SUPPORTING POST-COMPLETION PRACTICAL TRAINING

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Goals:

- Discuss and share strategies for managing the OPT application process

- Highlight student concerns and share strategies for managing student stress

- Discuss and share strategies for avoiding minor complications

APPLICATION PROCESS RESOURCES AND ADVISING

What resources do we use during the OPT application process?

- Emails…but do students read them?
- Videos
- Web content
- Live Webinars with Q&A sessions
- Recorded webinars
- Web chat
- Text message/group chat
- Handouts/visual aids
- Campus fliers

- One-on-one appointments
- Walk-in advising sessions
- Group info sessions
- Phone calls
- Government resources
- "Ask Me About…" session
- Social Media
- Newsletters
- Other?

Considerations with resources

- Who will update the content?
- How much time is needed to update?
- How often is it updated?
- Is messaging consistent across the resources?
- Is one resource more comprehensive than another? (ex. 15-min appt. vs. one-hour presentation)
- Is there an internal process for students to follow? How do you communicate it?

- How do you steer students to do their own research and investigation using available resources?
- What methods work best for your office, given staffing and volume considerations?
- Use of language: Do your resources imply OPT approval?
- Consider different learning styles

Resource Development

Common Questions

- When can I apply for OPT?
- Can I work before I get my EAD card?
- How long does it take?
- Why don't I see any updates on my case tracker?
- Can I travel with a pending OPT application?
- How do I apply for SSN?

Possible Solutions

- Identify key concerns for your population
- Create email response templates
- Bring up these issues when advising students at the start of the process…don't wait for them to ask.
- Feature answers prominently on your site
- Laminated handouts for repeat use
- Guides for co-occurring processes like SSN application/Driver's license renewal
- Study peak periods of inquiries to determine best use of resources

Office Practices

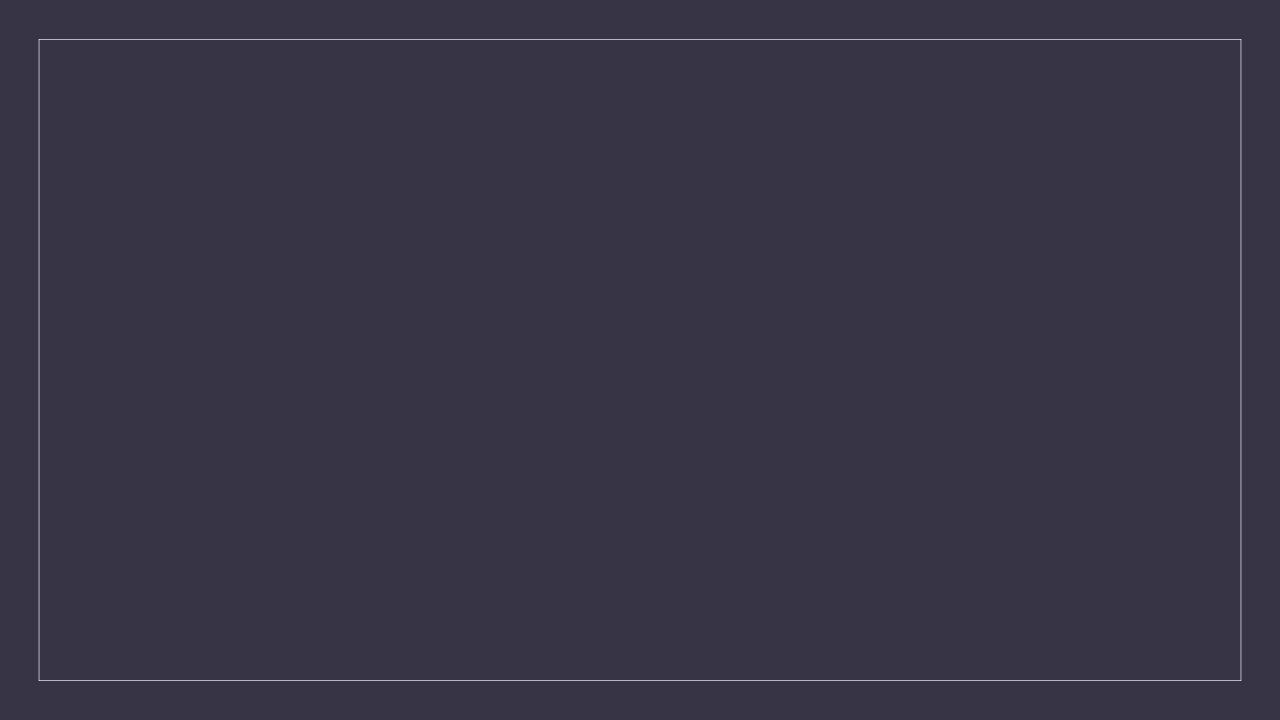Considering staffing and student volume concerns, where do you stand on the following?

- Line-by-line review of Form I-765

- Support with compiling the application for USCIS

- How much time do you allocate to a student for an OPT appointment?

- Tax advising

- Support with SSN/DDS/related processes

- Requests for assistance with I-9 and other paperwork

- Requests for assistance with finding employment/letters of recommendation

- Expectation of students' due diligence in the process

What factors impact office practice?

- Student volume
- Student expectations
- Institute culture
- Leadership culture
- Office staffing levels
- Office resources
- Other?

Discussion

- Is your office "hands on," "hands off" or somewhere in between? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your office's style?

MANAGING STUDENT CONCERNS

Understanding student stressors

Application:
- Unfamiliarity with OPT application process
- Applying for benefits with US government is daunting

Employment concerns:
- Uncertainty about job prospects and/or OPT adjudication time
- Unfamiliar with US interviewing/hiring process
- Comparing self to peers in terms of job offers
- Pressure from company to commit to offer

Personal/Family
- Personal/family expectations of success
- Misconceptions about OPT process
- Fear of small mistakes causing OPT denial

Managing Student Stress

- Remind them that you're familiar with the process, even though it's unknown to them
- Let them know that lots of students have the same worries with the process
- Let them know what to expect along the way. What's next after mailing the application?

Discussion

- What concerns do your students frequently have? What are your techniques for managing them?

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES

- Encourage students to keep soft copy and hard copy of all documents mailed to USCIS, and to keep shipment tracking information.

- Student forgot to include a document in the application
  - Wait for case to be receipted then email PSC and ask student to mail in the item
  - Pending passport renewal, I-94 issues.

- Student didn't file within 30 days and case is denied
  - Prominent messaging about 30-day window in your communications
  - Create a culture of early filing. Encourage application submission at start of eligibility window

- EAD card errors
  - Review I-765 before I-20 creation.
  - Advise students not to work until issue is resolved.

- Make sure your communication language is appropriate! A few students will believe that I-20 issuance is the last step in requesting OPT.

- SEVP Portal

- How do you advise on excessive unemployment?

  - We advise students to depart after 90 days. Problems with email communication

- Travel while OPT is pending?
- H1B filing questions
  - Promote student involvement and agency
  - Change of level, end of employment