

Optional Practical Training Workshop



Presented by the
International Student and Scholar Office
UNC Charlotte

What is it?

- 12 months of off-campus work authorization based upon completion of an academic degree (continues F1 status).
- Work must be in your field of study, at your level of study.
- Must be 'recommended' by ISSO (results in new I-20) and 'approved' by DHS (results in Employment Authorization Document EAD).



Eligibility

- Must have completed at least one full academic year in a *student status*.
- Must currently be in valid F1 status.
- Fulltime OPT available upon completion of coursework (thesis/dissertation students) or completion of degree.
- No job offer necessary to apply.
 - Must find job with in 90 days of EAD Start Date!



When to Apply

Application Timeline and When to pick Start date

- Can apply up to 90 days prior to program completion or as late as 60 days after program completion.
 - May 12, 2017- Sp. 17 Graduation: February 11– July 11
 - June 28, 2017- Sum. 1 Graduation: March 27- August 27
 - August 10, 2017 Sum. 2 Graduation: May 9 – Oct 9
- USCIS processing time can take 90 days (and sometimes beyond).
 - Recommend applying before graduation



OPT Start Date



- Can be as early as: Completion of required coursework (thesis/dissertation students) or completion of program
 - May 12, 2017 Spring Graduation: May 13 (Sat)
 - June 28, 2017- Sum. 1 Graduation: June 29 (Thurs)
 - August 10, 2017 Sum. 2 Graduation: August 11 (Fri)
- Or as late as: 60 days following program completion
 - July 11, 2017 (Tue) – Spring graduates
 - August 27, 2017 (Sun)- Summer 1 graduates
 - October 9, 2017 (Mon)- Summer 2 graduates
- Or anywhere in between – you choose!
But, once you request your start date with the ISSO, you may not change the date...



How do I choose?



- Consider the following:
 - USCIS processing time
 - Interviews/job search
 - Holidays and weekends
- Understand that you cannot control nor predict your future, you can only make an educated guess based upon what you know and what you plan.



What about the OPT end date?

- 12 months of OPT within a 14-month window post completion of degree
- 60-day 'grace period' to pack-up belongings and leave US or change to another visa status: no work or re-entry to US during this time



Special Considerations

- Fulltime OPT available upon completion of coursework (thesis/dissertation students) but must defend within 9 months of proposed OPT start date.
- No extensions of I-20s are allowed
- STEM extensions for qualified students (24 month, E-verify)
- 'Cap Gap' work authorization for period of time between end of OPT and start date of H1-B



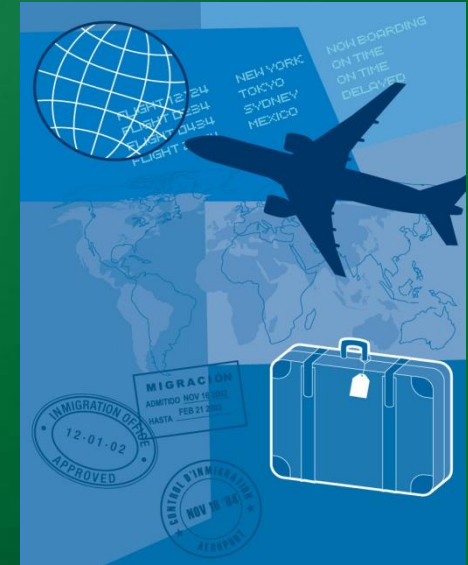
Maintaining Status While on OPT

- Required Reporting Responsibilities within 10 days to ISSO
 - Change of address
 - Change of employment (end job, begin new job, change location, return to home country)
 - Use web form at <http://isso.uncc.edu/OPUpdate.htm>
- 90 days of ‘unemployment’ allowed (from start date on EAD)
 - ‘Employment’ = fulltime, part-time, unpaid internship, self-employment (all in field of study)
 - May change employers or have more than 1 employer
 - Written documentation of employment recommended



Travel while on OPT

- Short-term travel is allowed but after EAD is received
- Must have necessary documents for re-entry
 - Valid passport (at least 6 months into the future)
 - Valid F1 visa stamp in passport
 - I-20 with travel signature within past 6 months
 - EAD
 - Employment offer letter



What about paying taxes?

- Federal & State taxes will be withheld ☹️
- Less than 5 years in F1 status = no FICA, social security, Medicare taxes withheld 😊
 - Check for accuracy on your 1st paycheck – don't wait!
- Understand your tax treaty (if applicable)
- Make friends with your human resources manager!
- Consult IRS publication 519 for details



How do I apply?



- Once you've decided on your OPT start date, submit your request for new I-20 with Advisor Recommendation form at <https://isso.uncc.edu/webform/optional-practical-training-opt-data-form>
- Click submit and **follow instructions:**
 - Allow 5 business days for processing then go to ISSO **Thursday 2-4 or Friday between 10-12**
 - Take your documents for review with an advisor. (see handout for full listing)
 - You will collect your new I-20 at that time.
 - Mail your complete application **WITHIN 30 DAYS** to USCIS



I-765 Questions

- Name: Consistent with how name appears on passport/I-20 (watch spacing)
<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>
- Strange line/character formatting
- Valid address in the southeast
- Item #16: (C)(3)(B)
- Please do not e-file unless it's a last-minute application



EAD issues

- Employment can begin only when EAD is received and employment start date is reached.
- Risky having card sent to a friend then to you!
- Processing time pending 75 days:
 - USCIS customer service 800-375-5283 with request to “elevate” request (not “expedite”)



Processing time pending 90+ days:

- submit e-request either via web form OR phone but not both!



Other issues on OPT...

- Name issues
 - Misspellings
 - Lengthy names
- Additional 12 months of OPT upon completion of a higher degree
- Beginning a new degree program/'transferring out' of UNC Charlotte
- Changing status to H1 & notification to ISSO
- NC Driver's License expiration date: 60 day extension possible until EAD arrives



Ethical and Professional Job Search

UNC Charlotte expects any student accepting a job offer to honor their commitment to the accepted position and company by ceasing their job search upon accepting an offer.

When faced with an offer you are not sure about:

- Ask offering employer for 24 hours to consider.
- Inform any 'first choice' employers of your offer and ask if they have made their hiring decision yet.
- Based on what you learn, make the best decision you can and STICK WITH IT!

<http://career.uncc.edu/resources/policies>



Questions?

- ISSO Advising Hours
 - Monday/Friday: 10am-12pm
 - Tuesday/Thursday: 2pm-4pm
- OPT Review
 - Thursday: 2pm-4pm
 - Friday: 10am-12pm



Congratulations and

Good Luck!!

