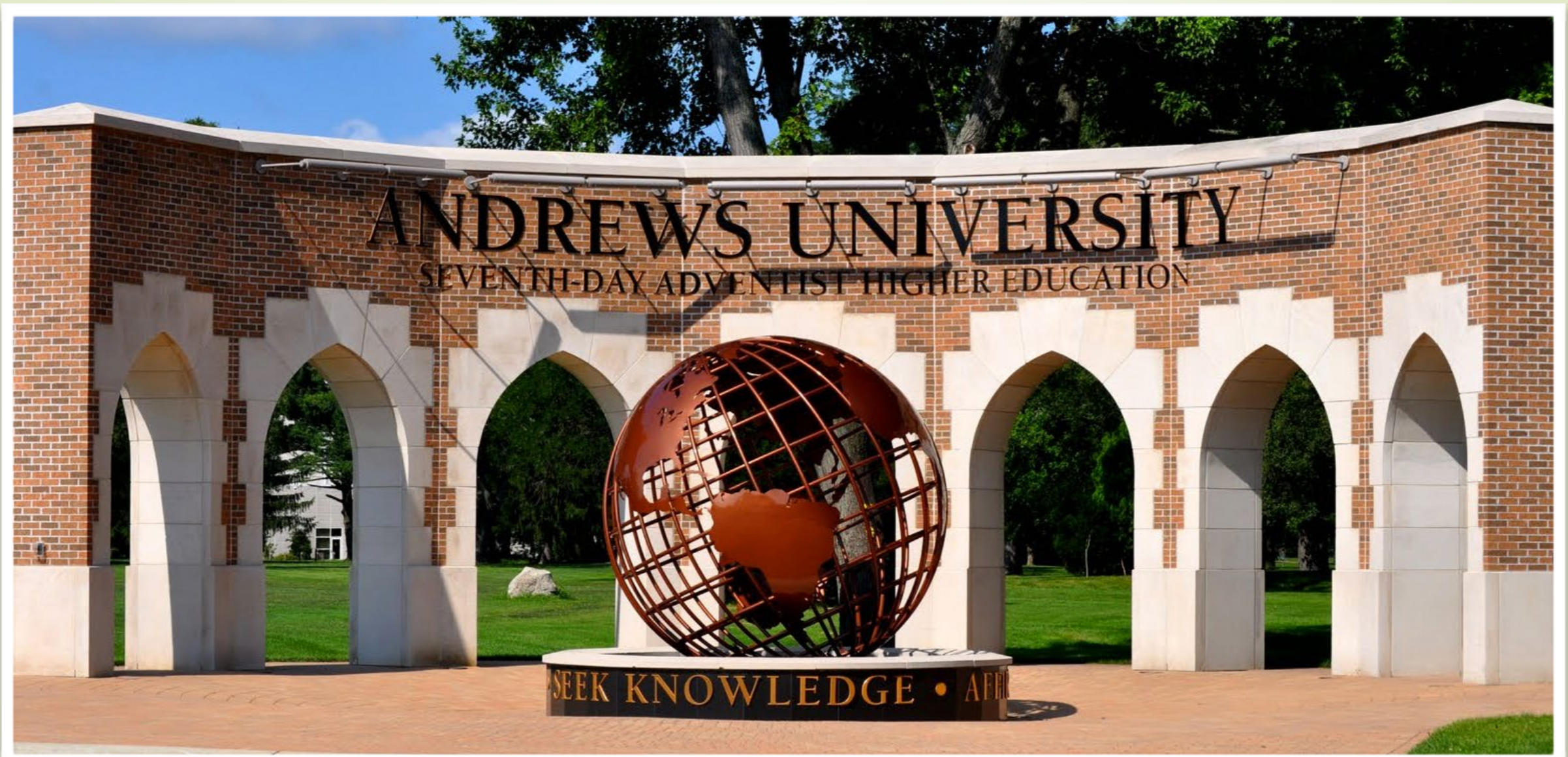# Fall 2022 Workshop

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Fall 2022 OPT Workshop

This OPT workshop is for

- Students in F-1 visa status who are nearing the end of their program of study
- Academic advisors who regularly advise students in F-1 visa status
- Anyone interested in knowing more about OPT

Fall 2022 OPT Workshop

This workshop will begin with an opening presentation explaining key information about OPT.

We will then spend the rest of the time answering questions you have about OPT.

Fall 2022 OPT Workshop

Opening Presentation: Key Information

1. What is OPT?
2. Who is eligible for OPT?
3. When can I apply for OPT?
4. How do I apply for OPT?
5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?
6. What happens during my OPT year?
7. What happens after my OPT year?

1. What is OPT?

Temporary employment authorization directly related to your field of study.

This authorization is granted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (**USCIS**).

1. What is OPT?

In almost all cases, the employment authorization is granted once the program of study is completed.

(i.e., **post-completion** OPT)

1. What is OPT?

During OPT, you remain in F-1 visa status.

This means that even though you are authorized to work in your field anywhere in the U.S. during OPT, you will still stay in contact with designated school officials (DSOs) at Andrews University.

2. Who is eligible for OPT?

Students in F-1 visa status who have completed their program of study and who have been enrolled full time for at least one academic year at the point of program completion.

2. Who is eligible for OPT?

You can participate in OPT one time per level of education (i.e., once after BA, once after MA, once after PhD).

2. Who is eligible for OPT?

You are <u>NOT</u> eligible for OPT if:

- You have already had OPT granted at the same level of education
- Your program of study is ESL
- Your I-20 is not in active status
- You applied for OPT but did not actually graduate before the OPT start date
- You are (or will soon be) outside of the United States

3. When can I apply for OPT?

You can apply for OPT beginning 90 days before your program of study end date (listed on your I-20) and up to 60 days after this program of study end date.

3. When can I apply for OPT?

For example: Let's say your program of study end date on your I-20 is May 5, 2023.

You can apply for OPT:
- As early as the first week of February 2023.
- As late as the first week of July 2023.

3. When can I apply for OPT?

When *should* I apply for OPT?

Apply as early (i.e., 90 days before the program end date if possible) to get the maximum amount of OPT time.

3. When can I apply for OPT?

But make sure you will actually graduate by the program of study end date on your I-20 before you officially apply for OPT.

If you do not actually graduate by the program of study end date you put on your OPT application, you can compromise or even forfeit OPT.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

First, what <u>NOT</u> to do:

*Please **do not** apply for OPT on your own without contacting a designated school official (DSO) in the Office of International Student Services first.*

If you apply on your own, you will be denied OPT! This is because a DSO needs to make a change to your SEVIS record before you apply for OPT.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

When you believe you are ready to apply for OPT, you will start the application process by accessing two documents:

1. **OPT Application Guide** (detailed application steps)
2. **OPT Status Form** (how you contact a DSO)

You can find both documents on the International Student Services webpage: www.andrews.edu/services/international

Once on the webpage, scroll down to the Employment section and click on Optional Practical Training (OPT).

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Guide

Read this carefully.

The OPT Application Guide has much of the same information as you see in this presentation.

It also has detailed application steps that you should follow when you apply for OPT.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Status Form

Completing the OPT Status Form and submitting it to a DSO in International Student Services is how you indicate you are officially applying for OPT so that your SEVIS record can be changed accordingly.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Status Form

The OPT Status Form asks for:
- Information from you as the student applying for OPT
- Verification from your academic advisor

Both you and your academic advisor must sign and date the OPT Status Form before it is submitted to a DSO.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Process

The OPT Application Guide presents detailed steps for the OPT application process (see pages 4 to 8).

You can apply either online or through mail.

In both modes, the first step of the application process is completing and submitting the OPT Status Form.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Process

After you submit the completed OPT Status Form, you will receive an **updated I-20 with OPT recommendation from a DSO.**

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Process

You will submit the updated I-20 with DSO recommendation to USCIS along with the following:

- I-765 form - Application for Employment Authorization
- I-94 Arrival Document
- Copy of Passport ID page
- Copy of F-1 visa
- Previous I-20(s)
- Passport photos
- $410 filing fee

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Process

The specific details for how to find these forms and documents, how to present and submit them, and how to pay the application fee (whether you are submitting online or via mail) are presented in the OPT Application Guide, pages 4-8.

4. How do I apply for OPT?

OPT Application Process

USCIS must receive your completed OPT application **within 30 days** of the issue date on your updated I-20 with OPT recommendation or they will deny your application.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

Approximately 90 days after USCIS receives your OPT application, you will be sent an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card at the address you put in your OPT application.

Make sure the address on your application is correct. If you move, USCIS will not forward the EAD card.

USCIS will not mail EAD cards to P.O. Boxes or addresses outside of the United States.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

Your EAD card is your approval, and you are authorized to work on the dates listed on your EAD card.

You cannot begin work until the start date on your EAD card.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

Duration of Standard OPT: One Year

If you applied for OPT approximately 90 days before the program of study end date on your I-20, you will likely receive a full calendar year of OPT.

If you applied around or after your program of study end date, you will likely receive less than a calendar year of OPT.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

SEVIS Portal

In addition to receiving your EAD card, you will also receive an email from USCIS with a link for you to create a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Portal account.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

SEVIS Portal

You MUST create and begin using this SEVIS portal account by following the directions in the email you will receive from USCIS.

The SEVIS Portal account is where you will need to report ANY and ALL employment information and report changes to your address, telephone number, and other personal information.

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

SEVIS Portal

The OPT Application Guide contains USCIS contact information and other details to help you set up and use your SEVIS Portal account (see page 3).

5. What happens when I am approved for OPT?

Effect of International Travel on OPT Approval

Travel outside of the United States during any point in the OPT application process is discouraged because of the risk of being denied reentry.

You should wait until you have an EAD card and OPT employment before you consider international travel.

6. What happens during my OPT year?

During your OPT year, your F-1 visa status is dependent upon employment.

Although you do not have to have employment secured when you apply for OPT or even when you are approved for OPT, you should find employment within 90 days of the start date on your EAD card.

6. What happens during my OPT year?

During the first 90 days after the start date on your EAD card, you will accrue unemployment days if you do not post employment to your SEVIS Portal account.

Once you reach 90 days of unemployment, your OPT authorization will deactivate, and you will no longer be in active F-1 visa status.

6. What happens during my OPT year?

As soon as you find employment, you must go into your SEVIS Portal account and update your account with the new employment information.

6. What happens during my OPT year?

The employment you list for OPT in your SEVIS Portal account:

- Must be related to your field of study listed on the I-20 you used to apply for OPT
- Must be at least 30 hours per week with written proof from the employer via a hire letter
- Does not need to be paid – interning or volunteering without pay will count if this work is related to the field of study, is at least 30 hours per week, and is listed in the SEVIS Portal account

7. What happens after my OPT year?

Once your EAD card expires, you will have a 60-day grace period. By the end of this 60 days, you must do one of the following:

- Depart the United States
- Begin a new academic program of study
- Apply for a different visa status (e.g., H-1B)
- Begin STEM Extension of OPT (if this applies to you)

7. What happens after my OPT year?

New Program of Study

If you will begin a new program of study after OPT, it is best to inform International Student Services before your OPT expires (especially if you are transferring to another school).

7. What happens after my OPT year?

New Visa Status

It is recommended that you begin the change of status process before your OPT expires.

If an employer sponsors you for an H-1B visa (H-1B begins October 1 each year), you may be eligible for a "Cap-Gap" extension of OPT if your OPT expires before October 1.

7. What happens after my OPT year?

24-month STEM Extension

Students who receive a degree in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) can be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT.

7. What happens after my OPT year?

To qualify for STEM extension, a student must:

- Have a qualifying STEM degree
- Have a paid job from a STEM employer for at least 20 hours/week during the extension period
- Work with the employer (Form I-983) and DSO (updated I-20) to add STEM extension in SEVIS before the expiration of the standard 1-year OPT
- Apply for STEM extension (Form I-765 + filing fee + updated I-20) to USCIS before the expiration of the standard 1-year OPT
- Complete self-evaluations (1 year into STEM extension and at the end of the 24 months)

Questions from Original Live Session

Can self-employment count toward OPT?

Questions from Original Live Session

What if the F-1 student visa status is expired while the student is studying before applying for OPT?

Questions from Original Live Session

Can you explain a bit more how the Cap-Gap works if I am going to receive an H-1B visa after my OPT ends?

Questions from Original Live Session

You said we need to apply for OPT before graduate (90 days before); but how can I apply for OPT if I don't know exactly when I will finish my dissertation?

Do I need to apply after I finished my dissertation?

Questions from Original Live Session

If I wait to apply for OPT after I graduate, will I receive less time for my OPT (less than the standard 1 year)?

Questions from Original Live Session

[From academic advisor]: What if a student doesn't actually graduate when we thought and OPT is approved. Is there any flexibility?

Questions from Original Live Session

Can you explain a bit more how the Cap-Gap works if I am going to receive an H-1B visa after my OPT ends?

Questions from Original Live Session

Do we need to inform the government (in SEVIS) that we are applying for OPT and will that affect the status of the F-1 visa? What if the F-1 visa is expired or nearly expired?

Questions from Original Live Session

You said we have to work 30 hours a week in OPT right?

Questions from Original Live Session

Does volunteer work that I count toward OPT need to be related to my field of study?

Questions from Original Live Session

What date should I put as my desired start date for OPT? The day after the program of study end date?

Questions from Original Live Session

When I am looking for a job for OPT, is it up to me or is there someone who will help me find a job?

Contact the **Career Center** at Andrews for assistance with writing CVs, cover letters, personal statements, preparing for an interview, etc. by calling 269-471-6288 or emailing career@andrews.edu.
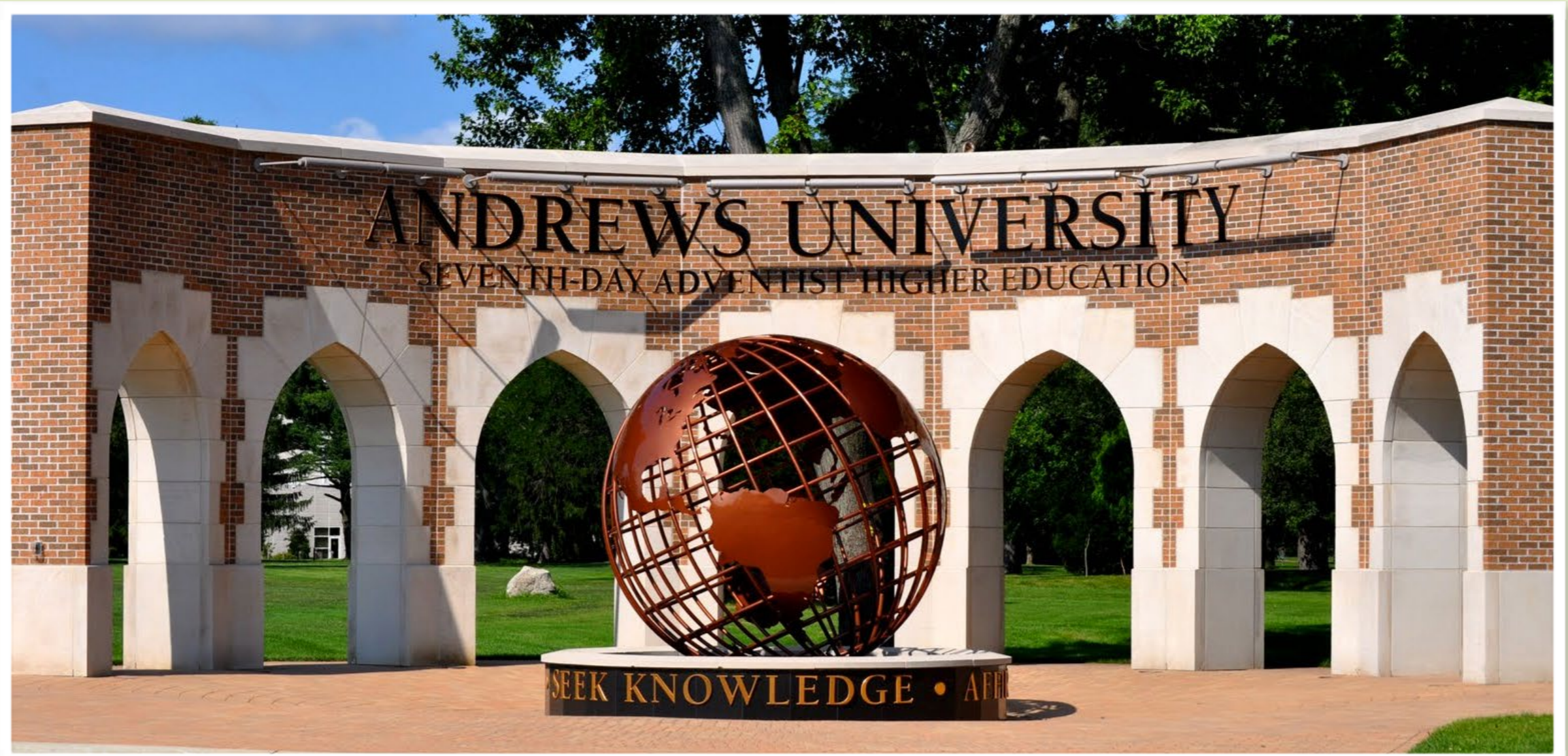
Questions from Original Live Session

You said standard OPT (for everyone) is 1 year. Is there any flexibility or availability to extend OPT past 1 year?

Questions from Original Live Session

You said standard OPT (for everyone) is 1 year. Is there any flexibility or availability to extend OPT past 1 year?

Questions from Original Live Session

What happens if the program end date on my I-20 is way in the future, but I will graduate earlier than usual and would like to apply for OPT. For example, my program end date says May 2023 but I will actually graduate early in December 2022?

Thank you!