Optional Practical Training Workshop

Presented by the
International Student and Scholar Office
UNC Charlotte
Workshop Preview

- OPT Overview
- Pre-Application Decisions
- Application
- EAD card in hand, now what?
- BONUS - Ethical Job Search
OPT Overview
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.
- Two-Step Approval:
  1. Receive a recommendation from ISSO (results in new I-20)
  2. Final approval by DHS (results in Employment Authorization Document, EAD)
Eligibility for OPT

Student Criteria:

- Has completed at least one full academic year in a student status
- Is currently in valid F1 status.
- Will not begin fulltime OPT until program completion
  - completion of coursework (thesis/dissertation students) or
  - completion of degree
- Has a job offer (optional)
  - No job offer necessary to apply.
  - But must find job within 90 days of EAD Start Date!
Pre-Application Decisions
When to Apply

Application timeline is based on program completion date.

(up to 90 days BEFORE)

(up to 60 days AFTER)

USCIS processing usually takes 90 days (and sometimes longer)
OPT Start Date

You choose!
But once you choose your OPT start date, you cannot change it.

OPT can begin 1 to 60 days after program completion

(1 to 60 days AFTER)
OPT End Date

OPT will end 12 months after OPT start date
OR
14 months after graduation (whichever is earlier)

--- 12 Months of OPT---
How do I choose?

• You choose!
  • OPT Application date
  • OPT Start date
• Consider the following:
  • USCIS processing time
  • Interviews/job search
  • Holidays/travel plans
• You cannot control nor predict your future, you can only make an educated guess based upon what you know and what you plan.
Thesis/Dissertation Students

• Flexibility in OPT start date
  • Fulltime OPT available upon completion of coursework
  • Defense date should be scheduled within first 6 months of proposed OPT start date.

• Time Management Challenges
  • It is hard to work full-time and finish a thesis/dissertation
  • You cannot extend your I-20 for more time to complete your Thesis/Dissertation
  • Cannot apply for a STEM extension without a copy of your diploma (which won’t be available if thesis or dissertation is incomplete).
How do I apply?

- Request I-20
  - Request new I-20 with Advisor Recommendation at [OPT I-20 Request Form](#)
- Prepare OPT application
  - Follow [F-1 OPT instructions](#)
  - After 5 business days, go to ISSO on a Thursday 2-4 or Friday between 10-12 for OPT REVIEW
  - Bring all documents listed in [F-1 OPT instructions](#)
  - 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)

• Valid address in the southeastern U.S.

• 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...

- NC Driver’s License expired before EAD arrives:
  - 60 day extension possible until EAD arrives
- Name issues
  - Misspellings
  - Lengthy names
EAD Card in Hand, Now What?
Reporting Requirements on OPT

Report within 10 days using ISSO Update Form

• Change of address
• Change of employment
  – end job
  – begin new job
  – change location
  – employer changes name
  – return to home country

• No new I-20 generated when employment is updated
Unemployment, no more than 90 days

Max 90 days of unemployment

- Counting from start date on EAD
- Employment = 20 hrs or more a week in your field of study, including:
  - unpaid internships
  - self-employment
  - changing employers
  - more than 1 employer
- Written documentation of employment recommended
- Unemployed 90 days = time to go home
Travel while on OPT

• Short-term travel is allowed AFTER EAD is received

• Must have necessary documents for re-entry
  • EAD card
  • Valid passport, at least 6 months into the future
  • Valid F1 visa stamp
  • I-20 signed for travel within 6 the past months
  • Employment offer letter

Card in hand? You can travel!
Paying taxes

- Federal & State taxes will be withheld 😞
- Less than 5 years in F1 status these aren’t withheld:
  - FICA
  - Social security
  - Medicare taxes

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
As EAD is ending

You may have options!

- ‘Cap Gap’ work authorization
  - For period of time between end of OPT and start date of H1-B

- Apply for a STEM extension (before EAD expires)
  - Students in STEM degrees eligible to apply
  - 24 month extension on top of 12 month OPT
  - See ISSO STEM OPT Extension instructions

- Grace period – up to 60 days after EAD expiration
  - May STAY in the U.S., cannot work or re-enter U.S. in F-1 status

- Transfer F-1 record to another university
  - Earn a higher degree = 12 more months of OPT
Bonus: Ethical Job Search Tips
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 (must sign-up online)
  • Thursday afternoons
  • Friday mornings

Congratulations and Good Luck!!