Kenyon

Center for Global Engagement

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I-765 Guideline for F-1 Visa Holders: OPT Application
Online Filing Instructions
Refer to USCIS instructions if you are applying for employment authorization under a different
category

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)? OPT is a benefit of F-1 status that allows students to work in the U.S. for up to 12 months after graduation in a field related to their major. USCIS (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services) is the agency that adjudicates OPT applications.

OPT Eligibility: Students in F-1 status are eligible for OPT if they have completed at least two semesters of study in the U.S. immediately prior to graduation with an active SEVIS record. Exceptions to this include students who completed the first semester of their senior year in another immigration status (such as H-4), but change to F-1 status for their final semester of study. You will need to apply for OPT during the designated application period and be in the U.S. at the time that you apply.
Please note that all applicants apply for Post-Completion OPT for the first year after graduation. If you majored in a subject that is eligible for the STEM OPT Extension, that is a separate application process that you can complete at the end of your OPT year.

OPT Application Timeline: You can apply for OPT up to 90 days before the program end on your I-20 or up to 60 days after. USCIS will generally issue OPT approval for 12 months, to be used within the 14-month period after your I-20 program end date. This means that you have some flexibility in choosing when you want your OPT to start—at the earliest, you can request the day after your I-20 ends; the latest date you can request is 60 days after your I-20 program end date. Please note that it may take USCIS up to 90 days to adjudicate an OPT application, so it is a good idea to apply as early as possible, especially if you want to be able to start working right after graduation.

Work Information: You do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT; in fact, many students are still job searching when they apply. Keep in mind that once OPT is approved, your employment needs to relate to your major (not concentration or minor—the F-1 regulations specify that the connection must be to your major). When your OPT begins, you can accrue up to 90 days of unemployment.
While on OPT, you maintain your F-1 status by working full-time and not exceeding the unemployment allowance. For the purposes of OPT, "full-time" means 21+ hours per week, and the following employment types are permissible, as long as there's a connection to your major:
- Multiple employers (all jobs must relate to major)
- Short-term multiple hires (performing artists)

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- Work for hire (contractual employment)
- Self-employed business owner (must have proper business licenses; consult attorney)
- Employment through agency or consulting firm
- Paid or unpaid employment or volunteering (if unpaid, must meet Department of Labor standards)

OPT Application Process:

1. **Attend or review the OPT workshop**

2. **Prepare digital files of application materials listed below**. Accepted file types are: JPG, JPEG, PNG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF. Foreign language documents must have an English translation. Maximum file size is 6MB. Name the files something that indicates who they belong to and what the document is (for example, Last Name_First Name_Document type)
   - ☐ Passport biographics page
   - ☐ I-20 with OPT recommendation (you will receive this in your OPT advising meeting)
   - ☐ Past I-20s with CPT authorizations or with previous SEVIS numbers
   - ☐ Front and back of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) if ever issued
   - ☐ I-94: Click "Get Most Recent I-94". This number changes every time you enter the U.S., so make sure you have the most recent copy.
   - ☐ Digital passport style photo: this should be 2x2 inches (at least 600x600 pixels) taken within the last 6 months. Refer to State Department guidance for passport photos; you can use their Photo Tool to upload a photo and crop it to the right size.

3. **Create an online USCIS account**; there are step-by-step instructions here.

4. **Proceed with starting your online application** for the I-765. Be careful that you select option (c)(3)(B) for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training. Once you have completed all responses, save a preview of the Form I-765 (you can do this in the "Review and Submit" section). DO NOT SUBMIT AND PAY UNTIL AFTER YOU MEET WITH AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR for your OPT advising appointment.

5. Schedule an appointment with an international student advisor in the CGE to review your OPT application. At least full 1 business day before this meeting, please email the advisor you're meeting

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with the preview of your completed I-765 form to review. In or after this meeting, you will receive a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation—you will need to upload this to your online application.

6. **Upload your I-20 with OPT recommendation** to your I-765 application, and if necessary, make any recommended corrections to the I-765. The final step is to **pay the I-765 filing fee** via U.S. bank account or debit/credit card within the OPT filing period (90 days before I-20 program end date and 60 days after I-20 end date) <u>and</u> within 30 days of your OPT I-20 being issued (late applications will be denied). Please note that once you make the payment, your application is submitted instantly and cannot be edited. Do not submit your payment until you are sure your application is complete.

<u>**General Tips (USCIS online account):**</u>
- **Inactivity on your application:** The USCIS online filing system will save your application as you work on it. Be aware that before your application is filed, your application draft will be deleted after 30 days of inactivity.
- **A-number or USCIS online account number:** The online application will ask if you have these numbers; most students applying for OPT will not. A-numbers are assigned the first time an individual applies for a benefit from USCIS, so if you don't already have one, you will be assigned one when your OPT is issued. Similarly, you probably would not have had a reason to make an online USCIS account prior to this.
- **Previously issued CPT:** As you prepare documents for your application, make sure to locate any I-20s that have previously issued CPT.
- **Different SEVIS numbers:** If you took a leave of absence at some point during college and therefore have had multiple SEVIS numbers, explain this in the "Additional information" section. List the program dates and number of your previous SEVIS record.
- **Multiple documents:** If you have multiple documents to upload in a single area, you can either include multiple documents in a single file, or upload multiple files.

<u>**Completing the I-765 online:**</u>
- **Form type:** In your online USCIS account, select "file a form online". Select Form I-765, and when asked for the eligibility category, select (c)(3)(B) for Post-Completion OPT.
- **U.S. mailing address**: Enter an address where you will be able to receive mail after graduation. If you do not have an established off-campus address, you may use the CGE address. Enter: Care of Rebecca Eckart, 207 Chase Ave., Gambier OH 43022.
- **Physical address:** Enter the address of your residence.

- **I-94 Number:** You can find this [online](#). Be sure to use the most recent record, as this number changes every time you enter the U.S.

- **SEVIS Number:** You can find this on the top left corner of your most recent I-20. The number starts with N00.

- **Social Security Number (SSN):** The I-765 will ask you if you want the Social Security Administration (SSA) to issue you a SSN. If you do not already have a SSN, you should choose "yes" for this question. If you have had a SSN issued previously but lost your SSN card, you can also choose "yes" and the SSA will send you a replacement card.

- **Previously issued CPT or OPT:** Be sure to upload I-20s from all previously issued CPT or OPT. In the "Additional Information" section, list information about any prior CPT or OPT. Specify CPT or OPT, full- or part-time, the authorization dates, and academic level (bachelor).

- **Form I-20:** This section asks you to upload the I-20 that has your OPT recommendation. This I-20 will be issued in your OPT advising meeting, after everything else with your application is complete. You can upload this I-20 in or after your advising meeting. This should be the final document you upload prior to submitting/paying for your application.

- **Application Summary:** In the "Review and Submit" section, when you get to the "Your application summary" page, please click "View draft snapshot" to download a draft copy of your I-765. Please send this to an international student advisor at least one business day before your OPT advising meeting. The advisor will review your draft and recommend any necessary edits during the advising meeting. Do not proceed any further with the online application until after you meet with the international student advisor and receive your OPT I-20.