



# Northwestern State University

## International Student Resource Center

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## OPT (Optical Practical Training)

### OVERVIEW

OPT is temporary employment authorization for **F-1 students** to gain experience in jobs **directly related** to their major area of study. OPT is recommended by the ISRC and authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Students are eligible for a total of 12 months of OPT per education level (e.g. Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate). The authorization can take 2 or 3 months to obtain. Students do not need a job offer to apply for OPT.

Students may apply for OPT authorization during the academic program, after the program completion, or a combination of both. Most students save up their 12 months of OPT to work after they graduate. If a student does not have an internship or practicum opportunity, pre-completion OPT could be an option.

### Important:

- An offer of employment does not have to exist prior to applying for OPT authorization.
- Twelve months or more of full-time CPT (Curricular Practical Training) makes you ineligible for OPT. (Part-time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility.)
- On-campus employment does *not* count against the 12-month OPT eligibility.
- You are eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT per academic level. For example, you may apply for 12 months of OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and then another 12 months after completing a master's degree.
- You may apply for OPT authorization during your academic program, after your program completion, or a combination of both.
- The approval process for USCIS takes between **three to four months**.
- You must wait until after you receive your EAD card (Employment Authorization Document) to begin working.

### ELIGIBILITY

- You are currently in **F-1** status.
- You have been registered **full-time** in a degree program for **at least one academic year** in valid **F-1** status. Or will complete one academic year by the date the OPT approval begins.
- The proposed OPT **must be directly related** to your major area of study.
- You are present **in the U.S. in valid F-1 status** at the time of application. You will not be eligible to apply for OPT if you are outside of the U.S. at the time of application.

### TYPES OF OPT

#### I. **Pre-completion.** There are three ways to engage in pre-completion OPT:

##### A) **During the student's annual vacation.**

- Student must intend to register for the next term.
- OPT may be part-time or full-time.

##### B) **While school is in session.**

- Student must be registered full-time.
- OPT may be **part-time only**.

**C) For masters and PhD students**, after completion of all course requirements (excluding thesis/dissertation)

- After completion of all course requirements excluding thesis or dissertation.
- If type C OPT is part-time, student must be registered full-time.
- If type C OPT is full-time, student need not be registered.

**IMPORTANT:** For most students, **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** is a better option than Pre-completion OPT. It allows for off-campus work authorization in your field of study without using any of the 12 months of OPT time. See our website for a detailed description of [Curricular Practical Training](#).

- II. Post-completion.** Employment begins after completion of academic program. Most students save their 12 months of OPT to use after graduation.
- III. STEM extension.** The STEM OPT extension is a 24-month period of temporary training that directly relates to an F-1 student's program of study in an approved STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Eligible F-1 students with STEM degrees who finish their program of study and participate in an initial period of regular post-completion OPT (often for 12 months) have the option to apply for a STEM OPT extension. See our website for a detailed description of STEM extension.

### **QUALIFYING OPT EMPLOYMENT**

Employment must be in a job that is related to the student's degree program. If the relationship between the job and a student's field of study is called into question by USCIS in the future, the burden of proof is on the student to demonstrate the relationship. The types of employment allowed during the initial 12-month period of OPT include (these do not apply to the STEM Extension):

- **Paid employment.** Students may work part-time (at least 20 hours per week on post-completion OPT) or full time in a job related to their field of study.
- **Multiple employers.** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program.
- **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists).** Students, such as musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). It is highly recommended for the student to maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. If requested by DHS (Department of Homeland Security), students must be prepared to provide evidence of all gigs.
- **Work for hire.** Commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner.** Students may start a business and be self-employed. The student must work full-time (more than 20hours/week). The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- **Employment through an agency.** Students must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Unpaid.** Students on the initial 12-month OPT may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. These students must be able to provide evidence from the employer that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

### STEPS TO APPLY:

1. Complete the [application form I-765](#).
2. Complete and submit to the ISRC the 12-month OPT I-20 Request Form. There is no fee.
3. Prepare your application materials.
4. Mail your application materials
5. Receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
6. Apply for a Social Security Card.

### WHEN TO APPLY?

- **Apply early! Do not wait for a job offer.** You do not need a job offer to apply for OPT. Allow time for ISRC processing of new OPT I-20 (one week), mailing your package to USCIS, and **at least three months for processing** by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). You cannot work until you receive OPT approval.
- You may submit your application to USCIS for OPT as early as **90 days before** your end date, until **60 days after** your end date. USCIS must receive your application no later than 60 days after your I-20 end date.
- Your OPT application must arrive at the USCIS Service Center within 30 days of the new OPT I-20 issue date, **or the request will be denied.**
- If you are outside of the U.S. or leave the U.S. after your program end date and you have not applied for OPT, you will **lose your OPT eligibility.**

### HOW TO APPLY?

- **You must mail a complete application to USCIS Department of Homeland Security:**

#### **What to Include? Checklist:**

- ✓ Fee of \$410. In some cases, you must pay an \$85 biometric fee. Double check applicable fees at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> for any fee updates or changes.
  - ✓ [Form G-1145](#) (optional to receive e-mail or text confirmation)
  - ✓ 2 passport photos.
  - ✓ Original [I-765 form](#).
  - ✓ Optional cover letter.
  - ✓ A copy (NOT original) of new OPT I-20.
  - ✓ A copy of your most recent I-94.
  - ✓ A copy of identification page of your passport.
  - ✓ A copy of most recent F-1 visa on your passport.
  - ✓ A copy of any previous EAD (Employment Authorization Document), if applicable.
  - ✓ A copy of ALL previously issued I-20.
1. Check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security". NO CASH. Don't forget to write your SEVIS number in the memo line.
  2. Optional. Download and complete [form G-1145](#) if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of your application packet.
  3. Two passport style photos with name written in pencil on back of each photo. You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).

**4. Download [Form I-765](#) and complete it as a form-fillable pdf.** Do NOT complete the form by hand.

The form is read by a machine-readable scanner.

- **Check the box: “I am applying for: permission to accept employment.”** (unless you are applying for STEM OPT-Extension).
- **Complete lines 1 through 16:**
  - **# 3 U.S. Mailing address:** Make sure this is where you will be to receive the EAD.
  - **#10 Alien Registration Number:** Use your I-94 number found either on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport) or taken from [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94). It is usually an 11 digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.
  - **#11 Previous Employment Authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an EAD (OPT card) at NSU or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT or an H-1B visa.
  - **#16 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 OPT on I-765 should have:
    - (c)(3)(A), Pre-Completion OPT
    - (c)(3)(B), Post-Completion OPT
    - (c)(3)(C), 24 Month Extension for an F-1 Student who has received a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM)

**5. A copy of your new OPT I-20 with your application to USCIS.** Once you complete [Form I-765](#), request a new I-20 to show recommendation for OPT, (OPT I-20 Request form XXX). (Make sure to have gathered all documents and be ready to mail them).

- Confirm expected program completion date.
- Choose your OPT start and end date.

**6. Your most recent I-94**

- Printout of the electronic [I-94 record](#) OR
- Copy both sides of your I-94 (front and back – even if the back is blank).

**7. Copy of Passport**

- A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
- A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).

**8. A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) OPT card, if you have had one.**

**9. A copy of ALL previously issued I-20 documents dating back to the start of F-1 status (be sure they are signed).**

**IMPORTANT— OPT I-20: the 30 day rule!!**

- OPT application **must be received by USCIS within 30 days of the date your OPT I-20 is issued.**
- Be ready to file when you request the new OPT I-20.
- I-20 more than 30 days past issuance date = **OPT denied!**

**Keep in mind:**

- **USCIS must receive your application no more than 90 days before AND no more than 60 days beyond your program completion date noted on your I-20.**

**Keep copies of everything you send for your own records!**

➤ **CHOOSING YOUR START DATE for POST-COMPLETION OPT:**

You are eligible to pick an OPT start date any time within the 60 days following your program completion date. If you are a PhD student or a Master's student with a thesis option, you may have more flexibility as to when your OPT can start. Factors to consider when choosing your start date are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you CANNOT begin to work BEFORE the start date on the EAD).** If you choose a start date farther into the future and then receive an earlier offer, you will not be able to change the date. **All of your work authorization ends (even on-campus work) on your program end date.** Be sure to take this into account!
2. **If you want the latest possible day to start your work authorization,** the latest day you may choose as your start date for the EAD is 60 days after your program completion date. Remember that some months have 31 days and USCIS counts each day!

**You may not change your OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!**

**Start date:**

- Can be the day after program completion.  
OR
- Up to 60 calendar days after that. **NO MORE THAN 60 DAYS!**

**Benefits/Disadvantages in choosing start date:**

- Early start:
  - Work permission right after completion.
  - On-campus work continues (if offer is available).
- Late start:
  - Good if no job offer.
  - Won't cut into days of unemployment (90 days).
  - Consider travel options (you cannot be outside the US).

➤ **CHOOSING YOUR OPT END DATE FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT:**

- Start date plus 1 year... or less
  - Ex: Start date > 9/6/2016  
End date > 9/5/2017
- If you choose less than 12 months, the only way to “redeem” the remainder of 12 months is to go back to school, complete another program (at same level) and reapply for OPT.

➤ **CHOOSING YOUR START DATE for PRE-COMPLETION OPT:**

Your pre-completion OPT start date relates to when you are applying for the benefit:

- **Full-time pre-completion OPT for summer term:**
  - Start date can be after classes/finals end in spring term.
  - End date must be before the start of fall classes.
- **Part-time pre-completion OPT for the fall/spring term:**
  - End date cannot go past your program completion date.

**Important:** You may not change your OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!  
You may not begin work until you have received the EAD card, and are within the start and end date.

**WHERE TO MAIL THE COMPLETE APPLICATION PACKET?** (please double check at the website <https://www.uscis.gov/> as they might have updated the mailing addresses).

Mail the original packet to:

USCIS Dallas Lockbox

- **For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) First-Class and Priority Mail Express deliveries:**

USCIS

P.O. Box 660867

Dallas, TX 75266

- **For overnight/courier deliveries (non-USPS):**

USCIS

Attn: AOS

2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business

Suite 400

Lewisville, TX 75067

**AFTER YOU SEND YOUR APPLICATION:**

- You will receive a notice (Form I-797) from USCIS with a tracking number (located in the upper-left hand corner of the receipt) that can be used to follow your [Case Status](#). Your case will stay in “Initial Review” status until it is approved.

**IMPORTANT:** No student should begin employment or leave the US prior to receiving the approval for OPT and Employment Authorization Document which authorizes employment.

- **After you receive your EAD, apply for a [Social Security Number \(SSN\)](#)**

You do not need to have the SSN card to begin work. However, for payroll purposes, you will also need to provide your SSN. If you do not already have an SSN, you are required to bring your passport, I-94 record, OPT I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and apply for an SSN card. To find the closest SSA, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/locator](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/locator)

**REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON OPT**

- **REQUIRED UPDATES.** The following information **must** be reported to the International Student Resource Center during the post-completion OPT period within 10 days of any changes, so that we can update SEVIS:

- Your residential address
- Your phone and e-mail address
- Employer(s) name
- Employer(s) address
- Job Title(s)
- Explanation of how your job(s) relates to your field of study at NSU
- Start and/or end dates of employment
- Any periods of unemployment
- Date of exiting the U.S. (You must provide date of exit if you decide to exit the U.S and complete your OPT status prior to the end date of your OPT)
- If your visa status changes while on OPT

- **TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON PRACTICAL TRAINING.** In order to re-enter the US while on OPT, you must have:

1. **Valid passport**

2. **Valid F-1 visa in your passport**
  3. **OPT I-20 signed within the last twelve months.**
  4. **EAD (OPT work card)**
  5. **Offer letter of employment from your employer.** (While a job offer letter is not required to obtain OPT, it is highly recommended that students who travel have a job offer letter with them when re-entering the US. Note: The EAD says “Not valid for Travel” of the face of the EAD, which means it cannot be used alone to re-enter the US.)
  6. **Dependent Travel:** An F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with the OPT recommendation, EAD and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 (endorsed within 12 months of re-entry to the US on page 3).
  7. **NEVER ENTER the US in any VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1** while on OPT (it will invalidate OPT!)
- **90 DAYS OF UNEMPLOYMENT RULE.** You may not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment during the 12 months of OPT. If more than 90 days, OPT and F status ends. **IMPORTANT: Unpaid** work is acceptable by USCIS but unless it’s truly VOLUNTEER work, there could be problems with US labor law!

## **OPT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **General:**

#### **1. What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?**

Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program to off-campus work. The work must be directly related to your level and field of studies. OPT is recommended by ISRC and authorized by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete.

#### **2. Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?**

No. You do **NOT need to have a job offer** before applying for Optional Practical Training. Once you find a qualifying job, you must notify the International Student Resource Center.

#### **3. What are the eligibility requirements to apply for F-1 Optional Practical Training?**

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full-time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) have valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

#### **4. Must I stay in Louisiana or can I work anywhere?**

The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.

#### **5. Can I work on campus while waiting for my EAD?**

Once you complete your degree, you cannot work on-campus or off-campus until you have the EAD in your possession and your selected start date has arrived.

#### **6. How long does it take to get authorization for OPT?**

Authorization for OPT is granted by USCIS. Their standard processing time is 60-90 days. Therefore it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working.

#### **7. How can I check the status of my OPT application after I mail it to the USCIS?**

When you receive your USCIS Notice of Action (receipt), visit [USCIS Case Status Online](#) and enter your receipt number.

#### **8. Is there any way to change the information on the EAD application (address, dates, etc.) once I have mailed the application?**

After you have mailed your application to USCIS no changes can be made except for address updates. To update your address, contact the National Customer Service line at (1-800-375-5283). Withdrawing the OPT application is very difficult and the fee is non-refundable. If the OPT has been approved, it is not possible to withdraw.

**9. What type of status will I have while working on OPT?**

During the OPT period, a student remains in F-1 status at Northwestern State University.

**10. My OPT I-20 was issued almost 30 days ago and I haven't filed yet. What do I do?**

Your OPT application MUST be received by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20 (item 10) to avoid denial. If you delay filing the application, you must come to ISRC (Russel 227) to request a new I-20 with a new OPT issue date. The new I-20 will take **at least 5** business days to re-issue. To be safe, file at least 2 weeks before the 30-day timeout of the OPT I-20.

**11. Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?**

For the first 12 month period of post-completion OPT, the employment does NOT have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed (including performance majors with regular “gigs”), interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employed” for the purposes of OPT employment. For more information, see the immigration OPT policy guidance: [http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt\\_policy\\_guidance\\_042010.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf) (page 17). Employer may not be able to write letter for unpaid work - check before starting job. Unpaid work is acceptable by USCIS but unless it's truly “volunteer” work, there could be problems with US labor law. For the 24-month STEM extension, we recommend that you seek paid employment.

F-1 students may participate in volunteer internships without work authorization if doing so won't violate any labor laws. If you will be compensated in some way for the service you are providing, you must have employment authorization. Compensation includes money, lodging, meals, transportation, gift certificates, or other types of remuneration. ISRC generally recommends that students obtain work permission for all unpaid/volunteer internships in case funding becomes available later, to apply for a Social Security number, or to use the experience on a resume or CV.

**12. May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?**

No. USCIS allows students to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the program end date. USCIS does not honor expedite requests for OPT. Should you make a request anyway, it will be denied and will result in longer processing times. You should apply early.

**13. Do I have to do anything at NSU with the International Student Resource Center while I am on OPT?**

Yes! Immigration regulations REQUIRE that while you are on OPT, you **MUST** report address, name changes, employer and any interruption in employment, within 10 days so that we can update SEVIS. The update will be made in SEVIS but a new I-20 will not be issued.

**14. Do I need to have a job/job offer while I am on OPT?**

Yes. F-1 regulations require that you do have employment in your field of study while in your POST-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 150 days if you apply for and receive the 24-month extension. You are required to report address, name changes, employer and any interruption in employment, within 10 days so that we can update SEVIS. If you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment for initial 12-month OPT, your SEVIS record will be terminated. *Unemployed days DO NOT accrue or “count” during any periods of pre-completion OPT.*

**15. How long can I stay in the U.S. after the end date of my OPT?**

You have 60 days after your OPT ends to leave the U.S., request a transfer of your I-20, or change your status. You cannot work during this time.

**16. Does my spouse or children get a new OPT I-20 too?**

Yes, if you did not receive OPT I-20s for your family, you must request them.

**17. I verified my status and the USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet – can I start working?**

No. You must be able to show the employer the EAD when you begin employment. You need to wait until the card arrives.

**18. I lost my EAD. How can I get it replaced?**

If your EAD card is stolen, lost or destroyed, it may be replaced by filling a new Form I-765, filling fee and supporting documents. It is not possible to replace an EAD if you are outside the U.S.

**19. Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work?**

To qualify as employment, you are required to work a minimum of 20 hours/week.

**20. Can I change employers while on OPT?**

Yes, provided the new employment is **directly related** to your field of study and you work a minimum of 20 hours per week. No special permission is required to change employers. However, you must update your employer information to the International Student Resource Center within 10 days of the change.

**21. Do I pay taxes while working on OPT?**

Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply.

**22. Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT?**

While in the U.S., your visa may expire. It only needs to be valid if you wish to re-enter from abroad. Your I-20 remains active while on OPT.

**Pre-completion OPT:**

**23. How can I use OPT while I am still in my program (Pre-completion OPT)?**

You may use OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time while school is in session, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods, and/or (3) full-time after you have completed all course requirements for the degree and have a thesis requirement remaining. These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

**24. What if I apply for pre-completion OPT and don't get the EAD in time?**

You cannot begin work without the EAD in hand and unless you are within the dates printed on the card. If you do not have the EAD, you would need to negotiate with your employer to defer your work start date.

**25. What if I lose my offer or decide I don't want to work using my pre-completion OPT?**

It is extremely difficult cancel any type of OPT. Once the EAD has been issued, immigration considers that you are using the benefit.

**Post-Completion:**

**26. When can I apply for Post-completion OPT?**

You may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days before your completion date and **the immigration service MUST RECEIVE your application PRIOR TO 60 days beyond your completion date. Your OPT I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!**

**27. If I complete a degree program, take 12 months of OPT, and then begin a second degree program at the same level (second bachelor's degree), am I eligible for another 12-month period of OPT)?**  
No. You are only eligible for 12 months of OPT at every degree level. You are eligible for another 12 month period of OPT after changing to a **higher degree level**.

**28. If I don't use OPT at the bachelor's level can I get two 12 month periods of OPT?**  
No. OPT for each level cannot be combined but must be used during/immediately after each level. Authorized OPT cannot be "saved" for use in the future.

### **Travel:**

**29. I want to leave the US for a short time while my OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the EAD will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can't I just enter the US on my tourist visa while I'm waiting to get the EAD then start work with the card once I get it?**

**NO!!** If you intend to continue working on your OPT, **NEVER** enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the US and re-enter in B status - you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be **invalid!**

**30. What documents do I need to re-enter the US while on OPT?**

You will need your OPT I-20 that has been endorsed on page three within the last 12 months; the EAD from USCIS, your valid passport, a **current F-1 visa stamp, AND your job offer letter or proof of employment.**

**31. The visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the US while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for fewer than 30 days, you could re-enter the US on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with a copy of your I-94 record, a valid passport, your EAD, an I-20 that has been signed within the last 6 months, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment** as long as: 1) you do not apply for a visa while in Canada and 2) you are NOT a national of Iran, Syria, Sudan, or Cuba. **If you are traveling elsewhere**, you will need to go to a US embassy or consulate and seek a new visa stamp. NOTE: while on F-1 OPT, you can still be subject to a 4-6 week security clearance delay.

**32. In what way is my application to the embassy for a new visa stamp affected by being on OPT?**

The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for F-1 status while on OPT is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. It is possible and many students on OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent.

**33. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new F-1 visa stamp while I am on OPT?**

You need to take a valid passport, the EAD, your OPT I-20, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment.** Because you are seeking a nonimmigrant visa, the official job offer letter should indicate that your employment is temporary and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you will apply your OPT work experience there.

**34. Do I still need to get a travel signature on my I-20 from ISRC while on OPT?**

Yes, while you are in F-1 status on OPT if you travel outside the US, you need to have the travel line signed every 12 months. If you are not located in Natchitoches, mail the original I-20 to ISRC for endorsement. Allow plenty of time for mailing to avoid delays.