

**WELCOME!**

# Optional Practical Training (OPT)



UNIVERSITY OF  
South Carolina

# OPT = WORK AFTER GRADUATION



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Write down any questions you think of while we present. We will answer them at the end.

# OPT is...

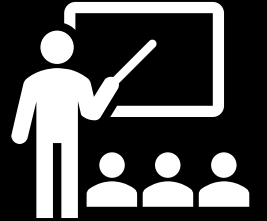
A work benefit of the F-1 **student** visa authorized by USC and USCIS.

An off-campus educational job experience for a **limited (12 months)** amount of time authorized by USCIS, related to your major.

# OPT is NOT...

A work visa for monetary gain and future employment.

Off-campus employment while you are enrolled in classes (that's CPT!).



# Section 8, Code of Federal Regulations

## 8CFR214.2(f)(10)(ii)(A)

*“Practical training may be authorized to an F-1 student who has been lawfully enrolled on a full -time basis, in an approved SEVP-certified college, university, conservatory, or seminary for one full academic year...a student may apply to USCIS for authorization for temporary employment for optional practical training directly related to the student's major area of study. The student may not begin [OPT] until the date indicated on his or her employment authorization document, Form I-766. A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for optional practical training...after completion of the course of study...or after completion of all course requirements...”*



**USCIS POLICY**  
**ISSS POLICY**





## PRE-COMPLETION OPT

- Before graduation
- Dissertation phase
- Less common
- Will have to apply again for post

## POST-COMPLETION OPT

- After graduation
- Can apply for before end of term
- Most common

# BOTH

- One year of full-time enrollment prior to start (total)
- You do not need a job offer prior to applying
- 90 days of unemployment allowed
- Can apply for STEM OPT extension
- Eligible again when higher degree obtained
- 1 year of full-time CPT makes you ineligible



The ISSS office only recommends applying for pre-completion OPT if you have a job offer, as you risk wasting OPT time if you do not find a job. You only get 12 months total! We only approve full-time OPT if you're on "z-status." Also, you will have to pay two application fees to USCIS if you use pre and post completion OPT. Pre-completion OPT is rare, and we generally recommend students only use post. We can shorten an I-20 to accommodate this as needed. Always talk to an advisor!

**BOTH**

one year of full-time  
employment for to

you need a  
prior to

only for STEM  
profession  
when

obtained  
one year of full-time  
employment makes you  
eligible

# APPLICATION TIMELINE

After 1 year of enrollment!

90 days



60 days

OCTOBER 19, 2023

DECEMBER 18, 2023

FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Can start applying up to 90 days before program completion. Any earlier and it will be denied! Can apply as late as 60 days after graduation.

Graduation Date  
or Dissertation  
(I-20 completion)

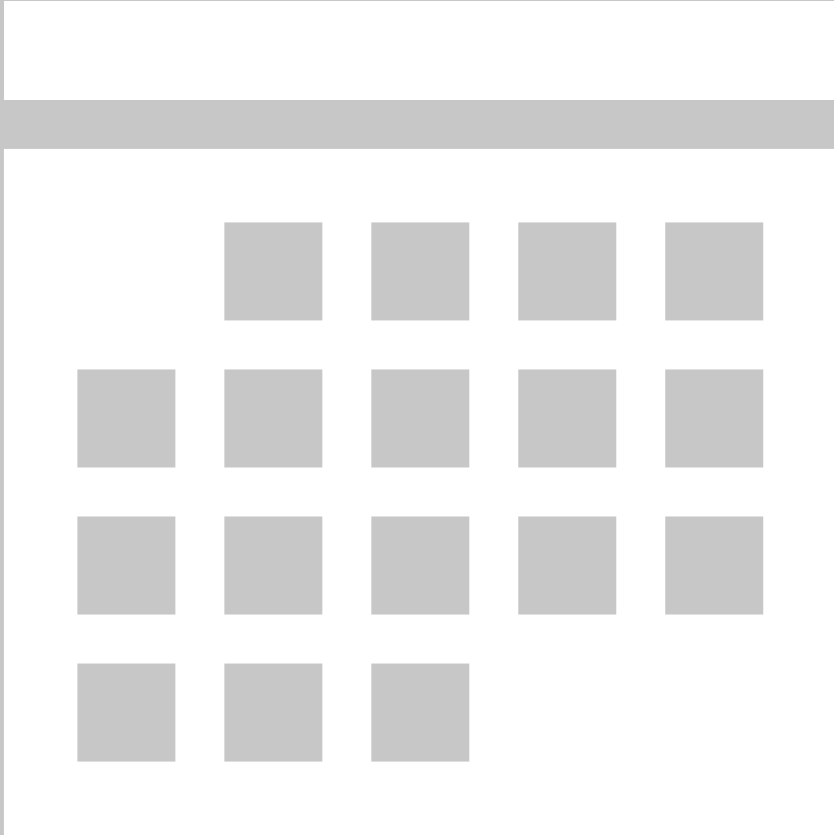
OPT Start Date: Must be before  
your 60-day grace period ends.  
Could be exact or anticipated.



**So, anyone who graduates on December 18, 2023, can apply for OPT from September 19 to February 16, 2024. We recommend applying earlier rather than later.**

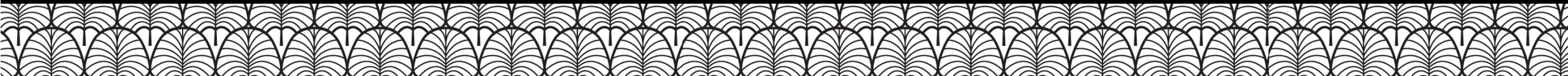
**When applying, they can choose a start date anywhere from December 19 to February 16, 2024. (You can see why applying early is beneficial here!)**

**Choose a start date based on your situation. Housing? Prospects? Funds?**



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- Will I graduate on time?
- What is the job market like for my major?
- Start date is NOT flexible. Cannot be changed after you submit the application.
- Paperwork can take 3+ months to process.

# Important considerations!



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# TAKE A BREAK!

Look for  
jobs!

**Ask yourself:** Are there a lot of jobs available? Is this job realistic for my situation? Do I qualify? Can I compromise?

Type one word or short phrase in the chat box that describes the most important thing you've learned about OPT so far.



**Interstride**

<https://interstride.com/>

# APPLICATION PROCESS

A lot of the responsibility of OPT falls on you, the student! ISSS approves your initial application and monitors your status, but it is the F-1 visa holder's responsibility to submit materials to USCIS and obtain the EAD (employment authorization) card. It's your responsibility to make sure your job relates to your field of study.



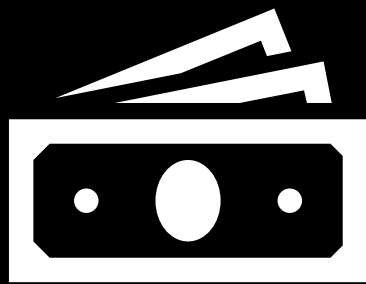
- Attend the OPT workshop or watch the [online presentation](#).
- Visit the [Study in the States OPT site](#) and read information.
- Familiarize yourself with the OPT process and decide if it is the right decision for your situation. Consider time and fees.
- OPT is a lot of responsibility on you, so make sure YOU understand it! [Ask an advisor](#) if you have questions.



# PAY THE ISSS FEE



- Pay the OPT SEVIS Maintenance fee on the [ISSS website](#).
- This fee allows ISSS to support your immigration compliance while you are working but still on student visa status.
- We won't process paperwork without the fee.
- Second fee goes to USCIS.



# COMPLETE FORMS





- Complete and sign the OPT I-20 request form in the [ISSS Forms Library](#)
- If applying by mail: I-765
  - Form will automatically be filled if you apply to USCIS online
- Email the form to [iss@sc.edu](mailto:iss@sc.edu)



**ONLINE I-765  
IS EASY!**



## OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING I-20 REQUEST FORM

### Student Completes This Section:

**Directions to student:** You should complete Page 1 of this form. Your academic advisor in your academic department needs to complete the second page of this form. Note that your academic advisor is not the same as your international student advisor. This form needs to be completed prior to submitting your OPT application. Digital signatures are acceptable.

Last Name: _____	First Name: _____
Post-graduation email address: _____	Telephone: _____
Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - From (mm/dd/yy): _____ To: _____	If you were previously authorized for OPT, which degree level? Bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> Master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
When do you expect to graduate? Semester: _____ Year: _____	Are you currently employed on campus? No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Until (mm/dd/yy): _____
I am requesting to begin OPT: <input type="radio"/> After graduation <input type="radio"/> After completion of all coursework except dissertation <input type="radio"/> While registered as a full-time student (part-time) <input type="radio"/> While registered as a full-time student (full-time)	
Requested OPT Start Date (must be within the 60 days after your I-20 end date): _____	

### OPT Statement of Responsibility:

My signature below confirms that I understand the following and agree to the terms of the F-1 Optional Practical Training work authorization.

- 1) The accuracy and completion of my OPT and/or STEM OPT application is my responsibility. UofSC International Student Services Advisors review the OPT application documents I provide to them, but USC International Student Services is not liable for any errors or mistakes on the Form I-765, G-1145, copies of passport, visa, I-94, passport photos, or payment.
- 2) If I choose for UofSC International Student Services to receive my mail from USCIS, I understand that I am responsible for staying in touch with the office for the collection of USCIS documents, including any notices of action, requests for evidence, and employment authorization documents. The University of South Carolina cannot be held liable for any problems with mailing or delivery.
- 3) I understand that I am responsible for maintaining copies of all OPT related documents, including my OPT I-20, my OPT application materials, official correspondence from USCIS, I-797 notices of action, Employment Authorization Documents, and any other documents pertaining to my OPT application.
- 4) I understand that it is my responsibility to report employment and address changes within 10 days of the change once my OPT begins using the SEVP Portal. If I do not report changes within 10 days, it is my responsibility to reach out to ISS to correct my record accordingly.
- 5) I understand that if I exceed 90 days of unemployment, my F-1 record is at risk of automatic termination and that I should depart the U.S. or change to another status.
- 6) I understand that if I lose my EAD card, I have to file a new Form I-765 and pay the filing fee again.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Academic Advisor Completes This Section:

International students on F-1 visas are eligible for at least 12 months of off-campus employment authorization in their field of study. This work authorization, called Optional Practical Training, is granted through application to U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services. We need confirmation from the academic department that this student is meeting the academic components necessary to apply for OPT.

Advisor's Name: _____	Advisor's Department: _____
Advisor's Email: _____	Advisor's Phone: _____
Student's Major: _____	Level of Study: Bachelor's <input type="radio"/> Master's <input type="radio"/> Ph.D. <input type="radio"/>
Second Major (if applicable): _____ *Minor is not applicable	
Is student registered in current term? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	Will the student have completed all coursework requirements for the degree by the requested start date? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<u>Graduate students only:</u> When is student expected to defend his/her thesis or dissertation? (mm/dd/yy): _____	When is student expected to graduate? Semester: _____ Year: _____
<i>I confirm that the information provided in this section about the student's academic progress is true and correct.</i>	
Signature of Advisor: _____	Date: _____
Optional Comments: _____	

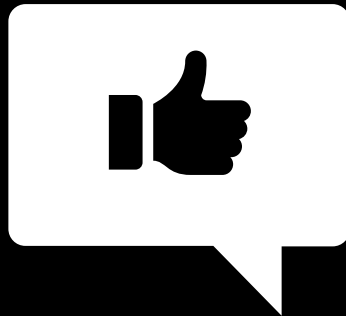
Address: 1705 College Street, Close Hipp Building, Suite 470, Columbia, SC 29208  
 Phone: 803-777-7461  
 Email: [iss@sc.edu](mailto:iss@sc.edu) Website: [sc.edu/internationalservices](http://sc.edu/internationalservices)

# ISSS APPROVAL



- Wait about 5 business days for ISSS to review and approve the form.
- You will receive an email with a new OPT I-20 and approval confirmation.
- ISSS approval does not guarantee USCIS approval!
- Once you receive your OPT I-20, you have 30 days to apply to USCIS.

4



Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status  
OMB NO. 1653-0038

SEVIS ID: [REDACTED] (F-1)

NAME: [REDACTED]

**EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS**

TYPE	FULL/PART-TIME	STATUS	START DATE	END DATE
POST-COMPLETION OPT	FULL TIME	REQUESTED	01 OCTOBER 2020	30 SEPTEMBER 2021

# PREPARE MATERIALS FOR USCIS



- After receiving OPT I-20, you have 30 days to gather/submit!
- We recommend online application
- Do not need to submit USC ISSS OPT form (internal use only)
- Create a USCIS account:  
<https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>
- Prepare ahead of time:
  - New 2x2 passport photo (for EAD card)
  - Scan of passport photo page
  - Digital copy of OPT I-20
  - Most recent I-94
  - A credit card (USICS filing fee)
- Form I-765 (automatic if doing online)

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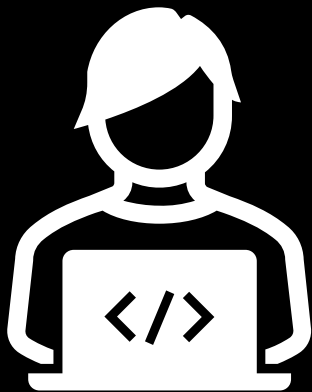


**SUBMIT  
TO USCIS**





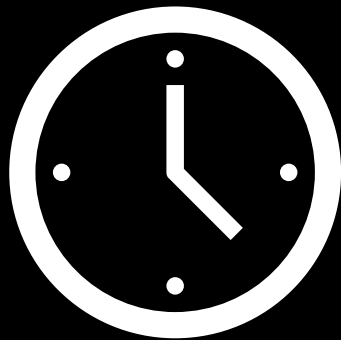
- Submit [online](#) to USCIS on your own.
- If confused, use the [guide](#) on the ISSS website to help you through the online process.
- Consider a start date that works best for your situation. Can't change it!
- Carefully double check all your information, including start date, before submitting.



**WAIT FOR  
APPROVAL**



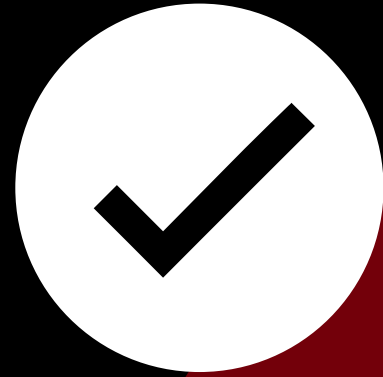
- Wait for USCIS to approve your request.
- You cannot legally work until the request is approved.
- Approval takes about 90 days (could be more or less).
- Check your online account frequently for updates.
- While you wait...apply for jobs if you don't already have a job offer.



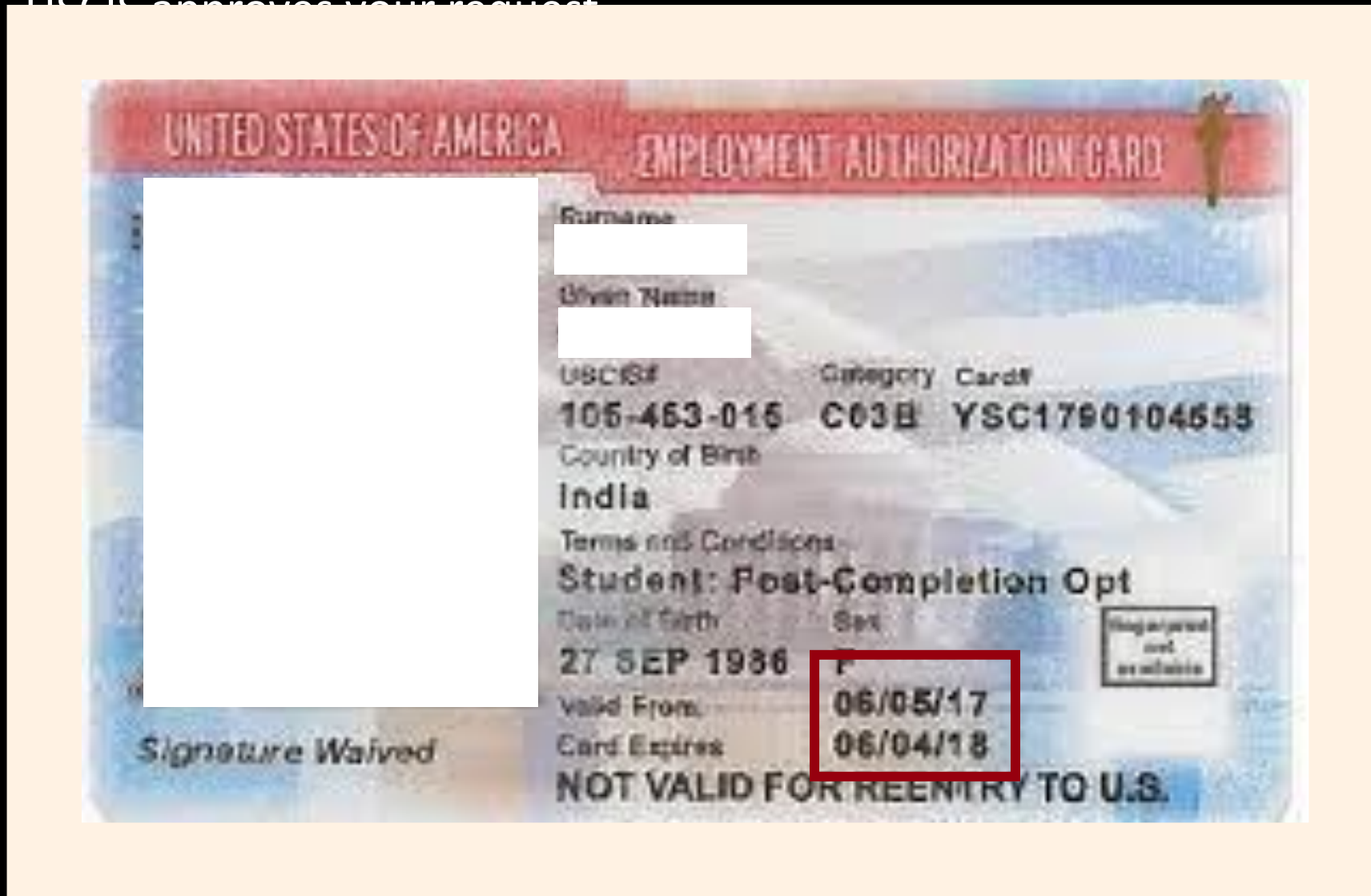
# APPROVAL AND EAD



- USCIS approves your request.
- By mail, you will receive an employment authorization card (EAD card) within 1-4 weeks.
- The EAD card reflects the OPT start/end time (1 year from listed start date).
- Check email for SEVP portal log in. This is where you will report employer information.
- Once you **physically** receive the card, you may begin employment.
- If you already have a job, start! Be sure to work at least 20 hours a week.
- If you do not have a job, have 90 days from the start date on your EAD to find/start one.
- Be sure to choose a job that relates to your field of study!



• USCIS approves your request



• field of study:

# TAKE A BREAK!

Have you been following the links? Post a screen shot of the application steps on our website, or the online application guide.





# **RULES AND REGULATIONS**



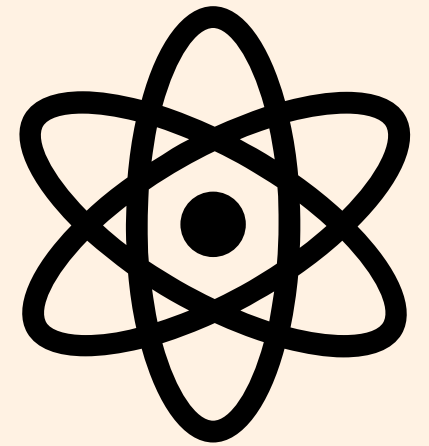
- **Must apply for OPT inside the USA.**
- **Enrolled and on F-1 status for at least 1 academic year before eligible.**
- **Application must reach USCIS within 30 days of I-20 creation.**
- **Job must be related to your field of study (your responsibility).**
- **Can use OPT for each higher degree level (can qualify multiple times).**
- **Ineligible if you have accrued 1 year or more of full-time CPT.**
- **Student's responsibility to set up SEVP Portal (online database) and report job, address changes, etc.**
- **60-day grace period after finishing OPT**



- **Allowed 90 days of unemployment (60 days added after OPT finishes and STEM extension is granted). Tracked on SEVP website.**
- **Must work at least 20 hours a week (should be full-time).**
- **Multiple jobs are acceptable, and you can switch jobs.**
- **Volunteer work, contract hire, unpaid internship, and self-employment are all okay for post-completion OPT. Not for STEM!**
- **Degree must qualify for STEM extension, and you must file updates every 6 months.**
- **Must have diploma, bona fide employer, and paid employment to qualify for STEM extension.**



# 24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION



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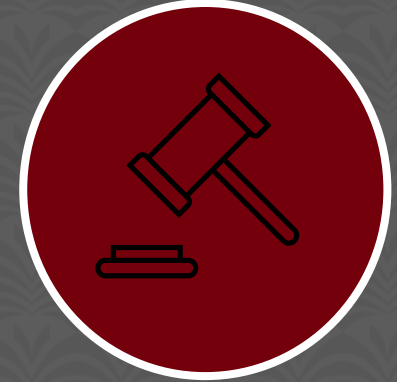
## WHAT:

- An additional 24 months of work authorization
- Applies after 1 year of regular OPT
- Must apply 90 days before original OPT expires
- Use the STEM OPT form



## WHO:

- Students with degrees in qualifying STEM fields (list available online)
- Employer must be E-Verified
- Student, employer, USCIS, ISSS



## REGULATIONS:

- Apply in a timely manner
- Can work while you wait for approval
- At least 20 hours per week
- Multiple jobs acceptable
- Additional unemployment
- Must submit a report after 6 months (training plan)
- Job must be paid



## WHAT:

- An additional 24 months of work authorization
- Applies after 1 year of regular OPT
- Must apply 90 days before original OPT expires
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## WHO:

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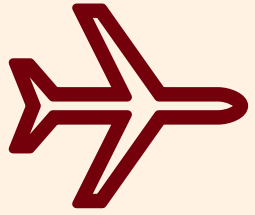
## REGULATIONS:

- Apply in a timely manner
- Can work while you wait for approval
- At least 20 hours per week
- Multiple jobs acceptable
- Additional unemployment
- Must submit a report after 6 months (training plan)
- Job must be paid



# AFTER OPT ENDS

- End date listed on I-20
- You must cease employment
- Prepare to leave USA (60 days)
- May change visa status (may need an immigration lawyer)
- Begin a new degree on F-1 status



# OPT & TRAVELLING

	Before graduation, Before USCIS OPT approval	After graduation, before USCIS OPT approval	After graduation, after USCIS OPT approval
<b>CARRY THES DOCUMENTS WITH YOU:</b>			
<b>Valid passport</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Valid F-1 visa</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>OPT I-20 with travel signature</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Evidence of continued enrollment</b>	YES	N/A	N/A
<b>I-797 Notice</b>	Not needed	YES	N/A
<b>Job off/verification</b>	Not needed	Strongly recommend carrying	YES
<b>EAD card</b>	Not needed	Not, but if on STEM, talk to ISSS	YES

You should report the following changes on the [SEVP Portal](#) within 10 days of the change occurring:

- Physical/home address or mailing address change
- Legal name change
- New employment, change in employment, or termination of employment

If you are on your STEM Extension OPT, you should report the following change on the SEVP Portal within 10 days of the change occurring:

- Physical/home address or mailing address change
- Legal name change

You should report any changes in employment within 10 days of the change occurring by using the **STEM OPT Update Form**, located in the [ISS Forms Library](#).

A new Form I-983 is required if there are any material changes to your STEM OPT employment. A list of material changes and a link to the Form I-983 can be found on the [Immigration and Customs Enforcement website](#).

If required by a material change in your employment, you can submit an updated Form I-983 to ISS using the **STEM OPT Update Form**.

# **OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**





## STEM Student Due Date Announcement

Hello, **Your name here**

### Your STEM OPT Reporting Deadlines

While on STEM OPT, you must give your designated school official (DSO):

1. Validation reports to confirm that your address and employer information in SEVIS is correct. These are due every six months.
2. Two Evaluations of Student Progress (page 5 of the Form I-983). These are due:
  - a. 12 months after your STEM OPT starts and
  - b. 24 months after your STEM OPT starts.
3. Evaluation of Student Progress (page 5 of the Form I-983) when you stop working for a STEM employer before your STEM OPT authorization ends. These are due within 10 days after you stop working for the employer.

Your reporting deadlines:

Date	What is Due?	Current Status
Oct 4 2023	Validation report for address and employer information	Due
Apr 4 2024	Validation report for address and employer information	
Apr 4 2024	Evaluation of Student Progress (page 5 of Form I-983)	
Oct 4 2024	Validation report for address and employer information	

Missing these deadlines may affect the state of your SEVIS record.

For more information, go to the STEM OPT Hub (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>) pages on the Study in the States website.

# Frequently asked questions:

- What happens if I exceed 90 days of unemployment?
  - Your record will be terminated. You must leave.
- Can I start work before the date on my EAD card?
  - No! You can only work during those days (paid or unpaid). Employers must report all staff to the government. Be careful of shady employers.
- Do I need to report volunteer work if it's unpaid?
  - Yes. All work should be reported while on OPT.
- Can I travel while on OPT?
  - Yes, but it can be risky while the application is pending. After you have your EAD card it's no problem.
- Can I mark "self-employed" to avoid going over my unemployment allotment?
  - No! Only if you have a business license and can prove true self-employment to USCIS. This includes reporting it on your taxes to the IRS.
- How can I avoid delays on my application?
  - OPT applications are rarely denied, only delayed. See this [tip sheet](#) from DHS.

# Frequently asked questions:

- How much does premium process cost?
  - The additional fee is \$1,500. The processing time is 30 days. Request it [here](#).
- Which start date should I choose?
  - It depends on what you want. A later start date will allow more time to job search and stay in the US. An earlier start date will allow you to begin employment sooner. You have to decide what best meets your needs.
- Can I work without my diploma?
  - Technically, yes. If you are a PhD student and working on your thesis.
- What if my mailing address changes while the OPT application is pending?
  - It is possible to update it while pending, however, this can cause delivery problems or delay the EAD card. It is better to keep the address on file and make sure you have some sort of access to the old mailing address.
- What is \_\_\_\_\_ on the online I-765 form?
  - Have you checked the [ISSS website](#)? We go through the online I-765 process step by step. It is your form!

**Questions?**

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