

Information on Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is a benefit of F-1 immigration status that permits up to 12 months of off-campus employment for the purpose of gaining practical experience in your chosen field of study. While you may work for any employer in the United States, the job duties must be directly related to your **major area** of study and commensurate with your educational level.

There are two general types of optional practical training:

1. Pre-completion OPT, available before the student's program end date; and
2. Post-completion OPT, available after the student's program end date, and most commonly used
 - **Post-completion OPT is further subdivided into:**
 1. Standard post-completion OPT
 2. STEM extension OPT
 3. H-1B cap-gap extension OPT

Requirements for OPT:

1. Must have been a full-time student for a minimum of ONE academic year (9 months)
2. Must be in valid F-1 status when you apply
3. A job offer is not required at time of application.
4. Job must be related to your major.
5. Can be full-time or part-time.
6. Have not exceeded 12 months of full time Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
7. ESL students are NOT eligible

When to Apply:

All students should apply at least three months before the date they wish to start working.

Pre-completion OPT:

- Must have been a full-time student for one academic year.
- The amount of time used in pre-OPT is deducted from the 12 months OPT
- Must work 20 hours/week during school year; full-time during school breaks.
- Must be enrolled full-time and in good academic standing
- Unofficial copy of transcripts must be included in the packet.
- Same application and fee as post-completion OPT.

Post-completion OPT:

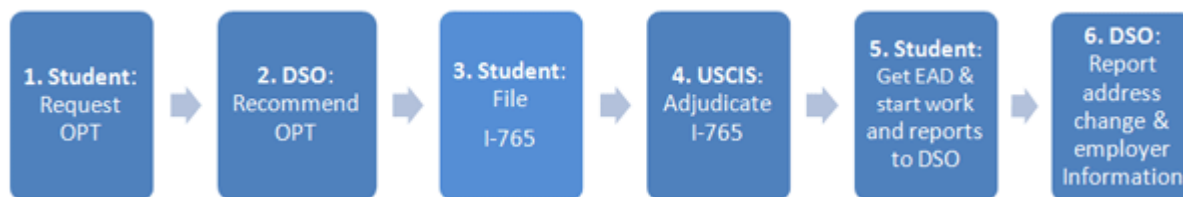
- You must have confirmed that you are graduating with Academic Advising before you can apply for post-OPT.
- Application for OPT is as early as 90 days before and not more than 60 days after the completion of your degree requirements (Ex: If May 30 is your completion date, you can apply between Feb 28 and July 29).
- OPT start date must be within 60 days after your program end date as listed on the I-20.
- Complete application package must be received by UCIS **within 30 days of the authorization by the International Student Advisor/DSO** (date of the issued OPT I-20).

How to apply:

A Form I-765 for standard post-completion OPT can be filed with USCIS up to 90 days before the program end date and up to 60 days after the program end-date, provided that it is received by USCIS no later than 30 days of the date the DSO enters the OPT recommendation into SEVIS.

➤ Standard OPT application procedures

The basic OPT application process consists of a DSO recommendation in SEVIS, the production of a new Form I-20, the student's filing of Form I-765 with USCIS (with fee, the OPT I-20, and other supporting documentation), and receiving an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS. Here is how SEVP's Help Hub maps the process:



➤ OPT application deadlines

An application for standard OPT consists of **four steps**:

1. The student makes a request for OPT to the DSO
2. After determining eligibility, the DSO updates SEVIS with an OPT recommendation
3. The DSO prepares a Form I-20 with the OPT recommendation and requisite signatures.
4. The student files a Form I-765 (with fee, signed Form I-20 with OPT recommendation, and any other supporting documents) with USCIS, within OPT filing deadlines

Standard OPT application steps must be taken within the deadlines established by the regulations. If USCIS receives an OPT I-765 before or after the window allowed for that type of OPT, the I-765 will be denied and the fee not returned, leaving making a new OPT recommendation and refiling (with a new fee) as the only remedy. The deadlines for standard OPT filing are as follows. The dates refer to limits on when the Form I-765 can be received by the proper USCIS Lockbox Facility.

OPT Filing Deadline Examples. Here are several examples of how the standard post-completion deadlines work with the 30-day filing limit. In these examples, assume the student's **program end date** is May 15, 2018...

- **Example 1.** DSO updates SEVIS with a post-completion OPT recommendation on May 10, 2018, five days before the student's program end date.
 - The student must then file Forms I-765 and I-20 with USCIS within 30 days of May 10.
- **Example 2.** DSO updates SEVIS with a post-completion OPT recommendation on May 30, 2018, 2 weeks into the student's 60-day grace period.
 - The student must then file Forms I-765 and I-20 with USCIS within 30 days of May 30.
- **Example 3.** DSO updates SEVIS with a post-completion OPT recommendation on July 1, 2018, 2 weeks before the end of the student's 60-day grace period.
 - The student only has 2 weeks to file Forms I-765 and I-20 with USCIS before the 60-day grace period expires.
- **Example 4.** DSO updates SEVIS with a post-completion OPT recommendation on February 1, 2018, 3.5 months before the student's program end date.
 - The student must file Forms I-765 and I-20 within 30 days of that date, but no sooner than 90 days before the program end date. In this case, the student must time the mailing or e-filing of the I-765 so that USCIS receives it no sooner than 90 days before the program end date but no later than 30 days after the DSO's OPT recommendation in SEVIS. This reduces the student's filing window to only two weeks.

➤ **Application checklist**

1. Send the following documents to the CIE office to begin the OPT application process:

- ☐ USCIS Form I-765 (original) –Include the appropriate OPT eligibility code on question 27:
 - (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT
 - (c)(3)(B) for standard post-completion OPT
- ☐ Form G-1145 Notification of Acceptance (only if applying through mail and not online)
- ☐ Copy of passport (recent and old one if applicable and marked that way)
- ☐ Copy of F-1 student visa
- ☐ Copies of Form I-94 Departure Record (found here: [I94 - Official Website \(dhs.gov\)](https://www.dhs.gov/i-94))
- ☐ Copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if you had been issued one before.
- ☐ One scanned color photo that meets USCIS specifications, (see specifications on OPT handout).
- ☐ Copies of all previous I-20s, including those from institutions outside of Salem State University.
- ☐ Bank account or credit card for payment of \$410. Payment received by *U.S. Department of Homeland Security* through Pay.gov website.

2. An international advisor will review your application documents, make suggestions for changes, and you will receive, and include in your OPT application package the following:

- ☐ New I-20 with **OPT recommendation** on second page. Sign and date that I-20, and email us a copy. **YOU CAN'T APPLY FOR OPT WITHOUT INCLUDING THAT OPT I-20 IN YOUR APPLICATION!**

3. Once application is ready:

- A. Once OPT is recommended in SEVIS by a DSO and you receive that OPT I-20, you must file for OPT ASAP. **USCIS must receive it within 30 days of the I-20 issue date or you will be DENIED.**
- B. Keep a copy of your complete application material for your records.
- C. File for OPT by reviewing our instructions to either file for the OPT application in the mail or online.
- D. After you submit your application send us a copy of the **Receipt Notice** or the **case number** you will receive from USCIS.
- E. Monitor the status of your application through your online USCIS account, or using the Case Status Check page on the USCIS website until approved and receive the EAD card.
- F. Update USCIS immediately if you change address to make sure you receive mail from them.
- G. Inform us right away if you receive a **Request for Evidence** from USCIS because we need to respond to them ASAP with the right information. Your OPT application may be denied if we don't.
- H. Send us a copy of your EAD card once you receive that.

If sending it by mail note the difference in the address for regular vs express mail.
Mail the complete OPT application packet to:

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries
by Certified Mail with return receipt

USCIS
PO Box 805373
Chicago, IL 60680

For Express mail and courier deliveries:

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

➤ USCIS Processing Delays

Federal regulations require USCIS to process I-765 applications within 90 days. This provides students some leverage in requesting case expedites and inquiries.

▪ **I-765s pending 75+ days:**

Student/applicant action: The student or applicant may contact the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) (1-800-375-5283) to request that the case be elevated. This inquiry may help speed up the I-765 adjudication process but a faster adjudication is not guaranteed. For more information about submitting a request when an I-765 has been pending for 75 days, please visit

<https://www.uscis.gov/forms/tip-sheet-employment-authorization-applications-pending-more-75-days>

Practice Note: Applicants should be careful about the scripted question from the NCSC regarding address changes. If they change the address on record, that will impact where the card is sent. This is particularly problematic for students who are using their school's address, and then inadvertently change it the address on record to their residential address when making a case inquiry.

▪ **I-765 pending 90+ days:**

Student/applicant submits and e-Request Case Inquiry to USCIS: <https://egov.uscis.gov/e-Request/Intro.do>

Each inquiry will be forwarded to the USCIS Service Center responsible for the case.

Please advise students not to contact USCIS multiple times as it slows the process. The student should choose either to call NCSC **or** to submit an e-Request, not both.

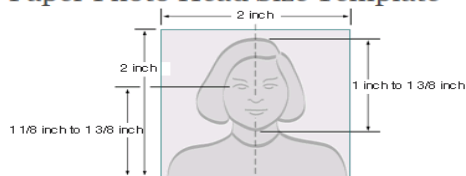
➤ Photo Requirements

You need 2 passport style photos if sending it by mail, or 1 if submitting online. You can use the Photo Tool to verify your photo meets the requirements: <https://tsg.phototool.state.gov/photo>

Photo Composition Template

- Make sure the photo presents the full head from the top of the hair to the bottom of the chin
- Center the head with the frame
- The person in the photo should have a neutral expression and be facing the camera

Paper Photo Head Size Template



- Photo must be 2 inches by 2 inches
- The height of the head (top of hair to bottom of chin) should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches (25 mm - 35 mm)
- Make sure the eye height is between 1 1/8 inches to 1 3/8 inches (28 mm - 35 mm) from the bottom of the photo

Well Composed Photo Composition Examples

