Important Information for F-1 Students on Standard Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) & OPT 17-Month Extension (for STEM fields)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study. This information sheet addresses issues related to Post-Completion and 17-Month Extension OPT. The student is responsible to know this information, and should check with an International Student Advisor in the Office of International Programs with any questions (406-994-4031 or international@montana.edu). Attention to and observance of all federal regulations is imperative so that the student can maintain F-1 immigration status.

Topics for Students on Standard Post-Completion OPT

Travel: Travel outside of the U.S. for less than 5 months while engaged in OPT is permitted if the student has had the I-20 signed within 6 months of the date of re-entry into the U.S., has an unexpired EAD card, and is returning to resume employment (a letter of employment from the employer should be in the student’s possession while traveling). A valid F-1 visa is also required for re-entry. Traveling outside of the U.S. without having secured employment is a risk.

Travel outside of the U.S. while the application for OPT permission is pending is not advised.

90 Day Unemployment Rule: Maintaining F-1 status while on OPT is dependent on employment. No more than 90 days of unemployment are allowed during standard OPT. Each day, including weekends, during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment. OPT authorization begins on the employment start date on the EAD card. Time spent outside of the U.S. during the approved period of post-completion OPT counts as unemployment against the 90 day limit.

Allowable Types of Employment Include:

Student should maintain evidence for each job or position held that proves duration of the position, job title, description of work and contact information for the employer or supervisor.

1) Regular, paid employment directly related to the student’s program of study of at least 20 hours/week. This can be with multiple employers.
2) Work for hire on contract (1099 employment).
3) Self-employed business owner (proof of licenses, active engagement and detailed records required).
4) Employment through an agency. Proof of an average of at least 20 hours/week required.
5) Volunteering or unpaid internships require proof of at least 20 hours/week of engagement. Internship must be a training type of experience for the benefit of the student intern and not displace another employee or violate any fair labor laws.
How to Report Name, Address & Employment Changes:

Any change in legal name, address or employment must be reported to OIP within 10 days of the change. It is especially important to report the start and end dates of all types of employment, so that this information can be input into the student’s SEVIS record. Lack of information in SEVIS on employment can result in termination of OPT authorization. E-mail to international@montana.edu.

**Topics for Students on 17-Month Extension**

Students in qualified STEM fields with authorization for the 17-Month Extension must work for an organization that participates in the E-Verify program. While adjudication of the application for the 17-Month Extension is pending, a period of up to 180 days of interim employment is allowed. No travel is permitted outside of the U.S. during this period. There are additional reporting requirements for both employers and students under this program.

**Reporting of Name, Address, Employer Name & Address, Loss of Employment:** Must be reported within 10 days of any change, just as described above. Note requirement to report loss of employment while on 17-Month Extension.

**Employer Obligation to Report Termination of Employment:** Employer must agree to report within 48 hours the termination or departure of a student, if prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. The student must inform the employer of this requirement, and advise them to report the terminated student’s name and the date employment ended to OIP via e-mail to international@montana.edu.

**6 Month Employment Validation Reports:** Reports are required by student on 17-Month Extension every 6 months starting from the date the 17-Month Extension begins and ending when F-1 status ends or if the student changes academic study level at MSU or if the student transfers to a new school or when the 17-Month Extension ends; whichever is first. This report is required of the student even if no changes occur and must be e-mailed to international@montana.edu. The report must include: student’s legal name, current mailing and residential address, name and address of employer, and date student began working for current employer. If no report is submitted, SEVIS will automatically terminate the student’s record.

**90/120 Day Unemployment Rule:** No more than 90 days of unemployment are permitted under Standard Post-Completion OPT (refer to statement above), and no more than 120 days total unemployment are permitted during the entire 29-month period of combined Standard Post-Completion OPT and the 17-Month Extension.