Northwest Nazarene University

Optional Practical Training Information

*General Information*: Optional Practical Training (OPT) enables international students to gain valuable work experience related to their fields of study. F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of full-time employment authorization for each higher level of education completed. Applications are filed with the Registrar, but it is the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) office which reviews the applications. While OPT is not employer specific, OPT work must be related to the field of study just completed.

*Eligibility*: International students who wish to gain OPT authorization must demonstrate that they are in valid F-1 status. They must have been enrolled full time for a full academic year prior to the OPT start date.

*Pre-completion vs. Post-completion OPT:* While students may apply for OPT prior to the completion of their programs of study, timing issues prevent this from being a realistic option for most students. OPT applications are reviewed by the USCIS, which can take up to three months to process the application. For this reason, most students wait until their final semester of study before applying for OPT.

*Extensions:* Some Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math students may apply for a 17-month extension. See OPT Extension Instructions for more information.

*Application Timing:* Because OPT is authorized by the USCIS, students must pay careful attention to when they file. OPT applications must *be received by USCIS* within 60 days of the end date of a student’s program of study. We therefore require that students submit their OPT applications to the Registrar at least 10 days prior to the end of that period. Students may apply up to 90 days before their program end date.

*Starting OPT*: Students may specify the date they wish to begin OPT. That start date must fall within 60 days following the completion of their course of study. Once students have specified a preferred start date and the application has been sent, the start date is not easily altered. Please choose carefully. Students may not begin working until they have received their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.

*Travel while on OPT:* When students have been approved for OPT they are still in F-1 visa status and therefore require a valid travel signature and a valid F-1 visa *in addition* their valid EAD to re-enter the United States. Because regulatory language states that students who have been approved for OPT are only eligible to re-enter to ‘resume’ employment, we have been told that students who travel before they have secured a job may be denied entry to the United States. We urge students to be cautious if traveling before employment has been secured. If an emergency requires you to leave the U.S. while your OPT is pending or before you have found a job, a status letter from the Registrar is generally helpful.

*Unemployment during OPT period:* The April 2008 regulations prohibit students from being unemployed for more than 90 days during the initial 12-month period of OPT. Student must report to the Registrar when they begin working for an employer and when they stop working for that employer. If unemployed for more than 90 days total, a student is considered to be in violation of their status.