Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Tutorial
COVID-19 Updates

- USCIS remains open for the OPT/STEM OPT I-765 application processing. Some USCIS locations are closed for in-person services.
- There have been delays in the I-765 processing time due to COVID-19. For more information, see the [USCIS Lockbox Updates](https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/uscis-response-to-covid-19) web alert.
- USCIS has NOT changed application timelines and deadlines due to COVID-19
- USCIS still requires a handwritten “wet” signature in **BLACK** ink for the I-765. NO DIGITAL or ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES
USCIS Updates

• January 8, 2021: USCIS updated the direct mailing address for the I-765. Make sure that you are mailing to the correct address.

• See the Fees and I-765 sections of the tutorial for more information about the form and fee changes.

• Make sure that you are paying the correct fee and using the correct form on the date you are mailing your package to USCIS.
Please note that this tutorial is for instructional purposes only.

An OPT application to USCIS is your own personal application. You alone are responsible for timely filing with full documentation, understanding F-1 rules regarding OPT, and properly maintaining F-1 status.

Please review the entire tutorial and contact your OISPS DSO if you have questions.
OPT Tutorial Outline

• OPT Overview
• OPT Eligibility & Allowable Employment
• Application Process Overview
• Step 1: I-765
• Step 2: I-20 Request Process
• Step 3: Preparing your OPT Request to USCIS
  • Application Deadlines
  • Mailing your Application
• Step 4: Receiving your EAD & USCIS Documents
  • I-797 Receipt Notice
  • While Application is Pending
  • Denials & Requests for Evidence
• Step 5: Maintaining Your F-1 Status & STEM Reporting Requirements
  • Employment Update/Change Form
  • Travel during STEM OPT
• Options after Post-Completion OPT
OPT Overview

• Post-Completion Optional Practical Training is a benefit for eligible F-1 students interested in engaging in employment directly related to their field of study after their degree completion in the U.S.

• F-1 students are eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree level achieved.

• Applicants do not need an employment offer to apply for OPT.

• Employment MUST be related to student’s field of major.
OPT Eligibility

• Must have attended a SEVP certified institution on a full-time basis for at least one academic year
• Must not have had 12-months of OPT authorization for the same degree level
• Must not have accrued 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for the same degree level

*** Part-time CPT authorizations do not affect OPT eligibility***
OPT Application Timeline

• OPT Applicants may apply for Post-Completion OPT up to 90 days before a student’s program completion date (end date on I-20) and up to 60 days after the student’s program completion date.

• The recommended deadline to submit an OPT application to OISPS is at least 3 months before a student’s requested OPT start date.

• Important Notes/Deadlines:
  • USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the DSO’s recommendation or within the end of your 60-day grace period, whichever is earlier.
  • Students applying for OPT after their program completion date may not receive the full 12 months of OPT authorization.
OPT Application Timeline (cont.)

- Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date
- Program Completion date
- OPT start date
- 12 months
- OPT end date

- Students must depart the U.S., transfer to another school or change visa status by this date

- Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period
- 60 days

- Grace period: Students may remain in the U.S. but may not continue employment
- 60 days
OPT Start and End Dates

• Applicants must choose their OPT start date.

• A requested OPT start date can be as early as 1 day after the program completion date and up to 60 days after the program completion date.

• NOTE: Graduate students may set their program completion date to their defense filing or the official last class day of their final semester.
OPT Employment Requirements

- OPT employment must be directly related to the F-1 student’s degree program.
- A student may work part-time (at least 20 hours per week) or full-time.
- Volunteer/Unpaid positions are allowed as long as they do not violate any labor laws.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm: A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- Self-employed business owner: A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. 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.
- Multiple employers: A student 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): A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- Work for hire: This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.
Unemployment During OPT

• Students on OPT have a total of 90 days (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment during their 12-month OPT period that begins on the start date of their OPT (as indicated on their EAD card).

• If you exceed 90 days of unemployment during your original 12-month OPT you are not eligible to apply for the STEM OPT Extension.
  • If you exceed your unemployment days on OPT your SEVIS record will be terminated, and your F-1 status will be in an unlawful status.
OPT Application Process

• Items needed for DSO to recommend OPT and issue I-20:
  • OPT Application:  
    https://www.lamar.edu/forms/international/optional-practical-training-application.html
  • I-765 form:  
  • Academic Advisor Recommendation Form  
Step 1: I-765

*OISPS strongly suggest that you type this form to avoid any misspelling of information. If you choose to handwrite, use BLACK ink only.

Initial for Post-Completion OPT

Name MUST match your passport! Please make sure you enter your “last” and “first” name accordingly.

Check edition date to ensure you have the most current form.

Leave blank if you have no other names.

Check to ensure you have the current I-765 form.
Please make sure that you read #10 - #15 carefully and answer accordingly.

Please read and complete #16-#17 if applicable.

Write down country of citizenship in 18a. Leave 18b blank unless you have dual citizenship.
I-765

Please read and complete all applicable information contained in Part 2 #19-#26.

Eligibility code: (c)(3)(B) for Post-Completion OPT
Please read page 4 and complete any information that is applicable.

Part 2. Information About You (continued)

If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 38a., provide the following information:

38a. Date you presented yourself to DHS

38b. Location where you presented yourself to DHS

38c. Country of claimed persecution

38d. Provide an explanation for why you did not enter the United States lawfully through a U.S. port of entry. If you need extra space to complete this item, use the space provided in Part 6. Additional Information.

NOTE: Refer to the Special Filing Instructions for Those With Pending Anytime Applications section of the Form I-765 Instructions for more information.

31a. (c)(35) and (c)(36) Eligibility Category. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(35) in Item Number 27., please provide the receipt number of your Form I-797 Notice for Form I-140, Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(36) in Item Number 27., please provide the receipt number of your sponsor’s or parent’s Form I-797 Notice for Form I-140.

31b. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(35) or (c)(36) in Item Number 27., have you EVER been arrested for and/or convicted of any crime? Yes ☐ No ☐

NOTE: If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 31b., refer to Employment-Based Nonimmigrant Categories, Items 6 – 9, in the Who May File Form I-765 section of the Form I-765 Instructions for information about providing court dispositions.

Part 3. Applicant’s Statement, Contact Information, Declaration, Certification, and Signature

NOTE: Read the Penalties section of the Form I-765 Instructions before completing this section. You must file Form I-765 while in the United States.

Applicant’s Statement

NOTE: Select the box for either Item Number 1a. or 1b. If applicable, select the box for Item Number 2.

1a. ☐ I can read and understand English, and I have read and understood every question and instruction on this application and my answer to every question.

1b. ☐ The interpreter named in Part 4, read to me every question and instruction on this application and my answer to every question in a language in which I am fluent, and I understood everything.

2. ☐ At my request, the preparer named in Part 5, prepared this application for me based on only upon information I provided or authorized.

Applicant’s Contact Information

3. Applicant’s Daytime Telephone Number

4. Applicant’s Mobile Telephone Number (if any)

5. Applicant’s Email Address (if any)

6. ☐ Select this box if you are a Salvadoran or Guatemalan national eligible for benefits under the ABC resettlement agreement.

Applicant’s Declaration and Certification

Copies of any documents I have submitted or exact photocopies of original documents, and I understand that USCIS may request that I submit original documents to USCIS at a later date. Furthermore, I authorize the release of my information from any and all of my records that USCIS may need in order to determine my eligibility for the immigration benefit that I seek. I furthermore authorize release of information contained in this application, in supporting documents, and in my USCIS records, to other airlines and persons otherwise necessary for the administration and enforcement of U.S. immigration law.
Please read page 5 and complete any information that is applicable.

Please sign and date in BLACK ink.
Part 5 is not applicable if you completed the form yourself. Part 6 is to add any “previous OPT/STEM OPT Authorizations” with start & end dates.
Step 2 – I-20 Request Process

- Log on to [lamar.edu/international](https://lamar.edu/international) website

- Click on International Student Programs & Services
I-20 Request Process

Click on “Guide and Forms”

Then click on “OPT Application” under Employment forms to complete application.
Step 3: Preparing your Post-Completion OPT Request to USCIS
Post-Completion OPT Application Checklist

- Mail complete application to USCIS – See checklist below:
  - Original I765 – signature in **BLACK** ink
  - Copy of I20 with the OPT recommendation – signed by DSO and Student
  - Copies of all prior I-20s
  - $410 (current as of 3/2021) filling fee in the form of a check or money order payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”. ***Write your SEVIS ID on the front.
  - 2 Passport style photos taken within 30 days of filing the Form I765. ***Write SEVIS ID and name on the back each photo in pencil***
  - Copies of any previous and current EAD cards
  - Copy of I-94
  - Copy of passport and visa
  - Optional: [G-1145 Form](#) (to request text/email communication from USCIS)
USCIS Filing Fee

- USCIS is subject to change, please check the [USCIS filing fee](#) page for current amount to submit.
- For **Credit Card payment**, submit form [G-1450](#), authorized payment for the correct fee amount. You may only use a credit card account with a U.S. billing address—no foreign billing address is allowed. You can use cards with Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover. See [Pay Your USCIS Fees With a Credit Card](#)
U.S. Style Passport Photo

- Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- Photo must present full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25mm to 35mm)
- Eye height must be between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28mm to 35mm)
- No shadows on the face or in the background of photo
- White background only
- Hair must be pulled back (forehead, eyes and ears must be fully visible)
- Neutral expression only
- Center the head within the frame
- Write your name and SEVIS ID number on back of the photos.
Mailing Your Application

• Mail your application and additional needed documents to the USCIS Lockbox Facility. The Lockbox will then forward the application to the proper USCIS Service Center for adjudication.

Click “Foreign Students” to reveal correct mailing addresses
Step 4: Receiving your EAD & USCIS Documents
I-797 Receipt Notice

• Applicants will typically receive a **I-797 Notice of Action** receipt from USCIS approximately 3-4 weeks from the date the STEM OPT application was received by USCIS. The status of a STEM OPT application can be viewed online with a **Receipt Number**: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

• Applicants will receive their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card approximately 3 months from the date the STEM OPT application was received by USCIS

• If you used OISPS mailing address - once OISPS receives an approval notice to be followed by the EAD card, OISPS will email you instructions on how to get your documents.

***verify all biographical information is correct as soon as you receive your I-797 notice and notify USCIS if there is any incorrect information shown.***
While OPT Application is Pending

- Student may NOT begin employment until they have received their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card and the start date as indicated on the EAD card has been reached.
- Student may not continue working beyond the end date of the EAD card.
- Student may NOT continue to work on campus after graduation or degree completion.
Application Problems: RFE or Rejection/Denial

• **RFE**: If there is a problem with your application, USCIS may send you a notice by mail called a “Request for Evidence (RFE).” An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejects, it simply means you need additional documents before your EAD can be issued.

• **Rejection/Denial**: In some cases, if too many items are missing from your application, USCIS will return the entire application to you. If this happens, you must make the corrections and send the application before the end date of your 60-day grace period.

• To avoid delays, review your application materials for completeness and sign all forms before mailing them to USCIS.
Step 5: Reporting Requirements While On OPT
Reporting Requirements While On OPT

• F-1 students are required to report to the DSO within 10 days if **any** of the following changes during their OPT period:
  • ALL employment changes including changing jobs, employer name change, acquisitions, etc. Changes in the student’s name
  • Address (physical/mailing)
  • Visa Status (i.e. – H1B Approval)
  • Primary work location
How To Report OPT Employment?

• Employment Updates/Changes
  • [https://www.lamar.edu/international-education/international-students-and-scholars/index.html](https://www.lamar.edu/international-education/international-students-and-scholars/index.html)

Click “Guide and Forms”
How To Report OPT Employment?

Click on “Employment Update/Change Form”
How To Report OPT Employment?

Please read and complete all applicable information and click “submit” when completed.
Traveling Abroad While On OPT

- Complete Travel Application Online - https://www.lamar.edu/forms/international/travel-request-application1.html
- Documents required to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status:
  - Valid Passport
  - Endorsed I-20 (each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.)
  - Valid F-1 Visa (if expired, you must renew with the U.S. Consulate/embassy)
  - EAD Card
  - Proof of Employment or Offer Letter
- NOTE: If you are planning to travel while your OPT is PENDING – contact OISPS regarding risks involved. OISPS does NOT recommend international travel while the OPT application is pending with USCIS
Options After Initial OPT Period

- STEM Extension
- Resume studying at Lamar or transfer to another school
- Return to Home Country
Resume Studying

• If student will resume studies, the updated I20 must be printed prior to the start of class and prior to the 60-day grace period ending.
• Your OPT work authorization ends on the date your new I20 is generated.
• Ending OPT early is allowed.
• If resuming study at another institution – SEVIS record MUST be transferred PRIOR to the student’s 60-day grace period ending. Please submit our transfer out form in order to proceed with this option.
• First day of classes MUST be within 5 months of the OPT EAD card end date.
Changing Status

• Applications for change of visa status **must** be received by USCIS prior to the end of the 60-day grace period.

• Work with immigration legal counsel regarding a Change of Status application to a new visa category. You will need to check with your legal counsel regarding your allowed period of stay or required exit date if you have a pending change of status when your grace period ends.