Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Guide

For F-1 International Students

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What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training is a benefit of F-1 student status. It allows students to have work authorization for off-campus employment <u>in their academic major field of study</u>. To be eligible, you must be in valid F-1 status for one academic year.

The name of the work permit for OPT is the Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

OPT Application Process

The application is completed in four steps:

1. **Request your OPT I-20: (Complete OPT Request Form and receive OPT I-20)**

2. **Prepare your application materials**

    Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize your materials for mailing

3. **Make an appointment with a Foreign Student Advisor** (OPT applications <u>will not</u> be reviewed during walk-in hours)

4. **Mail and Receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**

    3 months on average after your application has been received by USCIS

Highlights

1. One year of OPT is available after completing each degree program at a higher level. For example, you may use 12 months of OPT after completion of your Bachelor's, then your Master's and then your Ph.D. = 3 years total.

2. OPT is available both before or after completing a degree program.

3. A job offer is not required to apply for OPT.

4. The employment may occur anywhere in the U.S.

5. No special permission is needed from USCIS to quit a job or change employers. However, you must notify a Foreign Student Advisor of these changes.

6. During the period of OPT, a student remains in F-1 status.

7. An extension of OPT is allowed for up to 17 months if at the time of the extension you have a degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) field and your employer is enrolled in E-Verify. For more information, see our web page.

Things to Remember

Stipulations

1. The application for post-completion OPT must be received by the USCIS no earlier than 90 days before program completion and no later than 60-days after your date of completion.

2. It may take up to three months to receive the EAD (Employment Authorization Document).

3. More than 90 days of unemployment during OPT is a violation of F-1 status.

4. Once you complete your degree and your I-20 has expired, you must have a valid EAD to begin working on or off campus.

5. Once the OPT application is submitted to the USCIS, it is impossible to change your selected authorization dates.

6. Canceling the OPT application is very difficult and must be discussed with a Foreign Student Advisor.

7. OPT can only be extended beyond 12 months in limited circumstances (see item #7 at left.)

8. Employment must be related to the degree program noted on your I-20.

9. Students are required to report the following information to a Foreign Student Advisor within 10 days of any change: name, residential address, employer name, employer address, employment status .

Types of OPT

Pre-completion OPT

Work permission

before finishing degree

Post-completion OPT

Work permission after

Finishing degree

When employment occurs	Hours per week allowed to work	Comments
Summer or Winter Break (Pre-completion)	There is no minimum or maximum hours per week a student is required to work on pre-completion OPT.	The amount of time you use for pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12-month allowance. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50%. For example, if you work part-time for 4 months, only 2 months will be deducted. You will retain 10 months to use at another time.
Fall or Spring Semester (Pre-completion)	Must not exceed 20 hours per week. Graduate student who have advanced to candidacy may work up to 40 hours per week. (Graduate Assistants must follow Graduate School employment policies)	**Students on Pre-completion OPT are not eligible for STEM Extension OPT or the H1B cap gap extension**
After degree completion (Post-completion)	Students must work an average of 20 hours per week during post-completion OPT to be considered "employed" and maintaining F-1 status.	No more than 90 days of unemployment are allowed during the 12-month post-completion OPT period.

Application Deadlines

Pre-completion OPT
90 days before desired start date.

Post-completion OPT
You can submit your application to USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date of your program or 60 days after completion as long as you have not left the U.S. We recommend you apply as early as possible to avoid unexpected delays.

For a definition of "Completion of Program" as it refers to OPT, see page 8.

Is OPT right for you?

If you can answer "yes" to the questions on this page, you are ready to apply for OPT.

Yes!

No!

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, talk to a Foreign Student Advisor about your situation.

Pre-Completion OPT

Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year? At Ball State, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters. You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to Ball State as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to BSU.

Will your job offer still be valid three months from now? Getting the OPT permit can take three months. If your employer is not willing to wait for you, then it's not worth the effort to apply for OPT.

Do you plan on applying for STEM extension or H1B cap gap extension? Only eligible post-completion OPT students are eligible for these two extensions. If you want to apply for either of these extensions, you must submit a second application for post-completion OPT.

If you plan to work part-time during a fall or spring semester, will you also be enrolled in full time courses?

Are you willing to use some of the 12 months you are allowed for OPT? You will not have a full year of OPT after you graduate if you choose to use some of it for pre-completion employment.

Post-Completion OPT

Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year?
You can count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs before you came to Ball State as long as your SEVIS I-20 was transferred to BSU. At Ball State, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive fall / spring or spring / fall semesters.

Will you be completing your program of study at Ball State within the next three months? The application for OPT cannot be submitted earlier than 90 days before your completion date.

Are you enrolled full-time this semester or authorized by International Services to have a reduced course load? You must have approval from International Services before you withdraw from a course.

Step 1

Request your OPT I-20:

1. Complete OPT Request Form

2. Choose authorization dates

3. Submit OPT Request Form to your Academic Advisor.

4. Submit the completed OPT Request Form to the Rinker Center.

5. Pick up your new OPT I-20 from the Rinker Center

The OPT Request Form

To request your OPT I-20, you must submit a completed OPT Request Form to International Services.

A fillable, downloadable form is available on the forms section of the International Student Services webpage.

Choosing Authorization Dates
On the Request Form, you must indicate what dates you want your work authorization to begin and end before meeting a Foreign Student Advisor.

The authorization dates you choose will be noted on your new OPT I-20 and cannot be changed. The dates will also be noted on your EAD.

- The **start date** is the day on which the EAD becomes valid and you can begin working. The "clock starts ticking" on the start date whether you have a job or not.

- The **end date** is usually 12 months later, unless you request a shorter period of time or your application is approved 61 days or more after your program completion date.

If you change your mind about your authorization dates…..

You will **NOT** be able to adjust your OPT authorization dates once you have mailed your application to USCIS. Consider the authorization dates carefully before submitting scheduling an appointment with a Foreign Student Advisor.

After you submit your Optional Practical Training Request Form you will receive an email instructing you to pick it up at the Rinker Center.

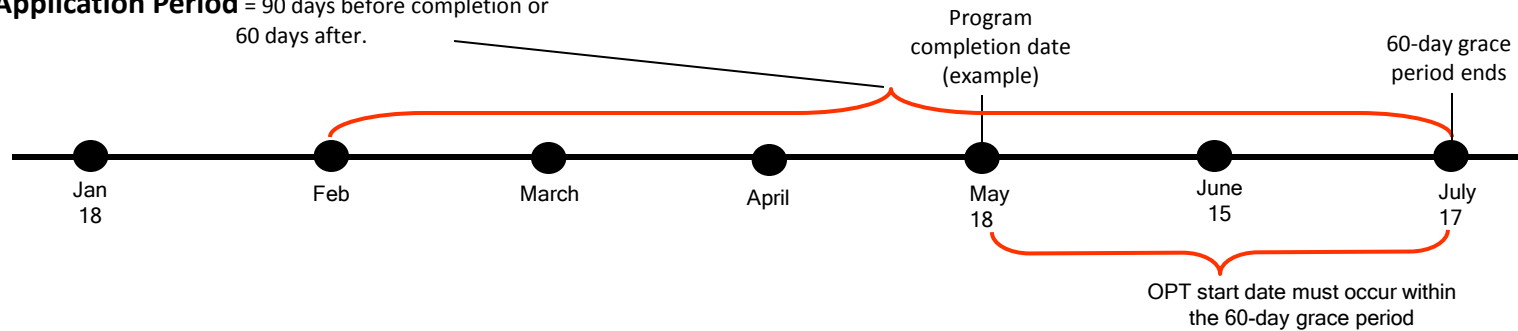**BALL STATE UNIVERSITY.** RINKER CENTER for INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS **Optional Practical Training Request Form**

- Your Academic Adviser must sign this form before you submit it to International Services (original signature required).
- See the reverse side for instructions and regulations affecting OPT applications. Please write legibly.

Family Name:	Given Name:
BSU ID:	Date of current I-20 expiration :
Email address you will use after graduation:	Telephone:

Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? ☐ No   ☐ Yes—From :   To :

If you have been authorized for OPT in the past, on which degree level was it based? ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Ph.D.

When do you expect to graduate?*   For which type of OPT are you applying? ☐ Pre-Completion ☐ Post-Completion*

Semester: Year: *Post-OPT requests: The earliest you can submit this application is 90 days before you graduate.

Requested OPT Authorization Dates: *Start Date :   End Date :
*Start date must be within 60 days of your program completion date.

"I understand the responsibilities required for maintaining F-1 status during my period of OPT authorization as stated on the reverse and in the OPT Application Guide "

Signature of Student: Date:

Academic Recommendation

This section must be completed by your academic adviser.

Student's Major:	Second Major (if applicable):
Expected Completion Date :	Level of Study: ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Ph.D.
Student registered in current term? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Has student applied for graduation? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If the student is requesting "pre-completion" OPT, has s/he completed all required courses?	☐ Yes ☐ No

"I confirm that the information provided in this section is true and correct. I would like to recommend that this student be allowed to obtain Optional Practical Training in order to secure a position in his/her field of study."

Optional Comments :

Adviser's Name:

Department :	Telephone:
Signature:	Email :

The OPT Request Form

Expected Program Completion Date

The "Completion Date" for OPT purposes is the day you complete your final degree requirements. Your actual completion date may not necessarily be the day of your graduation ceremony or the date on your current I-20 expiration.

- **Undergraduate Students**
  The last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

- **Graduate Students**
  The day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis or dissertation with the Graduate School.

  If you do not have a research component to your degree program, your completion date would be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

If you don't complete your program as expected….
Once your OPT I-20 has been created, changing your completion date can create serious complications for your OPT application. Consider your expected completion date carefully and make every attempt to finish your program on that day. Students who do not complete all coursework by the program end date may extend their program prior to the I-20 end date but they are limited to part time post-completion OPT until they satisfy all degree requirements.

Academic Adviser's Signature

A signature from your Academic Adviser is required on this form. This signature verifies your completion date and your registration status at the time of application.

The OPT Application Timeline

OPT Application Period = 90 days before completion or 60 days after.

Program completion date (example)

60-day grace period ends

Jan 18   Feb   March   April   May 18   June 15   July 17

OPT start date must occur within the 60-day grace period

Points to Consider

▪You can submit your application to the USCIS up to 90 days before the completion date of your program or during the 60-day grace period after completion.

▪If you leave the US during your 60-day grace period and you haven't applied for OPT, you lose your opportunity to apply for OPT.

▪USCIS must receive your application no later than 30 days after your OPT I-20 has been issued or your application may be denied.

▪It can take 3 months or more to receive the EAD from the USCIS.

▪Your OPT start date can be no later than 60 days beyond your degree completion date.

▪You cannot start working until you have received the EAD and your start date is current.

▪If you receive the EAD before your start date has arrived, you cannot work until the start date (noted on the EAD).

▪You cannot change your start date once the OPT I-20 has been mailed to USCIS.

▪As long as you have applied for OPT, your F-1 status remains valid while you are waiting for the EAD even if there is a gap between your completion date and the start date of OPT. During this "gap," you can remain in the U.S. or travel abroad and re-enter as an F-1. More details on traveling while on OPT are discussed on pages 25-26.
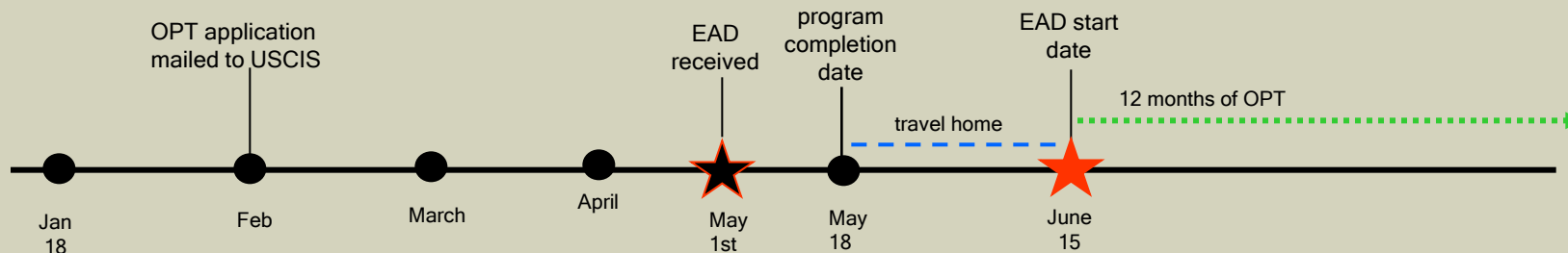
Timelines illustrating two common scenarios can be seen on the next page.

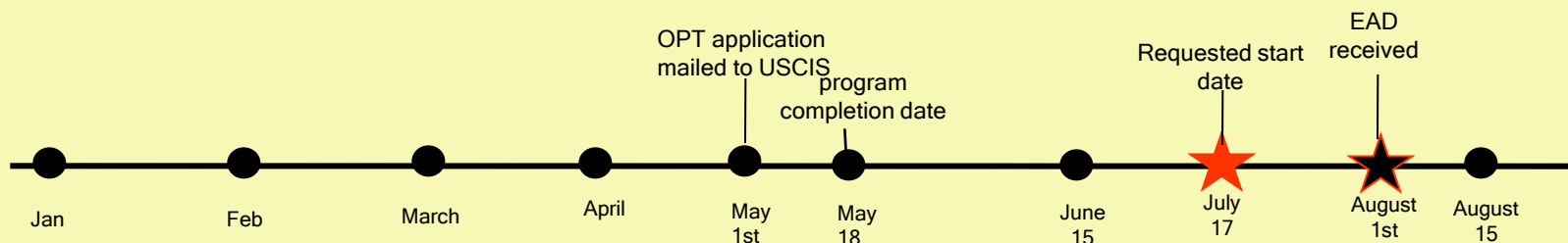# Choosing Authorization Dates --Typical Scenarios

Scenario 1: *Student with a job offer submits her OPT application early*

On Feb.18, Lin mails her application for OPT to the USCIS. She is completing her program on May 18 and chooses June 15 as the OPT start date because she has a job offer beginning that day. She receives the EAD on May 1. Her employer is pleased to see proof of the work permission early even though she cannot start working until June 15, as noted on the EAD. Lin decides to go home for one month to celebrate her program completion.

| OPT application mailed to USCIS | EAD received | program completion date | travel home | EAD start date | 12 months of OPT |

| Jan 18 | Feb | March | April | May 1st | May 18 | June 15 |

Scenario 2: *Student with no job offer submits his OPT application rather late*

Surendra doesn't have a job offer or time to search for one until after he finishes school. He chooses the latest date possible to start his OPT--July 17 --- which is the 60th day after his completion on May 18. He knows that he will be legal to stay in the U.S. as long as he has submitted the OPT application on time.   He finally mails his OPT application on May 1. On July 17, Surendra still hasn't received his EAD, so he can't work. Surendra receives his EAD on August 1 and it expires the following year on July 16. Surendra has lost 13 days of his 12 month OPT because his application was approved after the latest available OPT start date.

| OPT application mailed to USCIS | program completion date | Requested start date | EAD received |

| Jan | Feb | March | April | May 1st | May 18 | June 15 | July 17 | August 1st | August 15 |

Your OPT I-20

After submit your OPT request form, please allow a few days for processing. You will receive an email when to pick up your new OPT I-20 at the Rinker Center.

This sample shows how your I-20 will be updated for OPT purposes.

Check It for Accuracy!

Page 1
When you pick up your OPT I-20, make sure to check the following items:

Item #4: The education level will be updated if you have changed it. This usually only happens when a Ph.D. candidate decides to graduate with a Master's degree. If this is not accurate, contact a Foreign Student Advisor

Item #5: The completion date will be updated to match the completion date on your OPT Request Form. It may look like it will expire soon, but don't worry --- the I-20 remains valid for the length of your OPT authorization period .

This issue is important to note especially if you plan to travel abroad during your OPT period.

Item #10: Make sure the Advisor has signed it. Also, make sure the I-20 was issued less than 30 days in the past.

Item #11: Make sure you have signed and date d the I-20 after receiving it from International Services.

I-20 Page 2: No Changes

This page of your I-20 will not change. It contains a description of the F-1 regulations affecting your stay in the U.S. You should have already read them at some point during your stay in the U.S. If not, it's never to late--read them now!

Sample OPT I-20

Your OPT I-20

Page 3: Authorization Information and Travel Endorsement

On this page of your OPT I-20, you will see the following information:

- The authorization dates you have selected

- A new travel endorsement from the Foreign Student Advisor. Traveling while on OPT is allowed, with certain precautions. Details of travel-related issues are covered on pages 25-26 of this Guide.

Your OPT **application** must be sent to the USCIS no later than 30 days after the date of I-20 issuance. If your I-20 is more than 30 days old, see a Foreign Student Advisor for instructions.

Page 3

IF YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR F-1 NONIMMIGRANT STUDENT STATUS AND THE RELATING IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES, PLEASE CONTACT EITHER YOUR FOREIGN STUDENT ADVISOR ON CAMPUS OR A NEARBY IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE OFFICE.

FAMILY NAME: _____ FIRST NAME: _____

SEVIS

Student's Copy

Primary Major: 11.0401 Information Science/Studies
Student Employment Authorization:

| Employment Status: | FULL TIME | Type: | OPT |

Duration of Employment - From (Date): 08/15/2011 To (Date): 08/15/2012
Employer Name:
Employer Location:

The Student has met the 1 full academic year requirement.

Comments:

Event History
Event Name: Event Date:
Registration 08/30/2010

Current Authorizations: Start Date: End Date:
OPT Employment Requested 08/15/2011 08/15/2012

This page when properly endorsed, may be used for reentry of the student to attend the same school after a temporary absence from the United States. Each certification signature is valid for one year.

Name of School:

Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Advisor	*Advisor*	Foreign Student Advisor	05/18/2011	Muncie, IN
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)

Form I-20 A-B (Rev. 04-27-88)N

Step 2

Preparing and Mailing the Application

1. Gather the required materials

2. Complete the form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization

3. Meet with a Foreign Student Advisor

4. Mail your application package to the USCIS Service Center

Gather and Photocopy the Required Application Materials
Photocopy each document for your records.

Make sure that all photocopies are clear and legible!

Application Fee $380	Form I-765	Photocopies of Your:	Photocopy of I-94	Photocopy of Passport & Visa	2 Photos
		1. New OPT I-20 2. All previous I-20s*			
Use a personal check or money order made payable to "**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**"	Pages 15-18 of this Guide will give you instructions on how to download and complete this form.	Make sure all your I-20s are signed before copying them. Keep the originals for your records.	This small, white card is usually stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides of the I-94, even though the back side may be blank.	Your passport biographical information page (and passport extensions if applicable) **and** F-1 visa stamp or copies of the front and back of past EAD cards.	OPT photos need to be a certain size. See Page 19 of this Guide.
Make sure there is a name and address printed on the check (do not use the "temporary checks" often issued by the bank when you open a new account).		*Optional. We recommend you include these especially if you have used Curricular Practical Training (CPT).			Write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.

Form I-765:
Application for Employment Authorization

The I-765 is the USCIS form you need to submit. It is your official OPT application. A sample I-765 form is shown here.

The I-765 form can be downloaded from the USCIS web site.

Important: You must always use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 right before you mail your application since the USCIS updates their forms frequently.

How to Complete the I-765
Completing the I-765 for OPT is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The next two pages will cover how to complete those "tricky" questions so that you can avoid any delays in receiving your work authorization.

BE SURE THE BARCODE HAS PRINTED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE FORM I-765. If it has not printed, you need to **download** the form and **use a different PDF viewer** to print the I-765 with the bar code. USICS has created this form to be compatible with Adobe Acrobat Reader (The 'Preview' application on the Macintosh will NOT print this bar code properly).

Completing the I-765

1. Please note the table at the top of the form where it says" Do not write in this block." You do not need to complete that area since it is reserved for USCIS use only.

2. Check the box indicating that you are requesting "Permission to accept employment."

Items 3-11

Item #3:   Address in the United States
The address you put here is where the EAD will be mailed. This address needs to be valid for at least 3 months, the length of time it may take to process your OPT application. If you think you might move in the months after you mail your application, use a reliable friend or family member's address to receive your EAD.

The address you put here must also be in Indiana. If you are moving out of state, talk to a Foreign Student Advisor about how to submit this application outside of Indiana.

Item #9: Social Security Number (SSN)
If you have never worked in the U.S., you may not yet have a SSN. If this is the case, you can leave this space blank. You will be able to apply for your SSN when you get the EAD.

Item #10:   I-94 Number
On this item, you will use your current I-94 number. This is an 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your I-94 card (see sample on page 19). As an F-1, you will not have an Alien Registration Number.

Item #11:   Previous Employment Authorization
Check "yes" if you have ever received an EAD. Fill in the next two lines (at the top of the right column—shown on next page) with the information related to that previous work permit. A photocopy of that EAD must be included with your application package. (If you have lost it, write "lost EAD" in this space).

If you have never had an EAD, check the "no" box here. If you have worked on campus or have used CPT, you will still check "no" here.

1. Name (Family Name in CAPS)   (First)   (Middle)

2. Other Names Used (Include Maiden Name)

3. Address in the United States (Number and Street)   (Apt. Number)

412 West Charter Drive   #8

(Town or City)   (State/Country)   (ZIP Code)

Muncie   Indiana   47303

4. Country of Citizenship/Nationality

5. Place of Birth (Town or City)   (State/Province)   (Country)

6. Date of Birth   (mm/dd/yyyy)   7. Gender
☐ Male ☐ Female

8. Marital Status   ☐ Married   ☐ Single
☐ Widowed   ☐ Divorced

9. Social Security Number (Include all numbers you have ever used) (if any)

10. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) or I-94 Number (if any)

11. Have you ever before applied for employment authorization from USCIS?
☐ Yes (If yes, complete below)   ☐ No

Completing the I-765

Items 12-17

Item #12:   Date of Last Entry into the U.S.
This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your I-94 card. If you returned from Canada or Mexico and did not get a new I-94 please write your date of entry.

Item #13:   Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S.   This information is also on the I-94 (usually as a code like "CHI" for Chicago). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, write the name and the city where you entered in the blank.

Item #14: Manner of Last Entry
This is the status you had upon entering the U.S. For most students it should be F-1 but you may have also entered the U.S. as F-2 or H1-B.

Item#15: Current Immigration Status
Your current status should be F-1 student. If not, talk to a Foreign Student Adviser immediately.

Item#16: Eligibility Category
Use the following codes depending on the type of OPT you are requesting:

> *(c) (3) (A)* Pre-Completion OPT

> *(c) (3) (B)* Post –Completion OPT (see sample here)

Please note : the code *(c) (3) (C)* should only be used for 17-month STEM Extensions of OPT for eligible students. You can apply for the STEM Extension only after your 12-month OPT EAD has been issued.

Item #17: 17-Month Extension
Only those individuals who are eligible for the 17-month extension need to complete this section. If you entered *(c) (3) (A)* or *(c) (3) (B)* on item #16, you are not required to fill out this item.

Finishing the I-765

Sign your name, fill in your telephone number and the date of your signature at the bottom of the form.

**Please note that your signature must fit between the lines on the form. If your signature is too big, your application will be returned to you and delay your work permission. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than your normal handwriting.

If You Get "Request for Evidence (RFE)"

We strongly advise you to see a Foreign Student Advisor if you receive an RFE. In most cases, the USCIS will not call you at the telephone number you put on the I-765. If there is a problem with your application, they will send you a notice by mail called the "Request for Evidence (RFE)." An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejected. It simply means that you need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued. Please note the deadline to respond to the RFE. If you fail to meet this deadline, your application will be automatically canceled.

Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT usually by about one month. For this reason, it is important to make sure that you have completed the I-765 correctly and sent the proper documents to the USCIS.

Photo Specifications

The photos you are required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of U.S.–style passport photos.

Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications. However, you may want to print this page, or the pages from the web site above to take with you when you get your photo taken.

Frequently Asked Questions

What type of paper are the photographs to be printed on?
The photos should be printed on thin photo-quality paper.

Do the photos have to be in color?
Yes, the photos must be in color.

How big must the photos be?
The photos must measure exactly 2 inches by 2 inches.

A well-composed photo

Can hats or religious headgear be worn for the photo?
Unless worn daily for religious reasons, all hats or headgear should be removed for the photo. In all cases, no item or attire should cover or otherwise obscure any part of the face.

Can eyeglasses be worn for the photo?
Eyeglasses worn on a daily basis can be worn for the photo. However, there should be no reflections from the eyeglasses that obscures the eyes. Dark glasses or nonprescription glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable unless you need them for medical reasons.

7 Steps to Successful Photos:

1. Your photo should show your full face, front view, eyes open.

2. Make sure the photo shows your full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).

3. Your head should be centered within the frame

4. Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo

5. The background should be plain white or off-white.

6. There should be no distracting shadows on the face or in the background

7. Make sure you have a natural expression
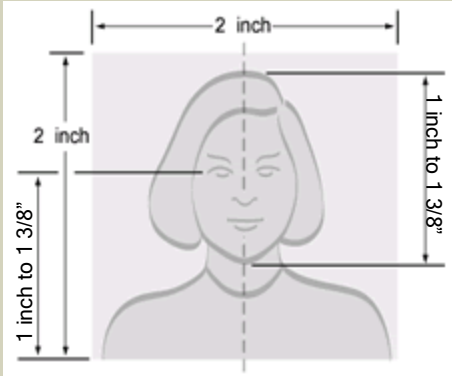
Write your name and I-94 number *lightly* on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.

Preparing and Mailing the OPT Application: Mailing Options

Express Mail (Federal Express)

We recommend **Federal Express** as the best, most reliable option.

If you use express mail, use the express mail (courier) address at the USCIS, which is different from the regular mail address (see next page). Federal Express mail service costs about $10.

Certified Mail / Return Receipt

"Certified Mail / return receipt" service is available through the U.S. Postal Service. You can request this service at the post office and pay a minimal fee (approx. $2). With certified mail, you will get a receipt showing what date the USCIS got your application.

A sample of the Certified Mail form and receipt is shown here.

In some cases, it may take up to 10 days for your application sent through the U.S. Postal Service to be officially received.

E-Filing your OPT Application

Currently, it is not possible to E-File OPT applications.

USCIS Service Center
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

Joe Kwon

123 Main Street

Muncie, IN 47303

Mailing Your Application: Final Review Before Mailing

Checklist Review

Put the following items in an 8.5" x 11" envelope and mail them to one of the USCIS address noted here.

☑ Check for **$380** made payable to: "U.S. Department of Homeland Security." <u>Visit the USCIS webpage for check–writing instructions</u>.

☑ Form I-765 (original)

☑ <u>Photocopies</u> of OPT I-20 and all previous I-20s (page 1-3). Don't forget to sign it !

☑ <u>Photocopy</u> of I-94 card (both sides)

☑ Photocopy of previous EAD, if applicable

☑ Photocopy of your passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp (if you have one)

☑ 2 Passport Photos (with name and I-94# written lightly with pencil on back)

Application Deadline

The USCIS must receive your application no later than **30 days after your OPT I-20** has been issued. The issue date is located next to the Adviser's signature on Page 1 of the OPT I-120. Please account for mailing time.

USCIS Mailing Addresses

*for people who live in Indiana******
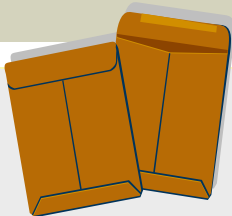
For Express Mail:

> **USCIS**
> **Attn: AOS**
> **1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S**
> **Suite 100**
> **Phoenix, AZ 85034**

For Regular or Certified Mail:

> **USCIS**
> **PO Box 21281**
> **Phoenix, AZ 85036**

*If your return address is not in Indiana, discuss this with a Foreign Student Advisor.

E-Notification

To receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your application has been accepted at USCIS, complete Form <u>G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance</u> and clip it to the first page of your application.

Step 3
Receiving Your EAD

1. The Notice of Action from USCIS

2. Traveling Abroad on OPT

3. Applying for a Visa

4. Frequently Asked Questions

The Notice of Action

This is your OPT application receipt from USCIS. It normally takes about 2 to 6 weeks to get it in the mail.

The Notice of Action is a very important document. You will need it to inquire about the status of your OPT application and for travel outside the U.S. If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.

Your Address Information
Verify the address on your I-765 receipt notices to make sure your name and address are correct. If it is incorrect, contact us immediately.

The "Receipt Number"
This is your case number at the USCIS. You should check the status of your case online through the USCIS web site .

It's important to sign up for automatic email updates or check the status regularly. If the Service Center sends you a Request for Further Evidence (RFE), you'll see the notification on this website and look for it in the mail. The case status site will alert you if there is any mail delivery problems.

If you do not get your Notice of Action within 6 weeks after mailing your application to the USCIS, contact a Foreign Student Advisor for instructions.

The Received Date
This is the date when the USCIS begins processing your application. It may not be the actual date they received your application but it is when your case was entered into the system.

The Notice Date
This is the date your Notice of Action was produced.

The Notice of Action

Receipt Number: WAC-07-103-50387		APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION	
RECEIVED DATE February 1, 2007	PRIORITY DATE	APPLICANT Your Name Here	
NOTICE DATE February 15, 2007	PAGE		
Your Name Your Street Address Your City, State and ZIP		Notice Type: Receipt Notice Amount received: $180 Class Requested: C031	

Traveling Abroad on OPT

Since you will remain in F-1 status during your 12-month OPT authorization period, traveling abroad and re-entering the U.S. as an F-1 is allowed (In fact, if you re-enter in a status other than F-1, you will lose your OPT eligibility). However, be aware that any time you leave the U.S. , there is no guarantee that you will be allowed to re-enter. Being denied entry is more probable for some people than others, although in general, Ball State students have not reported problems. To avoid problems, make sure you have the proper documents as listed here.

Documents Required For Re-entry to the U.S.

The travel documents you will need depend on the timing of your re-entry to the U.S.:

✓**Before** Completing Your Program	✓**After** Completing Your Program	✓**After** Completing Your Program
and	**and**	**and**
✓**Before** Getting Your EAD	✓**Before** Getting Your EAD	✓**After** Getting Your EAD

Before Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD

- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by a Foreign Student Advisor
- Evidence of continued enrollment (e.g. print-out of transcripts course schedule)
- Evidence of financial support

After Completing Your Program and Before Getting Your EAD

- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by Foreign Student Advisor
- . The travel endorsement is valid for **6 months while on OPT**
- The OPT receipt- Notice of Action
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- If you have employment, a job offer letter from the employer is strongly recommended.

After Completing Your Program and After Getting Your EAD

- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp
- Your OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed on page 3 by a Foreign Student Advisor.
- The travel endorsement is valid for **6 months while on OPT**
- The EAD (Employment Authorization Document)
- Evidence of financial support for the OPT period is strongly recommended (such as a bank statement or letter from sponsor or employer)
- A job offer letter is required.

Applying for a Visa

If you are traveling abroad and the F-1 visa in your passport has expired, you must obtain a new one before re-entering the U.S. To apply for a new visa during OPT, the basic documents you will need are:

1) A valid passport

2) A valid I-20 with travel endorsement from a Foreign Student Advisor within the past six months

3) The EAD

4) A job offer in your academic major field of study

5) Evidence of sufficient funds (e.g. a bank statement, a letter from a sponsor or a job offer letter)

Check the U.S. Department of State web site for more information about getting a visa at www.travel.state.gov.

Tips for Travelers

• Be prepared to tell the U.S. immigration officer at the U.S. port-of-entry your plans for the OPT year. They may want to know:

-What have you done to find a job?

-What kind of job do you plan to look for?

-What will you do after the OPT is expired?

-How will you support yourself while you are job-seeking?

• If you travel after getting your EAD, you must have a job offer letter to be able to re-enter the U.S.

• Don't leave the U.S. for long periods of time during the OPT year. A few weeks of vacation is reasonable, but if you are gone for several months, you may encounter difficulty in re-entering. Remember, unemployment is limited to 90 days.

• Be careful about trying to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT. You may not be allowed to re-enter as an F-1.

•Students who need to apply for a new visa should consult International Student Services prior to travel to discuss the visa application process and possible risks.

•Don't attempt to re-enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1 unless you are willing to forfeit your OPT permanently.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I know the status of my OPT application? As soon as you have your Notice of Action, check the USCIS website at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do and click on the "Case Status Online" button. The main information you can get from this is whether your application has been approved yet or is still in process. The processing time indicated is a standard message that often has no connection with actual processing times.

When will I get my EAD? USCIS will mail the EAD to you at the address you gave on the I-765 form. It should arrive approximately three to five months from the "received" date indicated on the USCIS "Notice of Action."

I never received a "Notice of Action." USCIS usually sends this within two to six weeks of their receipt of the EAD application. If you have not received the Notice of Action after this time, check your bank account to see if USCIS cashed your check. If so, you can request a copy of the check from your bank that should have your USCIS tracking number printed on it (ten digits beginning with "LIN…"). Keep in mind that it may take up to two weeks to get a copy from the bank. check the status of your application online at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do with the LIN.

How do I contact the USCIS? The number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Be sure to have your "WAC" receipt number ready before you call. Inquiries through the National Customer Service line may delay the processing of your application.

Is there any way to change the information on the EAD application (address, dates, etc.) once I have mailed the application? After you have mailed your application to USCIS no changes can be made except for address updates. If you change your address while your application is pending, contact a Foreign Student Advisor for instructions. You will need your Notice of Action receipt number.

How long can I stay in the US after the end date of my OPT? You have 60 days after your OPT ends to leave the US, request a transfer of your I-20, or change your status. You cannot work.

Do my wife or kids get a new OPT I-20 too? When your new OPT I-20 is printed, you should also get an I-20 for your family members with the updated information on it. If you did not receive OPT I-20s for your family, Inter.

90 days have passed since the Notice of Action receipt date. What can I do? First, verify your status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do. If your EAD application has been approved you will need to wait until the card arrives (2-4 weeks after it is approved). If the application is still pending, see a Foreign Student Advisor.

USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet – can I start working? No. Employers are required to verify that you are eligible to work before they can put you on payroll. You must be able to show them the EAD when you begin employment.

USCIS said that my application was approved over six weeks ago and I still haven't received it. Is there a problem? There may be. Have you moved? If so, did you update your OPT address? See a Foreign Student Advisor for more information.

How do I get an extension of my EAD? Only students who have completed certain STEM majors and have an employer who is enrolled in E-Verify are eligible for 17 Month Extension OPT.

I lost my EAD. How can I get it replaced? If you lose your EAD the only way to replace it is with a new EAD application. You must submit the same items as the initial application to USCIS (fee, photos, forms, etc.) and it will take 3 to 5 months. It is impossible to replace an EAD if you are outside the U.S.

My EAD says "not valid for re-entry" on it. Does that mean I cannot travel abroad and re-enter on OPT? All EADs are marked with this notation. It simply means that you must carry other documents to show proof of your eligibility to re-enter the U.S. such as your I-20 and valid F-1 visa stamp. The EAD alone is not enough to re-enter the U.S.

Frequently Asked Questions

What counts as employment? Immigration has provided many options to satisfy the employment requirement including paid, unpaid, and volunteer work related to your field of study.

Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work? There is no minimum for students on Pre-Completion OPT. All students on Post-Completion OPT, whether they have completed their degree or not, are required to work at least 20 hours per week. Students who do not work an average of 20 hours per week are not meeting the employment requirement.

I have been unemployed for 80 days. What is going to happen on the 90th day?

If you accumulate 90 days or more of unemployment, you are in violation of status which may affect your ability to travel in and out of the US in F-1 status, future immigration benefits, and change of status applications.

To avoid the status violation, you may do one of the following before the 90th day:

1. Secure unpaid or volunteer work related to your field of study at least 20 hours per week;
2. Request a 'transfer out' of your I-20 to a new school;
3. Leave the US and report your departure date to a Foreign Student Advisor

If I change my employment do I get another 90 days of unemployment? No you are only allowed 90 days of unemployment. This includes periods in between employment.

Do I need a Social Security Number to work in the US? Yes. If you plan to work in the U.S. you will need a valid Social Security Number (SSN). To apply, please visit your nearest Social Security Office from Berkeley International Office. More details can be found on the Social Security Administration website. The Social Security Administration will process your application and mail your Social Security number to you.

Do I need to complete any forms with my employer to begin working? Yes. Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form entitled Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your employer will provide this form and assist you in its completion.

Can I change employers while on OPT? Yes. OPT work authorization is not job-specific. Therefore, you may change employers, or have multiple employers at the same time, provided that each position is directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level. You will need to update the employer information with a Foreign Student Advisor within 10 days of the change.

Do I pay taxes while working on OPT? Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply. Check the IRS' web site, www.irs.gov for tax information and to see if your country is one of the few that has a tax treaty with the US allowing students to exclude a limited amount of earned income from federal taxation.

In general, however, F-1 students who have been present in the US for no more than five calendar years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are unfamiliar with this provision of the tax laws. See publication 519 available for download from the IRS web site www.irs.gov for information on how to claim salary incorrectly deducted for FICA or Medicare.

Frequently Asked Questions – Working on OPT

What if I am not able to complete my degree program by the completion dated noted on the OPT I-20? If your application has not been adjudicated, you can withdraw your OPT and request a program extension of your I-20. Your fee will not be refunded if you are:

An undergraduate student: You must extend your I-20 end date if you still have course work to complete. Your OPT will be limited to part time during the semester until you finish your degree. You are still held to the 90 day unemployment rule. See a Foreign Student Advisor before that completion date has passed.

A graduate student: Graduate students finishing their dissertation or thesis cannot change their program end date. They are ineligible to work full time before filing and are held to the 90 day unemployment rule. It is important that the student finish their degree before their OPT ends.

What status do I have between my degree completion date and the start of my OPT (EAD start date)?
If you have chosen a start date well after your degree completion date, you will still remain in F-1 status. Even though there seems to be a gap in your status, you are still legally allowed to remain in the U.S. or re-enter the U.S. from abroad during this time.

Can I go to school while on OPT?
Time spent going to school should only be an incidental part of your stay in the U.S. If you decide to go back to school full-time, you must get a new I-20 from the school and forfeit the remainder of your OPT time.

Do I need to do anything with International Student Services while on OPT? Yes. As a condition of your F-1 status, all students must report any changes in address and employment information to a Foreign Student Advisor within 10 days of any changes.

Can I start working without pay while waiting for my EAD? No. USCIS see it as "employment without authorization" and is a risky situation for you and your employer.

Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT? Your visa only needs to be valid to re-enter the U.S. from abroad. Thus, if it expires while you are still in the U.S., there is no problem. Your *F-1 immigration status* remains valid as long as you have an EAD that has not expired.

The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Reporting Requirements on OPT

The following information must be reported to a Foreign Student Advisor during the OPT period of authorization:

- Your Name

- Your Residential address

- Your Phone and email address

- Employer name

- Employer address

- Start Date of Employment

- Date of exiting the U.S (You need to provide date of exit if you decide to exit the U.S and complete your OPT status prior to the end date of your OPT)

You will also be required to update this information within **10 working days of any changes**.