



# F-1 Initial 12-Month OPT Information Packet

## **What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?**

OPT is practical work experience in your field of study (typically after completion of a degree) and Initial OPT can last up to 12 months. Students on OPT are still considered to be F1 students at EMU even if working elsewhere in the U.S. The Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is not a working permit; it is an extension of your F1 status for the purposes of practical training.

## **Who is Eligible?**

- F-1 students who are legally maintaining their status; and
- Who have been enrolled full-time for at least 8 months; and
- Who will be completing a course of study this term; and
- Whose proposed OPT employment will be directly related to their course of study.

## **What should you do before applying for OPT?**

You are required to make an appointment with the international advisor for OPT processing; NO exceptions! Plan early to avoid the delay of your OPT application.

## **When should you apply for OPT?**

Students can apply for OPT up to 90 days before, and 60 days after, the program completion date on their I-20. Program completion is the last day of the term during which you're registered for all the necessary credits for your program. It does not mean graduation nor does it mean that you can delay your OPT application until fulfilling incomplete credits.

It is currently taking 2 -3 months for USCIS to process applications and you must have your EAD card in-hand in order to start work. Your OPT may end no later than 14 months after your program completion date.

## **What should you know when applying for OPT?**

- This OPT packet contains detailed instructions for preparing your OPT application; please follow these instructions to avoid delay of your application. The packet includes:
  - The OPT application procedure
  - List of required documents to bring to your international advising OPT appointment
  - A final checklist to review prior to mailing your application
  - Information for tracking your application status
  - Detailed photo specifications
- Once your application for OPT has been approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to the address on the I-765 form. The post office WILL NOT FORWARD mail from USCIS, if you change your address after you apply. USCIS will also not deliver your EAD to a PO Box.
- It is impossible to cancel your practical training once you have received your EAD; the time granted on your EAD card will be counted regardless of your actual employment. You will not receive a refund of the fee paid and you are unable to apply for OPT again, based on that degree.

## **What should you know during OPT?**

- While on OPT you are still an NMC F1 student. See the "Important OPT information" handout in this packet to learn about your responsibilities as an OPT student. Remember, failure to maintain your immigration status can jeopardize your OPT employment.



## Important OPT Information

**While on the Initial OPT period, you are still considered an EMU F-1 student, you are required to READ and FOLLOW these instructions. Please keep this information for your reference.**

**During OPT, You MUST keep the Admissions Office informed:**

- Submit a copy of your **EAD card** to the Admissions Office upon receipt
- Report all **address changes (both in the U.S. or your home country) and name changes** to the Admissions Office within 10 days of occurrence. Your address must describe where you live; it cannot be a PO Box or an office address.
- Report **Employment Information** within 10 days of any change; this includes employer **name, address and telephone number**
- Report to the Admissions Office all **periods of unemployment** within 10 days of any change
- Submit a copy of all **Change of Status** application receipt and approval notices, upon receipt

**Don't forget:**

- You can't work until you have your EAD card **in-hand and the start date is valid**
- Your **OPT will automatically terminate** if you transfer to another school or begin to study at another educational level
- You may not accrue more than **90 days of unemployment** during the initial 12-month OPT period
- If eligible for the **17-month STEM OPT extension**, your application **must be received before** the end date of your initial OPT
- You have another **60-day grace period** after your OPT ends

**Travel during OPT:**

Traveling during OPT can be risky; we suggest you email the international advisor prior to purchasing an airline ticket. If you travel, you will definitely need:

- **I-20** which includes current employment information and an DSO (international advisor, designated school official) travel signature dated within the past 6 months
- **Passport**, valid at least 6 months into the future
- **Visa** stamp that will be valid upon re-entering the U.S.; If your visa is expired please speak to the international advisor prior to making any travel arrangements
- **Valid EAD card**
- **Proof of employment.** Carry copies of recent pay checks AND a letter from your employer indicating you will have a job upon your return.

**Dependent Travel** – Since OPT is not noted on dependent I-20s, an F2 dependent must carry copies of the F1 student's I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card, and proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

If you are unemployed or your OPT application is pending, talk to an OIS advisor before buying an airline ticket.

Other information you may need to know:

- **Taxes** – Generally, if you've been in the United States less than 5 years, you should be exempt from Social Security Tax & Medicare Tax (FICA) (See Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "US Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, earnings are subject to applicable federal, state & local taxes unless your country has a tax treaty with the USA exempting you from payment. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15th each year, for the previous calendar year.
- **Health Insurance** – It is extremely important that you have health insurance while living in the U.S. If your employer doesn't provide health insurance, you may be eligible to continue your student policy. You must show proof of health insurance for the duration of your OPT as you are still considered an NMC student.



# OPT Application Procedure

- Step 1: Obtain and read through this entire OPT packet
- Step 2: Assemble the documents required for your application
- Step 3: Make an appointment to see the international advisor to finalize your application
  - a. Make certain you have read this entire packet and have questions ready
  - b. Bring all the required documents, forms, photos and a check for \$380.
- Step 4: Mail Application – Get Receipt Notice – Track status
- Step 5: EAD – Submit photocopy to the Admissions Office
- Step 6: Address – Report any changes to the Admissions Office
- Step 7: Employer – Report name and address of employer to the Admissions Office
- Step 8: Periods of Unemployment – Report to the Admissions Office

## OPT Application Required Documents

When you meet with an international advisor, you need to bring the following documents:

- Completed 12-Month **OPT request Form**
- Completed G-1145 Form E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance ([www.uscis.gov/g-1145](http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145))
- **Academic Advisor Letter** – on NMC letterhead (Aviation Students)
- 2 full, **passport size photos** – gently print your name & SEVIS number on the back of each photo
- **Initial, stamped I-20**
- **Previous I-20s** from other U.S. schools (for transfer students only)
- **Original Passport** with **I-94**
- **Photo Identification** (driver's license or student ID)
- **Check for \$380 made payable to the US Department of Homeland Security** (do not abbreviate) and include your SEVIS N# in the memo field.
- **Photocopy of any previous EAD cards** and I-20 with previous OPT authorization
- **A copy of a job offer letter**, if applicable

### During the OIS OPT advising session we will:

1. Prepare I-765 form ([www.uscis.gov/i-765](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765)),
2. Prepare a new I-20,
3. Assemble your application materials and
4. Provide an envelope for mailing your application

# Final Checklist for Mailing

Once you have met with the International advisor, you will need to submit the following list of items to USCIS:

- G-1145** E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
- 2 passport size, color **photographs**
- Personal check** for **\$380**, made payable to the *US Department of Homeland Security* (do not abbreviate) and include your **SEVIS N#** in the memo field.
- I-765** Application for Employment Authorization, OIS will prepare during appointment
- Academic Advisor Recommendation Letter**
- Screen print of **SEVIS OPT screen**
- Photocopy of **new I-20 requesting OPT** (not the original)
- Screen print of **SEVIS CPT screen** showing previous CPT authorizations, if applicable
- Photocopy of **previous EAD** cards and requesting I-20's, if applicable
- Photocopy of **original, initial I-20** used to enter the USA the first time as an F-1 student, with original US entry stamp
- Photocopy of all **transfer-pending I-20s**, if applicable
- Photocopy of both sides of your **current I-94**
- Photocopy of your **US Visa**
- Photocopy of the **picture page & expiration date** of your **Passport**
- 1 additional **photo identification** (driver's license, student ID, etc.)

## Mailing Address:

We recommend using an express mail service for sending your application. **If the address on your I-765 is in Michigan and you are using the US Postal Service Express mail**, your application should be mailed to:

USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036-1281

The US Postal Service is the only expedited delivery service that delivers to a PO Box address. If you use **another express mail service**, you will need to refer to the USCIS I-765 instructions for the correct Lockbox mailing address.

If you are using a **non-Michigan return address** on your I-765, you will need to refer to the USCIS I-765 instructions for the correct USCIS Lockbox mailing address.

If you later decide **NOT to mail your OPT application** to USCIS, you must notify the International advisor immediately so that we can cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS. Failure to inform OIS that you are not applying for OPT can cause future problems.

## Tracking your Application Status

Once your application has been accepted by the Lockbox facility, you should receive a **text message** and/or **email** indicating receipt and containing your **receipt number**. Within 2 – 3 weeks of sending your application you will receive a **“Notice of Action;”** this is proof that you have an application pending with USCIS. This document will also contain your **receipt number**. This receipt number can be used to check your **case status** on-line at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>

## Color Photograph Specifications

You **must** submit **two identical color photographs** of yourself taken **within 30 days** of the filing your OPT application.

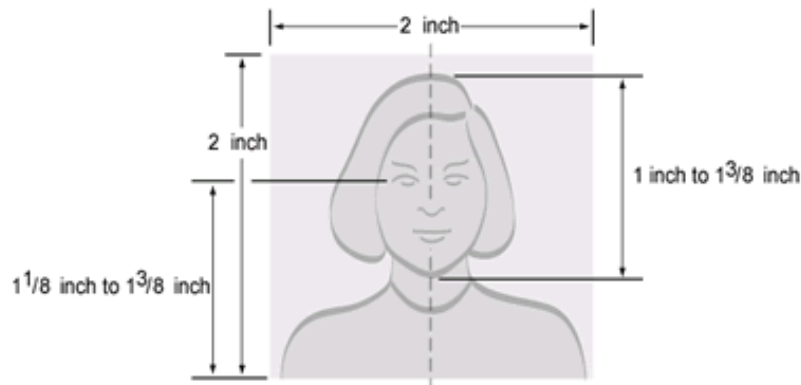
The **passport-style** photos must be:

- **2" x 2"**
- **full face**, frontal view
- have a **white to off-white background**
- printed on **thin paper** with a *glossy finish*
- be **un-mounted** and **un-retouched**
- Your **head must be bare** unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order of which you are a member

*Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and SEVIS Number on the back of the photo.*


## 7 Steps to Successful Photos

- ✓ Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- ✓ Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm)
- ✓ Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below)
- ✓ Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
- ✓ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
- ✓ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- ✓ Encourage subject to have a natural expression



## Sample Check & Academic Advisor's Letter

Your Name	1001
Your Address	
DATE	May 5, 2013
PAY TO THE ORDER OF	US Department of Homeland Security
	\$ 380.00
Three hundred eighty .....	
	DOLLARS
Your Bank Name	My Name
MEMO	N0001234567
⑆ 123456789 ⑆ 0000987654321 ⑆ 1001	

	1701 E. Front Street   Traverse City, MI 49686-3061 (231) 995-1000   (800) 748-0566   www.nmc.edu
<b>Northwestern Michigan College</b>	
To: Office of International Admissions Northwestern Michigan College 1701 E. Front Street Traverse City, MI 49686	
From: Mr. Advisor Name	
Date: February 13, 2013	
Re: Estimated Program Completion Date	
This is to certify that <u>NAME OF STUDENT AS ON I-20</u> is a full-time student in the <u>NAME OF DEPARTMENT</u> , pursuing a <u>NAME OF DEGREE PROGRAM</u> and is in the final stage of his/her program of study. Completion is fully expected by <u>MONTH DAY, YEAR</u> .	
Sincerely,	
<i>Mr. Advisor Signature</i>	
Mr. Advisor Name Title Name of Department	
Find it here.	



## Excerpts from: **Alien Liability for Social Security and Medicare Taxes**

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The full text can be found at: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129427,00.html>

In general aliens performing services in the United States as employees are liable for U.S. social security and Medicare taxes. However, certain classes of alien employees are exempt from U.S. social security and Medicare taxes as follows.

**Nonresident aliens**, in general, are also liable for Social Security/Medicare Taxes on wages paid to them for services performed by them in the United States, with **certain exceptions based on their nonimmigrant status**. The following classes of nonimmigrant's and nonresident aliens are exempt from U.S. Social Security and Medicare taxes:

**F-visas, J-visas, M-visas, Q-visas.** Nonresident Alien students, scholars, professors, teachers, trainees, researchers, physicians, au pairs, summer camp workers, and other aliens temporarily present in the United States in **F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2** nonimmigrant status are exempt on wages paid to them for services performed within the United States as long as such services are allowed by USCIS for these nonimmigrant statuses, and such services are performed to carry out the purposes for which such visas were issued to them.

### **Exempt Employment includes:**

- **On-campus student employment** up to 20 hours a week (40 hrs. during summer vacations)
- **Off-campus student employment allowed by USCIS.**
- **Practical Training student employment on or off campus.**
- Employment as professor, teacher or researcher.
- Employment as a physician, au pair, or summer camp worker

### **Limitations on exemption:**

- The exemption does not apply to spouses and children in F-2, J-2, M-2, or Q-3 nonimmigrant status.
- The exemption does not apply to employment not allowed by USCIS or to employment not closely connected to the purpose for which the visa was issued.
- The exemption does not apply to F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2 nonimmigrant's who change to an immigration status which is not exempt or to a special protected status.
- The exemption does not apply to F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1/Q-2 nonimmigrant's who become resident aliens.

The IRS has published regulations which stipulate that aliens who arrive in the United States on F, J, M, or Q visas will be assumed to be "NONRESIDENT ALIENS" but only to the extent that the assumption is consistent with the residency rules of section 7701(b) of the Code. Since the social security/Medicare tax exemption for foreign students, scholars, teachers, researchers, and trainees under the Code requires that the payee be a "NONRESIDENT ALIEN", then the social security/Medicare tax exemption ceases to exist at the point the payee becomes a "RESIDENT ALIEN" under the residency rules of section 7701(b) of the Code.

Thus, to summarize, both the Internal Revenue Code and the Social Security Act allow an exemption from social security/Medicare taxes to alien students, scholars, teachers, researchers, trainees, physicians, au pairs, summer camp workers, and other nonimmigrants who have entered the United States on F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1, or Q-2 visas and who are still classified as NONRESIDENT ALIENS under the residency rules of the Internal Revenue Code. As discussed above, **this means that foreign students in F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1 or Q-2 nonimmigrant status who have been in the United States less than 5 calendar years are still NONRESIDENT ALIENS and are still exempt from social security/Medicare taxes.** This exemption also applies to any period in which the foreign student is in "practical training" allowed by USCIS, as long as the foreign student is still a NONRESIDENT ALIEN under the Code. **Foreign students in F-1, J-1, M-1, Q-1 or Q-2 nonimmigrant status who have been in the United States more than 5 calendar years are RESIDENT ALIENS and are liable for social security/Medicare taxes** (unless they are exempt from FICA under the "student FICA exemption" ).

For more info see: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129427,00.html>



# Initial 12-month OPT Request Form

### Student Information

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Surname/Family Name                      First/Given Name(s)                      Middle Name(s)

SEVIS #: \_\_\_\_\_ NMC Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_

NMC Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Program of Study: \_\_\_\_\_ Expected Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional Practical Training (OPT)** for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on, practical work experience that is complimentary to your academic program. An F-1 students may be eligible for 12 months OPT, provided this practical training is **directly related to your field of study**, is **commensurate** with your education level, and is **recommended** by your academic department or advisor.

**Desired OPT Start Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **and End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Program End Date →		Check your I-20
Application	<b>Earliest</b> date for USCIS to receive application	90 days prior to program end date
	<b>Latest</b> date for USCIS to receive application	60 days after program end date
Employment	<b>Earliest</b> employment start date	1 day after program end date
	<b>Latest</b> employment start date	60 days after program end date

In making this request I understand and agree to abide by all requirements, including:

- I will **report all changes** in my U.S. or overseas address to the Admissions Office within 10 days of such change
- I will provide the Admissions Office with a **copy** of my Employment Authorization Document (EAD) upon receipt
- I understand that I **cannot begin working until I have my EAD card in-hand**
- I will **report** the name and address of my **employer** to the Admissions Office within 10 days of starting work
- I will **report** all periods of unemployment to the Admissions Office within 10 days
- I know I **require health insurance coverage** for the duration of my F-1 status, including the OPT period

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Received by International Office on: \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Signature: \_\_\_\_\_