Regular & STEM OPT Workshop

Workshop for F-1 Students
Wishing to Participate in an Internship or Practicum

VISA & IMMIGRATION SERVICE ADVISING

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

Revised: February 2020

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

- Regular OPT is temporary employment authorized by USCIS for 12 months and must be directly related to a student's major.

- <u>Some</u> majors (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) can extend their Regular OPT for an additional 24 months, which is called STEM OPT.

- If your prior degree was in a STEM major you might be eligible for the 24 month extension.

- STEM OPT will be discussed later.

Eligibility Requirements

- Sufficient GPA
  - 2.0 for undergrads and 3.0 for grads
- Maintained F-1 status
- Valid passport
- Two previous semesters were full-time OR approved RCL on file.
- OPT workshop within six months of your application submission to VISA
- When your application is submitted to VISA, you must have applied for graduation with the Registrar's office.
  - There is an exception to this for Ph.D. students (see later slide).

Eligibility for PhD Students

- You can apply for post-completion OPT before graduation once you have successfully completed all of your coursework.

- It is recommended that you meet with your VISA advisor if you apply for OPT without having applied for graduation because your dissertation is pending.

OPT Application Timeline

Submission timeframe to VISA:

- Up to 100 days before your program end date
- No more than 30 days after your program end date

Submission timeframe to USCIS:

- Up to 90 days prior to your program end date

  If they get your application 91 days before the end date=DENIED
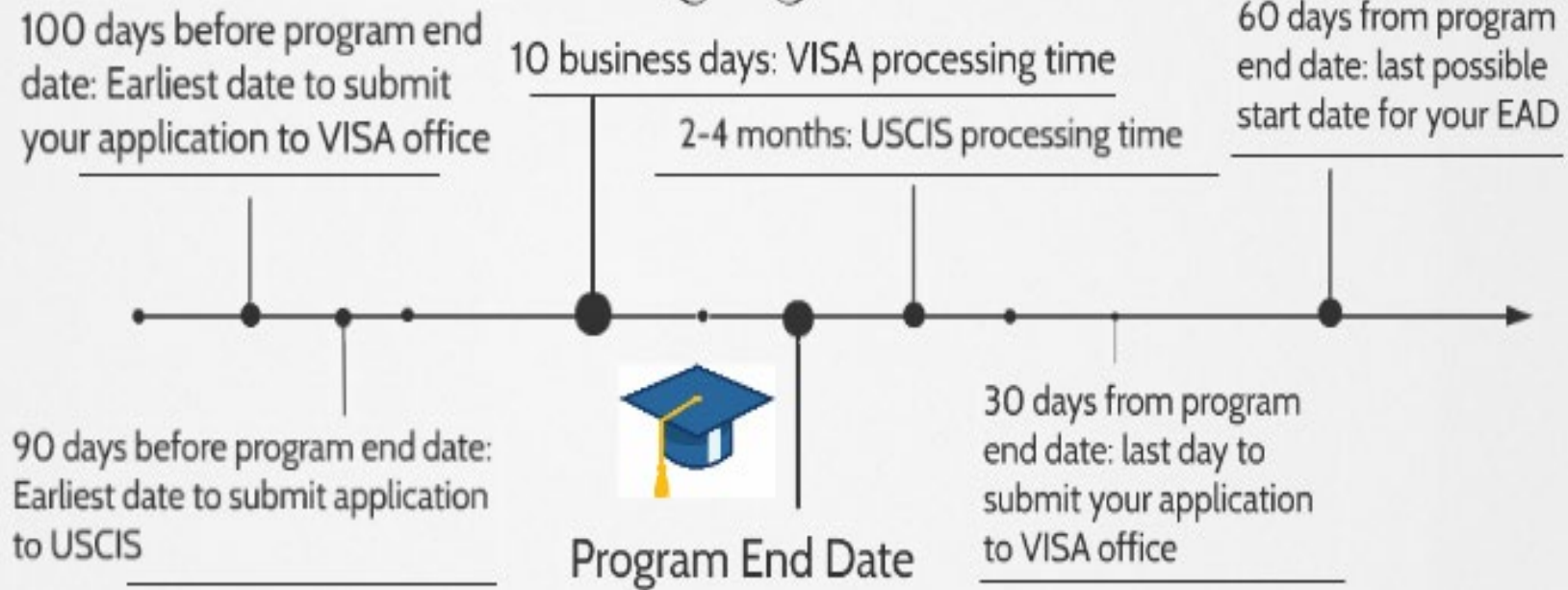- No more than 60 days after your program end date

IMPORTANT !

- USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the date your OPT I-20 is issued

If they get your application 31 days after your I-20 was issued=DENIED

OPT Timeline

100 days before program end date: Earliest date to submit your application to VISA office

10 business days: VISA processing time

2-4 months: USCIS processing time

60 days from program end date: last possible start date for your EAD

90 days before program end date: Earliest date to submit application to USCIS

Program End Date

30 days from program end date: last day to submit your application to VISA office

USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the issue date of your I-20. Send your application immediately!

You may not start employment until you receive your EAD card and the start date on the card has passed.

Requested Start Date

- VISA Processing Time: 10 business days

- USCIS processing time: approximately 2 - 4 months

- Your start date can be as early as the day after your program end date and must be no later than 60 days after your program end date.

- You can not begin your employment until you have your EAD card in your hand; so please plan ahead.

Employment Authorization (EAD) Card

- You cannot work until your EAD— sometimes called an OPT card—is in your hand, *even if* your requested start date has passed and/or if the USCIS site says it's been approved.

  - It may take up to two weeks to get your card after the approval is noted on the USCIS site.
  - USCIS encourages students to create a myUSCIS account on their website to view your case status.

OPT Employment

- Regular OPT requires at least 20 hours per week of employment; there is no maximum for the hours.

- You can change jobs without obtaining prior authorization and can have more than one employer.

- You may have up to 90 days of unemployment in Regular OPT.
    - Options before Day 90—PLAN AHEAD!!!!:
        - Look for internship and volunteer opportunities
        - Return to school for a new degree program (but lose OPT)
        - Change to another visa status
        - Leave U.S. and continue job search from home (and return in another status (e.g. H-1B)).

Volunteering on OPT

- You may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern on Regular OPT in a field related to your major to stop the "90-day unemployment clock."
  - Note that USCIS states this is possible
  - "...where this practice does not violate any labor laws."

- The work must be at least 20 hours per week. You must have evidence—acquired from your employer in the form of a letter—to verify your volunteer hours.

- All OPT-related volunteer work must be submitted to VISA via the OPT Employment Update Form.

Application Checklist

Please submit all documents single-sided

1. Form G-1145 (**OPTIONAL**)- Request a FREE electronic notification when USCIS receives your application.

2. **Personal or Cashier's Check (money order not recommended) for $410 to "U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security"** (Write SEVIS ID # & "OPT" in bottom left corner)

OR Form G-1450 - Authorization for credit card transaction

3. Request for OPT Form

4. Regular OPT Responsibilities Form

5. Form I-765

Application Checklist

6. **Copies** of _ALL_ I-20s you have used that have been issued to you by ODU and any other school (not immigration regulations page); **no** dependent I-20s

7. Recently taken 2 passport-style photos (2 by 2 inches) photos.

8. From your passport:
   - Biographical information & expiration date pages (**not** the address page)
   - current U.S. visa stamp page

9. Most recent I-94: Online printout OR, if you still haven't left U.S. or have had a change of status, copy of each side of card/I-94 from approval notice

10. Photocopies of previous all EADs (both sides)

I-765 FORM TIPS

- **Page 1. PART I**

REGULAR OPT ➡️

STEM OPT ➡️

1.a. ☐ Initial permission to accept employment.

1.c. ☐ Renewal of my permission to accept employment.

- **Page 2. PART II**

Your U.S. Mailing Address

Items 5-6: Is where your EAD Card is mailed. If you believe that you may move while your OPT is processing, you can enter your family or friend's address.

Your U.S. Physical Address

Fill this section if your mailing address is different than your current physical address.

Your U.S. Mailing Address

5.a. In Care Of Name (if any)

5.b. Street Number and Name

5.c. ☐ Apt. ☐ Ste. ☐ Flr.

5.d. City or Town

5.e. State   **5.f.** ZIP Code

(USPS ZIP Code Lookup)

6. Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address? ☐ Yes ☐ No

NOTE: If you answered "No" to **Item Number 6.**, provide your physical address below.

U.S. Physical address will become fillable when you select **"NO"** here

U.S. Physical Address

7.a. Street Number and Name

7.b. ☐ Apt. ☐ Ste. ☐ Flr.

7.c. City or Town

7.d. State   **7.e.** ZIP Code

I-765 FORM TIPS

- **Page 2. PART II. Item 8.** You may not have one. If you have had an EAD card before, your EAD card will have the 9-digit number beneath "USCIS #."

    8. Alien Registration Number (A-Number) (if any)
    ▶ A- ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

- **Page 3. PART II. Item 21.a.** Your Arrival Departure Record Number can be found on your most recent I-94.

    21.a. Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)
    ▶ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

- **Page 3. PART II. Item 27**

    REGULAR OPT: (C) (3) (B)   **OR**   STEM OPT: (C) (3) (C)

    27. **Eligibility Category.** Refer to the **Who May File Form I-765** section of the Form I-765 Instructions to determine the appropriate eligibility category for this application. Enter the appropriate letter and number for your eligibility category below (for example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii)).
    (☐) (☐) (☐)

- **Page 7. PART 6.**

    You need to complete this part if you had a different SEVIS Number, completed CPT, applied for OPT, or changed your visa status in the US. If you need to enter multiple events on this page, enter what happened most recently in item 3, next recent in item 4, etc.

Page Number	3.b. Part Number	3.c. Item Number
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Previous SEVIS ID number

N0012345678 ⇐ Your previous SEVIS Number

09/05/2015 - 05/15/2017 ⇐ Dates you had that SEVIS Number

Bachelor's ⇐ Your educational level with that SEVIS Number

Page Number	3.b. Part Number	3.c. Item Number
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CPT Authorization

Enter whether your CPT was "**Full-Time**" or "**Part-Time**"

Enter the SEVIS Number you had while on CPT

Enter the dates for your CPT

Enter your educational level at the time of CPT (bachelor's, master's, Ph.D., etc.)

Page Number	3.b. Part Number	3.c. Item Number
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OPT Authorization

Enter whether your OPT was "**Full-Time**" or "**Part-Time**"

Enter the SEVIS Number you had while on OPT

Enter the dates for your OPT

Enter your educational level at the time of OPT (bachelor's, master's, Ph.D., etc.)

OPT Application Review

- You can schedule an appointment Graduate Assistant to review your COMPLETED OPT application.

Regular Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Home | Visa Categories | Employment | Health Insurance | Scholarships | Forms | Resources for International Stu...

> Visa & Immigration Service Advising > Employment > Employment for International Students > Regular Optional Practical Training (OPT)

What is OPT?

There are two types of OPT. This page discusses Regular OPT; for information about STEM OPT, please click here. Regular OPT is temporary employment authorized by Immigration for F-1 visa holders for 12 months. It must be directly related to your major and gives you a chance to put your classroom knowledge into real world practice.

OPT Workshop

Applying for OPT starts with attending the OPT Workshop. If you are unable to attend the workshop in person, you may email intlstu@odu.edu to request access to view the presentation online.

OPT WORKSHOP REGISTRATION
Register Now ▶

OPT APPLICATION REVIEW
1. Bring your completed OPT application packet. 2. Be sure that you have already attended an OPT workshop or reviewed the online workshop video.
Schedule Appointment ▶

OPT WORKSHOP PRESENTATION
View Presentation ▶

OPT Forms

Please fill these forms out online FIRST and then print to sign and submit to your department.

Application for Regular OPT
Fill out online first, then print and sign.

Example Application
Use this as a guide for filling out the application.

I-765
Application for Employment Authorization

OPT Employment Update Form
Submit any time there is a change in your employment.

Application Submission to USCIS

- After your application is processed, you will get an e-mail at your ODU student account. **SAVE THIS E-MAIL!**

- Mail your Regular OPT applications to USCIS, using instructions in e-mail sent when OPT is ready.
    - We recommend using United Parcel Service (UPS), FedEx, etc. We do _**NOT**_ recommend using regular U.S. Postal Service.
    - Request the additional delivery confirmation for the best protection if your application is lost by USCIS.

    REMINDER: USCIS must receive your OPT application within 30 days from OPT I-20 creation.

Required Employment Updates

- After you get your EAD, send a pdf scan of your EAD to VISA at intlstu@odu.edu

- Submit the OPT Employment Update form any time there are changes in your employment. That includes when you first receive an employment.

- You must provide a short description about how your major relates to your current job in the OPT Employment Update form.

- A new I-20 is not necessary when you change employers. Your I-20, EAD and employer documentation are sufficient to verify that you are legally in the U.S.

Other Required Updates

- Your OPT is on an ODU I-20.

- Therefore, you are still responsible for keeping the following information current with VISA.
  - SEVIS U.S. address
  - SEVIS Home country address
  - Name
  - Country of citizenship
  - Change of status (e-mail scanned PDF to VISA)

  It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to ensure we have your current information.

OPT Application Process Overview

If eligible for STEM OPT

| Submit OPT Request Form to VISA | Mail your OPT Application to USCIS | Receive a receipt notice from USCIS with your case # | Approval Notice from USCIS – CANNOT begin your employment yet | Receive the EAD Card | Submit a copy of your EAD card to VISA and OPT Employment Update Form | 90 before OPT end date: Submit your STEM OPT Application to VISA |

- IMPORTANT: Mail from the government (SSA, USCIS, etc.) cannot be forwarded even if you submit the address-forwarding form.

- If USCIS contacts you for additional information and you have questions about it, please scan and send the correspondence to VISA.
  - If you have no questions, feel free to respond to the request and be sure to keep a copy of everything you send.

General Info

- The expiration date on your I-20 will be the program end date for that semester. **However,** your OPT dates will be listed on the second page.

- Remember, your OPT employment must be directly related to your major.
  - If your job appears to be in a field different than your major, ask your employer to write a letter to justify the connection between your job and your degree. Keep this with your I-20s and other important documents.

- You can register for one or two classes per semester as a **non-degree** student.
  - for recreational reasons <u>OR</u>
  - for professional development related to your current OPT job

SAVE YOUR I-20s…FOREVER!!! (Yes, forever!)

Student SEVP Portal

- Students on OPT and STEM OPT will have access to their SEVP portal

- SEVP will email you with instructions on creating their portal.

- You can report your employment, update your address and employer info HOWEVER you are still required to submit OPT employment update form to our office.

- BE SURE TO MAKE A COPY OF YOUR PORTAL as your access to it will end after 6 months past your OPT/STEM OPT end date.

studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help
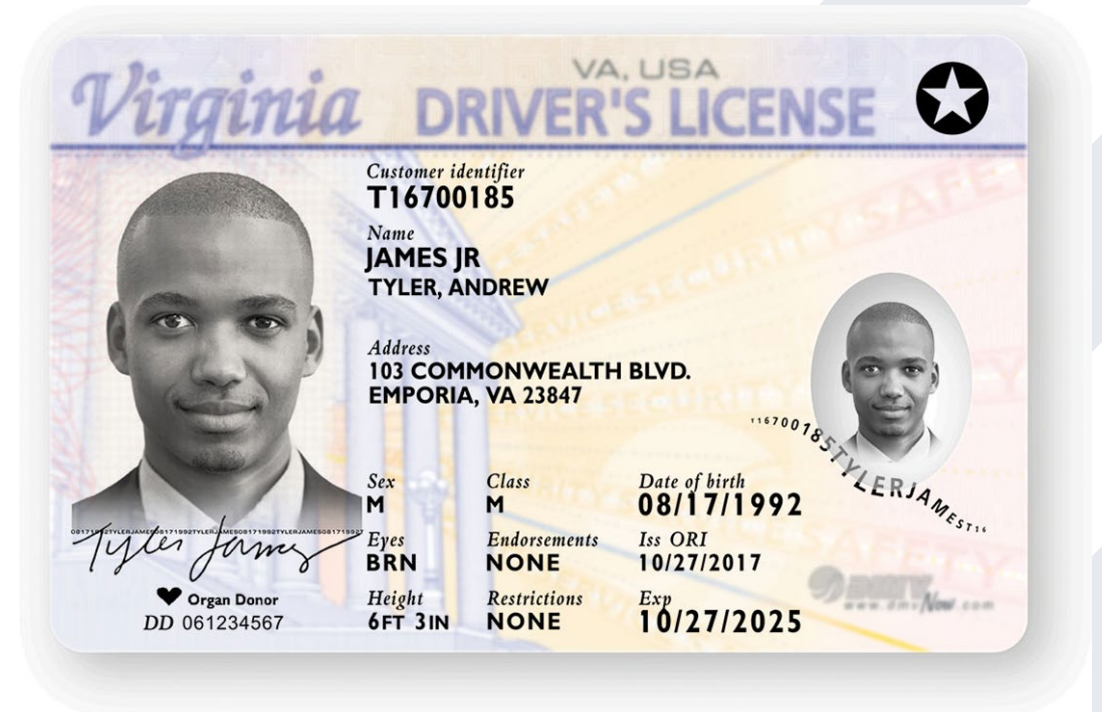
Virginia Driver's License

- To renew your driver's license…:
  - you will need your OPT I-20 and EAD <u>OR</u>
  - if you have not received your EAD, submit a letter request form from the VISA office to temporary extend your DL for 60 days.

  If you have issues extending your VA driver's license, please contact us.

Travel and Re-Entry

- VISA **strongly** recommends you not leave the U.S. while USCIS is processing your Regular OPT request.

- You must have a job related to your major to re-enter the U.S. on OPT; the moment your EAD is **issued**, you'll need to show it and proof of employment at the airport.
  - Proof of employment should be a letter on company letterhead from your employer verifying your start date and OPT end date (even if you plan to change to another status and continue with the company).

TRAVEL SIGNATURES: You automatically get your first travel signature when your OPT I-20 is issued.

Please visit our page on *Traveling Abroad and Re-Entry the U.S. under Resources*

When you are traveling, it is important that you have all the necessary documents, even when taking a brief trip to Mexico, Canada, or islands adjacent to the United States.

› **Documents Required for Re-entry into the U.S.**

› **Traveling While on Optional Practical Training (Regular OPT & STEM Extension)**

› **Travel Ban**

› **Visa Stamp and Applying for a New One**

› **Administrative Processing**

› **Automatic Visa Stamp Revalidation**

Useful Tips to Consider

Book flights with enough layover times. For example, if your port of entry is at JFK, make sure to have at least 3 hours before your flight to Norfolk.

Be prepared to go through secondary inspection or additional processing at the port of entry.

Always double check that you have all necessary documents before your trip, including visas or paperwork needed to enter the country to which you will be traveling.

Regular OPT & Health Insurance

- You are not required to purchase the University Health Insurance Plan <u>after graduation</u>.

- HOWEVER, we **STRONGLY** recommend you continue coverage or purchase another health insurance plan.

- As you are still on a student visa, you are eligible for ODU's insurance.
  - If your employer offers insurance, it will likely be a more comprehensive policy and you may want to consider buying that one instead.

- ODU Student Health Services: You are eligible to receive health services at the Student Health Center one semester after graduation.

Cap Gap & H1-B

- A cap-gap I-20 can be issued to an F-1 student whose H1B application was selected for processing and their OPT will expire before October 1 (Start date of all cap-subject employees is October 1.)

- **Students CANNOT travel during the cap gap and return in F-1 status.**

- Students can file for STEM OPT extension while an H-1B application is pending.

Regular OPT Termination

- If you are issued an I-20 to start a new degree program or if your SEVIS record is transferred to another school, your OPT will be terminated at the time the I-20 is transferred or created.
  - Be sure to work with the international student advisor at your school to make sure you are aware when your OPT will end.

- If you wish to cancel your OPT, please send an e-mail to VISA and an advisor can provide information on the next step(s).

This concludes the portion about Regular OPT.

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STEM OPT

STEM OPT Extension Eligibility

- Students received their most recent degree in the following fields:
  - Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics

  This list includes those with a double major (but minors do not count).
  - Check your major to make sure it is eligible.

- Students who received their prior degree in STEM within 10 years preceding the date of STEM application.

- Students received another STEM degree at a higher educational level. (Maximum: 2 periods of 24-months STEM OPT)

STEM OPT Application

- Mail your STEM OPT request (if you are out-of-town) to VISA via the address in your Regular OPT notification email.

- Once processing is complete, we will send an email to your ODU student email.

- Please take the time to follow the STEM OPT example application on the VISA webpage very carefully.

STEM OPT Forms

Application for STEM OPT

Fill out online first, then print and sign.

Example Application

Use this as a guide for filling out the application.

Form I-765

Application for Employment Authorization

Form I-983

Training plan for STEM OPT students.

STEM OPT Application Checklist

NOTE: When preparing your Regular OPT application, make two sets of copies for easier STEM OPT application prep.

1. Form G-1145 (**OPTIONAL**)- Request a FREE electronic notification when USCIS receives your application.

2. Personal or Cashier's Check (money order not recommended) for **$410** to "**U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security**" (Write SEVIS ID # & "OPT" in bottom left corner)

OR **Form G-1450** - Authorization for credit card transaction

3. Request for STEM OPT Form

4. STEM OPT Responsibilities Form

5. Form I-765

6. Form I-983 (pages 1-4, page 5 will be due after 12 and 24 months of STEM)

Continued…..

STEM OPT Application Checklist

7. Copies of _ALL_ I-20s you have used that have been issued to you by ODU and any other school (not immigration regulations page); **no** dependent I-20s

8. Recently taken 2 passport-style photos (2 by 2 inches) photos.

9. From your passport:
   - Biographical information & expiration date pages (**not** the address page)
   - current U.S. visa stamp page

10. Most recent I-94: Online printout OR, if you still haven't left U.S. or have had a change of status, copy of each side of card/I-94 from approval notice

11. A copy of your OPT EAD (both sides)

12. Copy of your transcript with your degree conferral date

13. Copy of your diploma

STEM Application Submission to USCIS

- USCIS can receive your application 90 days before the end of your current OPT (EAD card).

- ALL STEM OPT applications **should be** processed by the VISA office before it is mailed to USCIS. Reminder:
  - VISA's processing time: 10 business day.
  - USCIS processing time: appx. 4 months.

- If your application is submitted in time, your transition from Regular OPT to STEM OPT should be seamless.

- You can continue to work up to 180 days while your application is pending.

- You should keep your STEM application receipt (I-797) to document that you have submitted it to USCIS.

Employer Responsibilities

- Employers must be enrolled in USCIS e-Verify employment eligibility verification program.

- Employers must complete and sign I-983 form.

- USCIS may visit your employers' worksite(s) to verify whether they are meeting the STEM OPT program requirements.

- Employers must report changes in any of the following via I-983 form to the VISA office within 5 business days:
    - Employer name and address
    - Decrease in student's compensation
    - Reduction in hours worked to less than 20 hours per week
    - Employer's EIN
    - Termination of employment

Employment Requirements

- You must be working in a paid position for at least **20 hours per week per employer**; otherwise, you will accrue unemployment days.

- You cannot be unemployed for more than **150 days total** (including unemployment dates during your Regular OPT).

- Volunteering and unpaid internships are only allowed above and beyond your paid employment.

- All employment and address information must be current with VISA.

Required Updates

- OPT Employment Update must be submitted:
    1. EVERY 6 MONTHS regardless if there is a change or not

        6 months: OPT Employment Update online form

        12 months: OPT Employment Update online form and 12th month self-evaluation (last page of I-983)

        18 months: OPT Employment Update online form

        24 months: **Final Employment evaluation (last page of I-983)**
    2. Within 5 business days whenever there is a change in employment. NEW I-983 is required.

    SEVP may terminate your record if you do not make this update.

- You are still responsible for keeping the following information current with VISA.
    1. SEVIS U.S. address
    2. SEVIS Home country address
    3. Legal Name
    4. Country of citizenship
    5. Change of status (e-mail scanned PDF to VISA)

Travel and Re-Entry

- VISA **strongly** recommends you not leave the U.S. while USCIS is processing your STEM OPT request.

- You must have a job with an e-verified company in a position that is related to your major to re-enter the U.S. on STEM OPT.

- Upon re-entry, you need proof of employment.
  - letter from employer verifying that you'll start or resume a job and pay stubs

TRAVEL SIGNATURES: You automatically get your first travel signature when your STEM OPT I-20 is issued.

Please visit our page on *Traveling Abroad and Re-Entry the U.S. under Resources*

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Be prepared to go through secondary inspection or additional processing at the port of entry.

Always double check that you have all necessary documents before your trip, including visas or paperwork needed to enter the country to which you will be traveling.

This concludes the STEM OPT portion.

Questions?

intlstu@odu.edu

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