

**“To Complete or Not Complete” Case Studies
NAFSA Bi-Regional III & VII, San Juan 2012**



“Can one desire too much of a good thing?” [As You Like It]

Valeriya, an outstanding student who completed her Master's in Business Administration (MBA) in May 2011, received a great job offer in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, immediately after graduation and began work on her OPT. Her employer decided to sponsor her for an H-1B work visa, however it was denied. Valeriya thought she would work at her dream job on an H-1B visa, but she made a quick decision in April of 2012 to re-enroll at an institution of higher education. Valeriya contacted her International Student Advisor at her previous institution to transfer her SEVIS records to the new institution she planned to attend in Pittsburgh. However, Valeriya did not realize if her International Student Advisor transferred her SEVIS records before her OPT ended she would lose her authorization to work.

“The wheel is come full circle” [King Lear]

Sasha completed her Bachelor's in biology in December 2011. Earlier in the year, she applied to several Master's programs across the United States. Sasha received multiple offers of acceptance; however, she was still waiting to hear if she was accepted to her current institution's Master's biology program. Sasha heard from her current institution that she was approved for the Master's biology program and immediately went to see her International Student Advisor with her letter of acceptance. Sasha's International Student Advisor was able to change her degree level in SEVIS prior to the completion date of her undergraduate program and issued her a new I-20 to begin the Master's biology program.

“What's done is done” [Macbeth]

After Clair had completed her Bachelor's degree in business, she obtained OPT. She had been working for the year and now had a very big decision to make: would she continue with another degree or return to her home country? After stopping by the International Office and speaking with an advisor, she chose to return home at the end of her OPT where her job prospects were greater. Once she returned to her home country, she contacted her DSO before the end of her 60 day grace period to let him know that she had arrived safely.

“Nothing will come of nothing” [King Lear]

When Swati was ready to graduate with her Master's degree, she contacted her international office concerning filing for OPT authorization. She was given detailed information on all the requirements and she began actively seeking employment that would begin right after graduation. She was given authorization to begin by USCIS, but it seemed that she could not find an employer that was hiring. After 30 days of unemployment, she became very discouraged and depressed. Swati went in to speak to her advisor about the situation. At the 60 day mark, she spoke to her parents about the lack of job prospects and they told her to come home. They went online and booked her a plane ticket to leave in two weeks. Very discouraged, Swati went to her international advisor and told him what was happening and that she would be leaving since she could not find a job in the allotted amount of time and produced a copy of her flight itinerary sent to her by her parents. Her advisor was very sympathetic and understood that the job market was not well in her field. He kept a copy of her flight information and asked her to contact him when she arrived home safely.

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on, rounded with a little sleep” [The Tempest]

“As good luck would have it”, Milad finished his PhD in Electrical Engineering in May 2011, and found a great employer for his OPT [07/05/2011-07/04/2012]. Being that the employer was with E-Verify, Milad was able to apply for the STEM OPT extension, effective 07/05/2012 through 12/05/2013. However, Milad's employer also submitted an application for an H-1B on his behalf. Milad provided a copy of the new EAD card to his DSO, upon her request, but when she logged into SEVIS to update his immigration record, she found that his record was automatically completed on 10/01/2012 due to Change of Status approved.

“O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?” [*Romeo and Juliet*]

Romeo Carletti graduated with Master's in Economics in December 2011 and began his OPT at the start of the New Year and dutifully reported his employment; unfortunately, the economy just wasn't working with him. Late in the summer, even after the Fall semester began, the DSO noticed that Romeo inactivated his "Local Mailing" address in Banner, which is used to report physical presence. The DSO emailed Romeo to inquire about the change: "Even if you departed the USA permanently after your graduation, we must keep your 'Local Mailing' address in the USA during your 60-day grace period. Please remember that it is your legal requirement to report a change of address to our office (via OASIS) every time it changes within 10 days....If you have departed the USA permanently while on OPT, you should notify us promptly so that we can complete your F-1 SEVIS record appropriately." Romeo promptly replied, "I left the US for my home country since August 1. I will not return to the US. My OPT will expire at the end of December 2012."

“Delays have dangerous ends” [*Henry VI*]

Sarah Fourgoht is an F-1 student at Wonderful Community College. It is the beginning of the Summer 2012 semester and Sarah is ready to graduate. She meets with her academic advisor who notes that she will be graduating and shortens her Form I-20 accordingly to reflect the last day of classes for that semester which is August 10, 2012. On August 20, Sarah realizes that she will not be accepted to her new school because her GPA is too low and she failed a class during the summer at Wonderful Community College. Unfortunately, she didn't remember to let her advisors know that she had failed and would not graduate. Her SEVIS record is now in the 60 day post-graduation window and Sarah has nowhere to go. She cannot transfer and technically she's out of status at her current institution.

“Expectation is the root of all heartache” – *attributed to Shakespeare*

Jason Ankshus has been a student at Bylow Community College for four semesters. He has not finished his program there but has found an accelerated Bachelor's program at Big State University designed for adult learners who attend courses at night. He wants to transfer into this program right away. He is currently taking 6 credits during the summer 2012 semester at Bylow where the semester technically ends on August 10, 2012. However, Jason will need to travel internationally on August 9 to attend a wedding. When he returns on August 24, he will start at Big State University. He is concerned about when he can get his Form I-20 from Big State University. He says he should be done with his finals at Bylow before August 10.

“Better three hours too soon than a minute too late” [*The Merry Wives of Windsor*]

A hard working doctoral student from Sri Lanka, Chamith and his wife, faced many challenges in the College of Engineering: getting approval for an internship to collect data for his dissertation and finding that it was not a good fit, to getting a defense date; but the Department finally certified that he would complete his program in Spring 2012. Chamith happily applied for post-completion OPT. Approximately three weeks after the Commencement ceremony, the graduation list was submitted to ISSS and Chamith had been denied his degree; the EAD card had already arrived in the ISSS office.

“This is the short and the long of it” [*The Merry Wives of Windsor*]

Every semester, Matt notices that doctoral students graduate with a Master's degree, but continue to enroll in the following semester, still working on the PhD. After transferring from a community college, he is perplexed by how this keeps happening at his new, large university. Thinking that this habit is contrary to immigration regulations, he wants to update the program to Master's, then use the "Shorten Program" function in SEVIS, and then issue a new Form I-20 for a "Change of Level", since "Complete Program" will not allow for continued studies. After discussing this with his supervisor, he recognizes that the Master's degree earned along the way is "just gravy" – a bonus that is not the main course of the meal.

Resources:

SEVIS Manual: http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/School_UM_Vol2.pdf

NAFSA AM: <http://amdev.nafsa.org/core/nafsa/content/actions-taken-end-course-study-or-opt>