# Disclaimer

The Northwestern University Office of International Student & Scholar Services (OISS) offers guidance on Optional Practical Training (OPT) and OPT STEM processes as a courtesy to NU students. We make every attempt to ensure that we provide you with the most up to date information available. However, any advice provided to you by our office does not constitute legal advice. You should always independently check all deadlines and all OPT and STEM OPT application documents for accuracy before mailing them or submitting them online to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The OPT application is a personal application for which you are responsible. The application preparation and USCIS case decision will vary depending on the facts at issue in your particular case. While OISS exercises best efforts to provide you with the most current guidance, please be aware that USCIS may change its interpretation of applicable policies, procedures, regulations, and eligibility requirements at any time. OISS is not responsible for, and expressly disclaims liability for, any errors or omissions relating to your OPT application and any decisions made by USCIS. For legal advice, students are encouraged to consult with a licensed and experienced immigration attorney at their own expense.

What is OPT?

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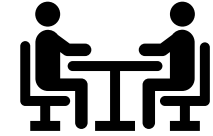
Optional
Practical
Training

OPT is temporary work authorization (permission to work).
Most students use OPT to authorize work after completing an academic degree.

What is OPT?

OPT ≠ VISA

- OPT (optional practical training) is a work authorization benefit for F-1 students only.

- OPT grants you 12 months permission to work after graduation.

- You do not need a job offer to apply!

- All OPT information is available on our website.
  https://tinyurl.com/NU-OISS-OPT

When to apply for OPT?

When to apply for OPT

Determine your final quarter of enrollment.

- This will be your program end date, as listed on your I-20.

- Graduating early? OISS Advisor will shorten your I-20 end date.

Plan ahead! Average OPT processing time, with USCIS, is 2-4 months.

When to apply for OPT

100
- **days** <u>before</u> I-20 end date: Earliest date you can apply with OISS.

90
- **days** <u>before</u> your I-20 end date: Earliest date you USCIS can receive your application.

60
- **days** <u>after</u> your I-20 end date: Latest date USCIS will accept your OPT application.

How to apply for OPT?

Step 1: Apply for an OPT I-20 with OISS

OPT Application Process

OISS assists with authorization

USCIS* Adjudicates

| Be in your final term | Apply through the OISS Portal | Obtain your OPT endorsed I-20 | Send OPT application To USCIS* | Receive your EAD** |

*USCIS = United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
**EAD = Employment Authorization Document

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20
https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Name:	**Education Level:**	MASTER'S
Visa Type: F-1	**Campus Site:**	Evanston Campus
Student ID:	**Program Dates:**	09/07/2021 - 12/10/2022
SEVIS ID:	**SEVIS Status:**	Active

Change Picture

1 Important Updates!   **2** Personal & Program   **3** Requests & Documents

Please review the following reminders to help you maintain your F-1 immigration status during your time at Northwestern.

Please check your NU e-mail account frequently to read important reminders and regulatory updates from the OISS.

ENROLLMENT

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

https://oissportal.northwestern.edu/
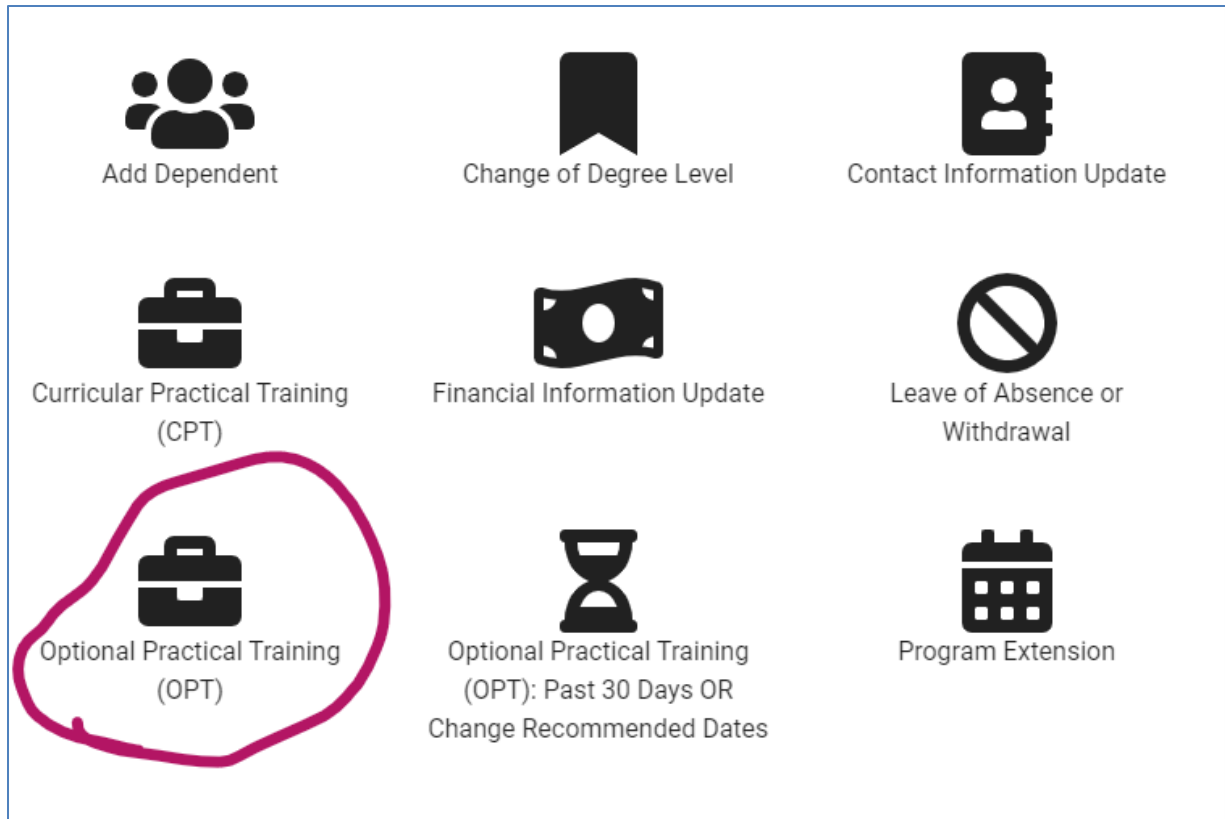
Read Eligibility for Post-Completion OPT & Maintaining F-1 Status on OPT, click "next" after each section. Type in your information in the Academic Program Details questionnaire.
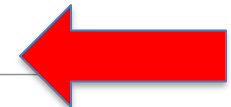
Select "post completion OPT" under OPT employment type, choose your requested OPT start and end dates, and select "full time". Click next and add your **academic advisor's** contact information.

Choosing an OPT Start Date

Term	Program End Date	Apply for OPT 90 days before program end date (Earliest date USCIS will receive application)	Earliest OPT Start Date	Latest OPT Start Date (End date of grace period & last date USCIS will accept OPT application)
Summer Quarter 2022	08/27/2022	05/29/2022	08/28/2022	10/26/2022
Summer Semester (Law) 2022	08/19/2022	05/21/2022	08/20/2022	10/18/2022
Fall Quarter 2022	12/10/2022	09/11/2022	12/11/2022	02/08/2023
Fall Semester (Law) 2022	12/15/2022	09/16/2022	12/16/2022	02/13/2023
Winter Quarter 2023	03/18/2023	12/18/2023	03/19/2023	05/17/2023
Spring Quarter 2023	06/10/2023	03/12/2023	06/11/2023	08/09/2023

Remember!
After mailing your application to USCIS students cannot change/alter their selected OPT start & end dates.

Choosing an OPT start date

Important Reminders:
- You do not need a job (offer) to apply for OPT!
- Still job searching? Choose a later start date.
- Traveling? Consider your travel plans.
- Applying late? Choose a later start date.

Still not sure?

Ask your OISS advisor by email, phone or scheduling an appointment in the OISS Portal!

Choosing an OPT start date

For PhD & thesis-based Master's students:

- You can apply for OPT before officially graduating (before defense)
- For PhD$\rightarrow$ ABD status you qualify to apply

- Finishing early? Once you apply for OPT, we shorten your I-20 to match term end date, and you cannot apply for an I-20 extension once you apply for OPT.

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

Who is your "**Approver**" for OPT purposes?

- Graduate students: Program Director, Dept. Chair, P.I.

- Undergraduates: Advisor from your major

  - "Academic advisor" is defined as a person associated with an academic college that has advisory responsibilities and can verify your course enrollment & academic plan or degree audit.

Approval

Approver Name *

✉ Approver Email *

Approver Title

Approver Organization

Approver Phone

Approver Role

200 characters remaining

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

OPT recommendation request is sent to your academic advisor via email.

Academic advisor certifies:

- You have completed all your course requirements
- You are going to graduate in the term you have indicated (or ABD)
- You are in good academic standing (no academic probation)

Step 1: Apply for OPT I-20

After recommendation received:

- OISS Advisor processes OPT Recommendation: Processing time is <u>one week.</u>

- Student will receive I-20 in the portal for download & email instructions

- Upon receiving OPT I-20, please remember to sign on the bottom of page 1 in ink.

Don't forget step 1!!

DO NOT...

…. Submit OPT Application online with USCIS <mark style="background-color: yellow; color: red">until</mark> you receive <u>an updated I-20 with OPT recommendation</u> on the 2nd page.

The updated I-20, with OPT recommendation on page 2, is only valid for 30 days from the day the OISS processed your OPT request.

Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

Post Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Checklists

All Students are reminded to review the Post Completion OPT Website (here) and disclaimer*.

ONLINE APPLICATION CHECKLIST - Review Instructions

☐ 2 x 2 Photo of You (digital): Upload one U.S. passport style photo. Follow guidelines outlined in online application to ensure photo is acceptable. Review the U.S. Department of State photo requirements website.

☐ Form I-94: Upload your most recent I-94 entry record. Download most recent Form I-94 at cbp.gov/i94, it is not necessary to provide your travel history.

☐ Employment Authorization Document: Upload your passport biographical page
   • If you previously applied for OPT, include copy of the front and back of your previous EAD card(s). *If you lost your EAD(s), upload a copy of your receipt notice or approval notice with a statement explaining your EAD was lost.*

☐ Previously authorized CPT or OPT: Any I-20s with CPT Authorization and/or OPT from any U.S. based institution. *If you lost any Northwestern CPT I-20s, ask your advisor for a CPT printout.*

☐ Form I-20: Most recent I-20 with Post Completion OPT Recommendation on page 2. Sign the bottom of page 1.

☐ Payment: Be prepared with bank card (debit or credit) or bank withdrawal information. Confirm filing fee on USCIS website.

APPLICATION BY MAIL CHECKLIST

☐ Form G-1145: Download from USCIS website - electronic notification form

☐ Form I-765: Download from USCIS website - see sample I-765

☐ Form I-94: Include a copy of your most recent I-94 entry record. Download Form I-94 at cbp.gov/i94, it is not necessary to provide your travel history.

☐ Form I-20: Most recent I-20 with Post Completion OPT Recommendation on page 2. Sign the bottom of page 1.

☐ Copy of Initial or Transfer Pending I-20 from Northwestern University
   • *If you have lost this I-20, please include copy of the oldest I-20 from Northwestern.*
   • *Include copy/copies of I-20s from previous U.S. based institutions.*

☐ Copy of ANY I-20s with CPT Authorization on 2nd page - from Northwestern AND any other U.S. based institutions.

☐ Copy of Passport Biographical Page

☐ Copy of U.S. F1 Visa Stamp (even if it is expired)

☐ 2 NEW U.S. passport style photos -Taken within last 6 months. Write full name & I-94 number on back of photos. Review the U.S. Department of State Photo requirements website.

☐ Payment: Personal Check, Money Order, or Cashiers Check. Made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security". Confirm filing fee on USCIS website.

☐ If you previously applied for OPT, include a copy of the front and back of your Employment Authorization Document(s) - EAD(s): *If you lost your EAD(s), include a copy of your receipt notice or approval notice with a statement explaining your EAD was lost.*
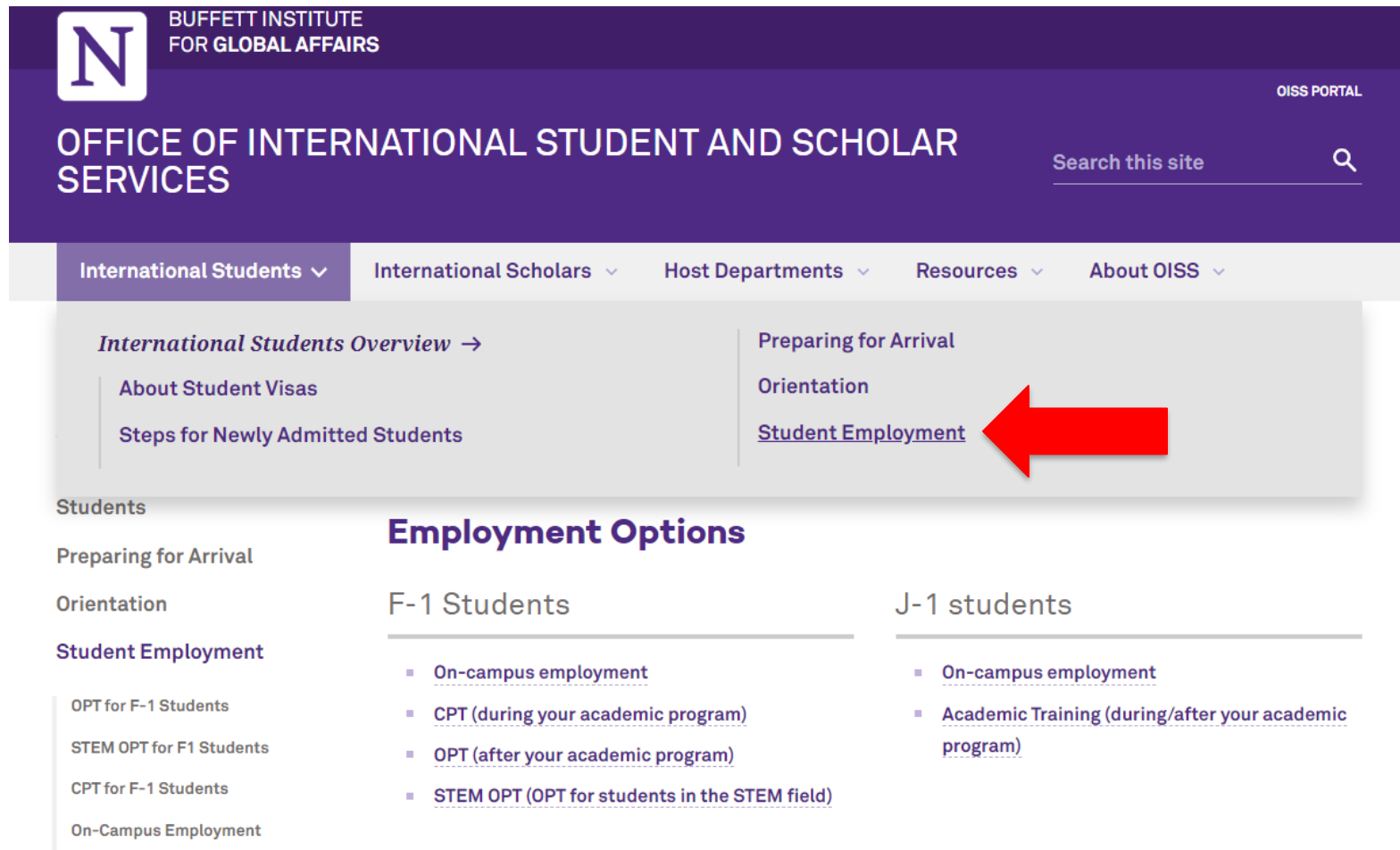
*Disclaimer: The Northwestern University Office of International Student & Scholar Services (OISS) offers guidance on Optional Practical Training (OPT) and OPT STEM applications as a courtesy to NU students. We make every attempt to ensure that we provide you with the most up

- **Review - OPT Instructions & Checklist**

- Have specific Questions? Connect with your OISS Advisor via email or by appointment.

Use our website!
Northwestern.edu/international

Use our website!
Northwestern.edu/international

Step 2: Send your OPT application to USCIS:

- Visit - https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

- Online application does not require as many documents to be uploaded.

- Full online application <u>instructions</u> found on our website

- $410 Fee

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Sign In

Email *

[   ]

Password *

[   ]

Forgot your Password?   Show Password

Sign In

https://my.uscis.gov/

Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

Form I-765: Mailing Address

- Input U.S. mailing address that is valid 6 months into the future

- Sign up for USPS Informed Delivery – Free Service

- If you are moving:
  - Ask a friend, family, peer is they can help receive mail for you.
  - Rent a Post Office Box (PO Box) from USPS or UPS

Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

- Most recent I-94 number
  (not the travel history)

- If you cannot retrieve the number or details are incorrect, contact your OISS advisor.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Securing America's Borders

Most Recent I-94

Admission (I-94) Record Number : 51415565885
Most Recent Date of Entry: 2017 July 25
Class of Admission : F1
Admit Until Date : D/S
Details provided on the I-94 Information form:

Last/Surname :
First (Given) Name :
Birth Date :
Passport Number :
Country of Issuance : China

OPT Application Documents
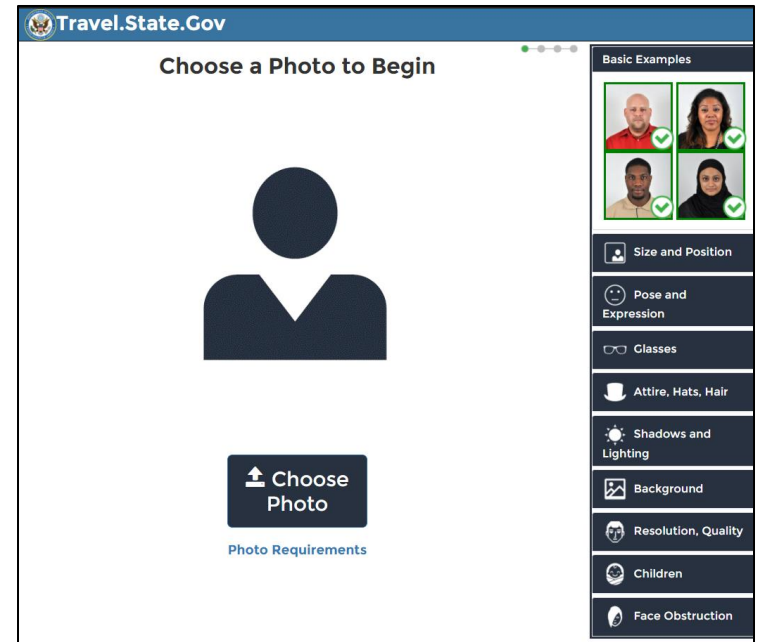**Online ONLY**

Passport Photo:

Use Photo Composition Tool:

- Linked in online application

Confirm your photo (jpeg) is accepted.

OPT Application Documents

Application fee

Current fee: $410 (verify on uscis.gov) *possible fee increase in the future*

- Students can now pay online with USCIS.
- Only use U.S. Based Accounts – Credit, Debit, or Direct Bank Withdrawal.
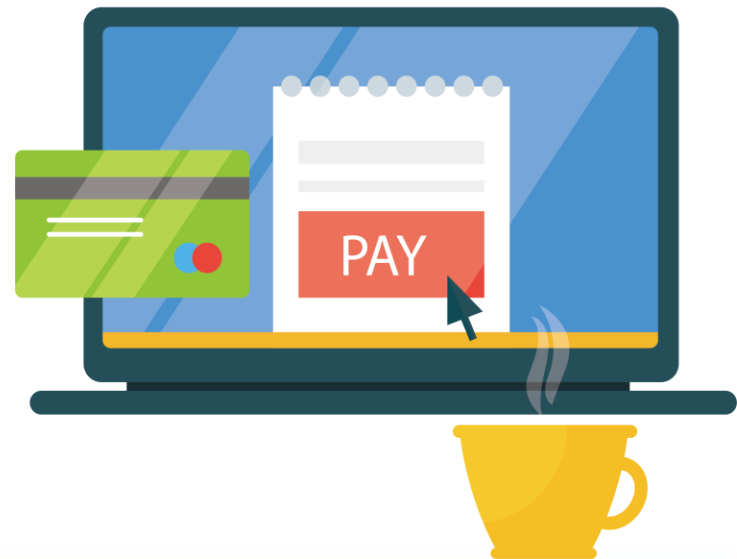
Step 2: Send your application to USCIS

Submit your application online to USCIS <u>as soon as possible after receiving your updated OPT endorsed I-20</u>

- Students must submit online or mail OPT application to USCIS **within 15 days** from receiving confirmation your OPT request has been processed
- Make a copy of all your application documents

After Submitting OPT Application

Online application:

- Download receipt notice (I-797c) immediately upon submission

Within 2 to 4 months (hopefully):

- Receive approval notice (I-797) and EAD!

- Do not start working until you receive your EAD and the start date arrives.

Possible Outcomes for OPT Application

1. OPT Approved

2. **Request for Information**

3. **OPT Rejected or Denied**

If #2 or #3 happen:
Do not panic!
Contact your OISS Advisor and email them a copy of the notice.

After Submitting OPT Application

After your I-20 program end date <u>you are still in status</u>.

While you wait for your OPT Approval **and** Employment Authorization Document (EAD):

Students Can:

- Take a break! You earned it!
- Travel in the U.S. or internationally.
- Search, apply, and interview for jobs.

Students Cannot:

- Work (paid and un-paid).
- Re-enter the U.S. - must have EAD

Travel - International

Before I-20 end date

International Travel is permitted!

Travel with standard documents:
- I-20, Passport, F-1 Visa Stamp

After I-20 end date

International travel is permitted!

New documentation required!
- **You must have EAD** to re-enter the U.S.
- Along with your I-20, Passport, and F-1 Visa Stamp
- *Eventually - travel with your offer letter.*

Travel - International

Remember:

While on OPT - **your I-20 travel signature is only valid for 6 months**.
- Request a reprint through the OISS Portal!

Students **may renew F-1 visa stamp**!
- Plan accordingly! Always a risk of delay or denial
- Travel with a copy of your NU transcript, [status letter](), and job offer letter
- Talk to your supervisor! Tell them you are travelling for your visa renewal and there is possibility of delay

ALWAYS Re-enter in F-1 Status!

OPT Document Reminders:

- Confirm your name is spelled correctly on EAD.

- Check your EAD dates - should be one year minus a day.

- **EAD is not a form of identification**. Only needed when requested by employer, SSN Application, Driver's License, or international travel.

- Make copies - physical and electronic scans.

Appropriate OPT Employment

Must be 20+ hours per week

Must be directly related to your field of study at NU

- Can be paid or unpaid (including internships)
- Can be work for multiple employers
- Can be contract work or through an agency
- Can be self-employed

Keep accurate records of all employment!

90 Days of Unemployment

- 90 days are **<u>cumulative.</u>**

- Unemployment days begin on OPT start date (printed on EAD). OPT start date is not always the same as the requested OPT start date.

- **No grace period after reaching all 90 days** - make plans to depart the U.S. as soon as possible and contact your OISS Advisor.

SEVP Portal

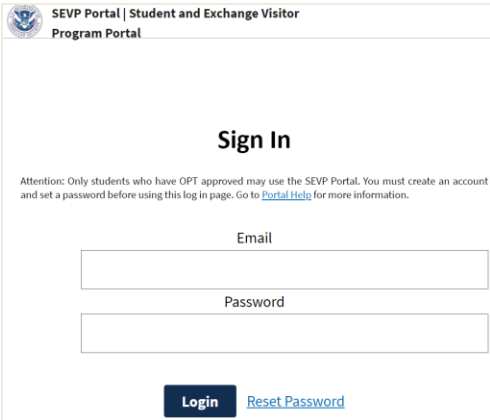https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

SEVP will email you a link to create your SEVP Portal account – <mark>on OPT start date.</mark>

- Submit an SEVP Portal Reset Request in the OISS Portal if:

  - You do not receive an email from SEVP during the first week of OPT

  - Your SEVP Portal account is locked

SEVP Portal

https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

Reporting is required:

- Update your US address within 10 days of moving.

- Update your US employment information within 10 days of starting/stopping a job.

- Report brief 3 to 4 sentences on how job relates to your major area of study.

Reporting late?

- Submit OPT Employer Update through OISS Portal.

STEM OPT Extension:
[24 Months](#)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs qualify for 24 additional months of OPT.

Eligible students may apply for the STEM OPT Extension approximately 3 months before your Post Completion OPT end date.

Employer must be E-Verified & position must be paid.

After the OPT EAD End Date

- **<u>You cannot work.</u>**

- You have a 60-day grace period to stay in the U.S.

- You can transfer to another U.S. university to begin a new academic program.

Contact Us

Email your advisor based on the first letter of your family name!

- **A-D:**   **hongji.wang@northwestern.edu**

- **E:**   **mark.zajac@northwestern.edu**

- **F:**   **rkrein@northwestern.edu**

- **G-L:**   **stephanie.cisneros@northwestern.edu**

- **M-T:**   **angelica.garcia@northwestern.edu**

- **U-Z:**   **ryan.radebaugh@northwestern.edu**

- **Kellogg MS:**   **international-advising@kellogg.northwestern.edu**

Questions?

Please ask your OISS Advisor any OPT questions.

Google, WeChat, Reddit are full of false information, so please ask us or consult northwestern.edu/international instead !

Please do not ask your friends (they may also give you incorrect information)!

We are here to help you through the OPT process.

Questions?