IV. Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the US less than five years are "non-residents for tax purposes" and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see IRS Publication 519, "US Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, your earnings ARE subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Tax returns must be filed as early as January and before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. ASK your employer to review the information about Foreign student taxation on the [IRS website](#) that tells them which taxes should be withheld from your paycheck and how much. The amount and type of taxes will depend on your tax residency status.

V. APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 1: Be Informed.

Read this entire handout thoroughly and carefully.

STEP 2: Receive your Department's Recommendation.

Your academic advisor or other authorized department personnel must complete the *Academic Advisor Recommendation Form for Optional Practical Training* found on page 5 of this handout. They must confirm the completion date of all degree requirements, either with thesis/dissertation or without thesis/dissertation. This form must be filled out and signed by your academic advisor. Electronic signatures are accepted, and the completed form should be emailed to the advisor who conducts your OPT appointment TOGETHER with the *Student Participation Start Date Form for Optional Practical Training* and the *OPT Student Responsibilities Contract* (see STEP 3).

STEP 3: Determine your OPT start date.

Complete the *Student Participation Start Date Form for Optional Practical Training* included on page 6 of this handout and read and sign the *OPT Student Responsibilities Contract* on pages 7-8 of this handout. If you are unsure about your OPT start date, leave the "start date" blank and discuss this with the International Advisor at your OPT appointment. The advisor can advise you on OPT start and end dates based on your individual plans.

STEP 4: Make an Appointment with an International Advisor at GEO.

After you have the required forms listed below (a&b), [schedule an OPT Application appointment](#) (these appointments are online and take approximately two hours.) If you're unsure about your start dates, wait until you discuss your options at your appointment.

- a) A completed Academic Advisor Recommendation Form, page 5 of this handout
- b) A signed OPT Student Responsibilities Contract, page 7-8 of this handout
- c) A Student Participation Start Date Form, page 6 of this handout

After your appointment, the International Advisor will review these documents; if everything is in order, recommend OPT in SEVIS and issue you a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation.

STEP 5: Receive the new I-20.

After attending an OPT appointment with an international advisor, you will receive the new I-20 by email within 3 to 5 business days of submitting your documents. **Your I-20 may have a new completion date to reflect the completion of your degree requirements.** Check that the OPT recommendation is properly recorded on pg. 2 of the I-20 and print and sign it. You will need to include a signed copy of this I-20 with your OPT application. (If you worked on CPT during your program, you will receive a screenshot of your CPT history, which you will also need to include in your application.)

STEP 6: Complete the USCIS application online.

Complete the USCIS online application within 30 days of the issuance date on the I-20. you will first have to create a USCIS account using a permanent NON-UNM email address at: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up After setting up the account, you will select:

- "File a form online"
- "Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)"
- "(c)(3)(B) Student Post-Completion OPT" eligibility category (do NOT select a different category!!!)

If you would like your GEO advisor to assist you with the online application, you may request an appointment with the advisor who issued your OPT I-20.

Scan these items to complete the online application: *Passport photo must be JPG, JPEG or PNG. Documents must be PDF, JPEG, TIF/TIFF and. Document names can only contain letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscore and parentheses.*

- official passport photo – you can take a photo of your torso and head against a white background with a smart phone. Go to this website: <https://tsq.phototool.state.gov/photo> to see the size and position ALWAYS upload your photo to this site to see if it meets the requirements. Physical photos do not always work. You will need the digital copy. **If you do not verify the photo on the above website, your application may be delayed!**
- I-94 (both sides if it is a paper card)
- government issued photo ID, such as a passport
- copy of I-20 *after you have signed it* (you will receive this after your OPT appointment)
- (if you ever worked on CPT)* screenshot of CPT work history (you will receive this with your OPT I-20)
- (if you ever had an EAD before)* front and back of previous EAD's

Information needed to complete the online application:

- country of citizenship/nationality
- I-94 admission record number
- last arrival date in the U.S., port of entry & status at entry (found by clicking on "[View Travel History](#)" on I-94 website)
- current passport number, expiration date, and issuing country
- current immigration status (F-1 STUDENT)
- SEVIS number (listed on I-20)
- Social Security number (if you have one)

Other information about the application:

- Your **\$470** filing fee payment is due when you submit. You can use credit, debit, or ACH payment. Once you submit payment, your application is also submitted, and you can no longer revise or edit the application.
- Once you submit your application, you will receive a case number immediately. With this, you can check your case status, documents, and case history at any time by accessing your USCIS account. You will also receive a paper receipt notice in the mail about 2 weeks from the time you received the case number.

STEP 7: Wait for the EAD card.

Once your application is received by USCIS, you will be given a case number and you can track your case status online. Your EAD card should arrive within 3-4 months of USCIS receiving your application. If you chose premium processing, 1 month. Your permission to begin OPT is not finalized until you have received an EAD card from USCIS. DO NOT START WORKING UNTIL YOU RECEIVE THE EAD CARD AND HAVE REACHED THE START DATE ON IT.

STEP 8: Provide GEO a copy of your EAD card, create your SEVP Portal account, and report your employment.

Once you have received your EAD card, you must provide GEO with a copy by emailing it to iadvisor@unm.edu. As soon as you receive the card AND your employment "start date" has been reached, you are authorized to start working. On or after your OPT start date, you will receive an email message from SEVP with instructions for setting up your SEVP Portal account. Once you have set up your Portal account, you must report your employment information as well as any changes in your personal information directly to the SEVP Portal. You must report your employer's name and address to the Portal as soon as your "start date" begins or you will start accumulating days of unemployment. *If you have not reported your employment information through the SEVP Portal, your 90 days of unemployment will start on this date automatically.*

REMEMBER:

- OPT is still F-1 student status. You **MUST** report ALL employment, address, and phone changes in the SEVP portal throughout your entire OPT period and follow all other rules to maintain legal F-1 status.
- The end date on the new I-20 is the date your "on-campus" and/or CPT work permission ends.
- It is illegal to begin the OPT position-before the EAD card is received and the start date is reached.
- You are only authorized to work within the dates on the EAD card.
- Students on post-completion OPT can accrue **ONLY 90 days** total of unemployment.
- OPT permission is automatically terminated if you transfer to another school or you start studying at another educational level.
- Email iadvisor@unm.edu if you change visa status or permanently leave the US while on OPT.

***WORKING IMPROPERLY OR WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION IS A SERIOUS VIOLATION OF YOUR STATUS AND COULD LEAD TO DEPORTATION OR EXCLUSION FROM THE US.**



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ACADEMIC ADVISOR RECOMMENDATION FORM FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

To: Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel

The below-named student is applying for permission to engage in employment for Optional Practical Training (OPT) as provided in regulations of the Department of Homeland Security for F-1 students. OPT is employment in a job related to the student's field of study and is intended to enhance and supplement the formal, classroom education. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must authorize OPT.

Before this authorization can be granted, GEO must have a statement from the student's academic advisor confirming the date the student is expected to complete all degree requirements. (A graduate student may apply for OPT before completion of the thesis or dissertation, provided that they have completed all other requirements for the degree such as coursework, comprehensive exams, and thesis/dissertation proposals). The academic advisor should be reasonably convinced that the student will be able to complete by the date specified on the form. **The date of completion is not necessarily the end of the term or the graduation date, but the date all requirements for the degree are fulfilled (including defense and thesis/dissertation correction for graduate students).** Both dates are requested below.

Please complete the form below and return it to the student so that we may process this student's request. Should you have any questions, please feel free to call GEO at 277-4032.

****MUST BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED BY THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR OR AUTHORIZED DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL ONLY****

To: Global Education Office (GEO), 2120 Mesa Vista Hall, MSC06 3850

This is to certify that _____ has completed or is expected to complete all requirements for the degree on _____
 (Student's name)
 _____ and will receive the degree of _____ in the field or major of _____.
 (Date) (Field of Study)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS who want to do full-time OPT BEFORE degree completion:

Date all requirements for the degree **EXCLUDING** the thesis/dissertation were/will be completed by _____.

 (Name of Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel—Please Print)

 (Signature of Academic Advisor or Authorized Department Personnel)

 (Telephone Number and/or email address)

 (Date)



STUDENT PARTICIPATION START DATE FORM FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

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To: F-1 Student

In the process of applying for OPT, you must decide the date that your employment authorization will begin. It is important to remember that once applied for, the authorization may not be rescinded or changed except on special discretion of USCIS. **Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted and the date of the authorization has begun, it is not possible to have it canceled at all.** This means that after OPT is authorized by USCIS, inability to find an appropriate job, loss of job, or failure to complete requirements for a degree may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work. You need to be certain that you will want to engage in OPT BEFORE YOU APPLY. In addition, your OPT permission will be terminated if you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level and you will not be able to get any unused time back in a future application.

Please complete the form below and send it to iadvisor@unm.edu before your OPT appointment with an International Advisor.

****MUST BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED BY THE F-1 STUDENT SEEKING OPT****

I expect that if I get a position for OPT it will be in: _____
List all UNM major(s) here:

You will accrue days of unemployment toward the 90-day limit, so whether or not you have a job offer should be a consideration when selecting your OPT start date.

OPT Starting date: _____ Ending date: _____

Name of Student

Name of International Advisor that conducted OPT Session

Signature of Student

Date

Date of OPT Session

I hereby authorize GEO to receive, open and copy all mail related to OPT. I understand that GEO will forward information about all correspondence related to OPT to the most recent email address reported to GEO.

Personal Information:

Current Residential Address: _____

Permanent (non-UNM) email address: _____

Phone Number: _____

OPT STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES CONTRACT

RULES F-1 STUDENTS MUST FOLLOW WHILE ON OPT TO REMAIN LEGALLY IN THE US

International students are required to abide by US immigration laws and regulations throughout their stay in the US including the time that they are on authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT). Current Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations require F1 students on OPT to report any changes to their personal information or employment information through the SEVP Portal. Once reported, this information is transferred into the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Students who fail to comply with these requirements and do not report through the SEVP Portal are considered to be “out of status” by DHS.

Because failure to comply with these requirements will mean loss of legal status in the US, it is essential that you understand these reporting responsibilities. This form lists the specific information you must report through the SEVP Portal while on OPT in order to maintain legal student status. To report this information, SEVP will send you an email message on or shortly after your OPT startdate with instructions to create your SEVP Portal account. Please follow the instructions in that message to create your account and report your employment. It is YOUR responsibility to ensure that your SEVP Portal account is accurate and up-to-date for the duration of your OPT year. Any new information must be reported within 10 days of the change.

INFORMATION THAT ALL STUDENTS ON OPT MUST REPORT TO THE SEVP PORTAL TO MAINTAIN LEGAL STATUS:

1. Current, physical US address. This must be the place where you currently live and it must be updated within 10 days of making any change. A current email and phone number are also required.
Current, Mailing US address. This must be the address you use to receive mail.
2. Current US employer and address. *IF YOU DO NOT REPORT AN EMPLOYER IN YOUR SEVP PORTAL ACCOUNT, YOU WILL BE LISTED AS “UNEMPLOYED” AND WILL BE ACCRUING UNEMPLOYMENT DAYS.* If you accrue more than **90 days** of unemployment your SEVIS record may automatically terminate.
3. Employment Start Date and End Date/s. You must report employment within 10 days of your employment start date. (You can enter start dates in the past.) If you are currently employed, do not enter an “end date”.
4. Any changes or interruptions in employment, such as periods of “unemployment.” (Vacations while employed do not count as “unemployment.”)
5. Any change of non-immigrant status or permanent departure from the US.

When employment start and/or end dates are reported, an updated I-20 reflecting the change will be automatically emailed to you from GEO within 2-3 weeks of reporting the change.

OPT STEM EXTENSIONS:

If you have completed a STEM degree and you wish to apply for an OPT STEM extension, please send an email to iadvisor@unm.edu **4 months** prior to the end of your current OPT authorization so that we can provide you with further instructions on how to apply for a 24-month OPT STEM extension of your OPT.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR REENTRY WHILE ON AUTHORIZED OPT:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by an International Advisor at UNM within the last six months.
2. Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). Note that the EAD card says “not valid for travel” on the face of the card. This means that you cannot use the EAD alone to reenter the US, but must also have the signed I-20 and an employer letter.

3. Valid passport.
4. Valid F-1 visa page (if you are traveling to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days and not applying for a visa while there, you may be able to travel with an expired visa - ask an advisor for details).
5. Documentation or letter from your OPT employer on official letterhead, confirming that you are working for them on OPT in a field related to your studies. Note that this MUST be the same employer that you have reported through your SEVP Portal account. This employer should be listed on pg. 2 of your I-20.

Below is a list of documents F-2 dependents must have to reenter the US if they are traveling without the student:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by the International Advisor at UNM within the last six months.
2. Copy of the F-1 student (spouse/parent) SEVIS Form I-20 showing authorized OPT.
3. Copy of the F-1 student's Employment Authorization Document (EAD card).
4. Valid passport.
5. Valid F-2 visa page (if you are traveling to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days and not applying for a visa while there, you may be able to travel with an expired visa -ask an advisor for details).
6. Documentation or letter from the F-1 student's OPT employer, showing that the F-1 student is working on OPT. Note that this MUST be the same employer that the F-1 student reported through the SEVP portal. This employer should be listed on page 2 of your I-20.

Remember: If you do not have all of these documents you should not travel internationally or you risk not being able to reenter the U.S. to participate in OPT. Traveling outside the US is not recommended if your F-1 visa has expired and a new one is required to reenter the US. Consult with an International Advisor when contemplating travel outside the US and reentering to continue OPT.

I have read and understand my responsibilities as outlined above.

NAME (Print)

SIGNATURE

DATE