OPT Workshop

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

• What Is OPT?
• Pre Application Process
• OPT Application
• Waiting on OPT Approval
• While on OPT
What Is OPT?

• OPT stands for Optional Practical Training

• It is 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.

• Job offer is **NOT** necessary to apply!
1. Pre Application Process

- OPT Eligibility
- When Do I Apply for OPT?
- Choosing My OPT Start Date
- Special Note!
  - Thesis/Dissertation Students
OPT Eligibility Criteria Requirements

1. Pre Application Process

- Has completed at least one academic year in a student status
- Is currently in valid F-1 status

- Full time OPT cannot begin until program completion
- Completion of degree
  OR
- Completion of coursework (thesis/dissertation students)
When to Apply

- (up to 90 days BEFORE program end date)
- (up to 60 days AFTER program end date)

Application timeline is based on program completion date.
When to Apply

(up to 90 days BEFORE program end date)

Apply by **--- 90 days avg. USCIS processing---**

(up to 60 days AFTER program end date)

Apply by date

USCIS processing usually takes 90 days (and sometimes longer)

--- 90 days avg. USCIS processing---
OPT Start Date

OPT can begin 1 to 60 days after program completion.

(1 to 60 days AFTER)

OPT start date

OPT start date
Choosing OPT Start Date

Consider the following:

• USCIS Processing Time (average of 90 days)
• Interviews/Job Search
• Holidays/Travel Plans

Remember:

• Your requested start date must be within **60 days** after your program completion date.
• The “start date” is the date your permission to work begins.
  • You cannot work earlier than the start date, but you can start working later.
• It is **IMPOSSIBLE** to change the requested OPT date after the application has been mailed to USCIS. Choose your dates CAREFULLY.
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.
  - All on-campus employment ends by OPT start date.
- By discretion of ISSO we have the right to step in and say NO if you are not making normal progress toward your degree.

- 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?

1. Apply Online with Academic Advisor Recommendation
   - Request new I-20 based on start dates & Academic Advisor Recommendation through ISSO Connect.

2. Schedule OPT Review
   - Sign up for an OPT review session that is at least 5 business days after you submit your OPT I-20 Request.
   - Bring all documents listed in F-1 OPT instructions

3. Prepare OPT Application
   - Follow F-1 OPT I-765 instructions

4. Mail Application
   - Mail your complete application WITHIN 30 DAYS to USCIS
Tips For Form I-765

• Follow USCIS form I-765 instructions carefully
• If questions do not apply to you - type or print “N/A” unless otherwise directed
• Name:
  • Make sure it is consistent with how name appears on passport/I-20
• Address:
  • Valid address where you can receive mail for the next 100 days
• OPT Eligibility Category: (C)(3)(B)
• Space for Additional Information
  • List all previously used SEVIS numbers
  • List all previously authorized CPT or OPT
Waiting On OPT Approval

- Tracking Your OPT Application
- EAD Issues
- OPT Issues
- Managing your stress while waiting
Tracking Your OPT Application

- G-1145
  - Allows electronic notification from USCIS regarding application

- USPS Informed Delivery
  - Preview of your mail electronically before it arrives

- USCIS Case Status
  - Check your status once you have a receipt number
EAD (Employment Authorization Document) Issues

• Employment can begin only when EAD is received and employment start date is reached.
• EAD envelope cannot be forwarded (federal mail does not get forwarded)
• Look up your USCIS Case Status
  • If your case is outside normal processing time, submit an online inquiry rather than calling USCIS
Other Issues While Waiting on EAD

• NC Driver’s License expires before EAD arrives:
  • 60 day extension possible until EAD arrives
Managing Stress

Good Ideas

- Exercise
- Spend time on your hobbies
- Prepare resumes & cover letters
- Work on interviewing skills
- Focus on positive things in life

Bad Ideas

- Checking case status every HOUR
- Reading non-credible websites
- Pondering scary what-if’s
- Calling USCIS EVERY DAY
- Listening to friends on various social media platforms

3. Waiting On OPT Approval
While on OPT

• Reporting Requirements on OPT
• Unemployment on OPT
• Travel on OPT
• Taxes
• EAD Ending
Reporting Requirements on OPT

Report within 10 days using ISSO Update Form

1. Change of Address
2. Start/End Employment
3. Change of Employment Location
4. Change of Supervisor

A new I-20 is NOT generated when employment is updated
Unemployment, No More than 90 Days

- Max 90 days of unemployment during 12 months of OPT
  - Counting begins from the start date on EAD
- Employment must be 20 or more hours per week in your field of study, including:
  - unpaid internships
  - self-employment
  - paid employment
- You are allowed to have more than 1 employer and can change employers
- Keep employment offer letter for personal filing purposes
- Unemployed more than 90 days = violation of status
Travel Outside the US 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 F-1 visa stamp
  • I-20 signed for travel within the 6 past months
  • Employment offer letter
• Remember to send your I-20 to the ISSO at least 4 weeks in advance to get it signed before you 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!
Paying Taxes Cont.

Understand your tax treaty (if applicable)
• Make friends with your human resources manager!
• Consult IRS publication 519 for details
  www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-publication-519
• ISSO staff cannot answer tax related questions
  • Refer to the IRS website
As EAD Is Ending

- You may have options!

- 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

- ‘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 ONLY in STEM degrees are eligible to apply
  - 24 month extension on top of 12 month OPT
  - See [ISSO STEM OPT Extension instructions](#)
Ethical Job Search Tips
Ethical & 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**!
• DO NOT promise an early start date before your EAD start date/arrival

[http://career.uncc.edu/resources/policies](http://career.uncc.edu/resources/policies)
Beware of Scams

- Scam – A dishonest scheme; a fraud; a swindle
- You may receive calls from numbers that look like official offices such as 911 or the number for USCIS
- They may possess personal information such as your I-94 and passport numbers, birthday, address, etc.
- May threaten to terminate your immigration status or deport you if you do not pay them a sum of money immediately
  - Money wire, Bitcoin, Western Union, gift cards
- May tell you not to contact UNC Charlotte officials or local police
If you think, a call may be a scam, take a number and hang up. Do NOT send any money & Do NOT give personal information. Contact police to report.
Questions?

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

- **OPT Review (must sign-up online)**
  - Thursday afternoons
  - Friday mornings

- **Email and Phone Communication**
  - 704-687-7781 or intlsso@uncc.edu
  - 3 business days processing time for responses
  - Use only one communication method per question
  - Professional communication expected
CONGRATULATIONS & GOOD LUCK!