Optional Practical Training: Pre-Completion OPT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) provides an F-1 visa holder with an opportunity to gain 12 months of employment experience in his/her major area of study (with an option for a 24-month extension for certain STEM majors). The 12 months can be used all at once or in shorter increments during the school year (part-time), summer vacations (part-time or full-time), or after graduation (Post-Completion OPT). Any time you use for Pre-Completion OPT, you will have that amount of time less after graduation for Post-Completion OPT. (Example: 3 months of Pre-Completion OPT = 9 months for Post-Completion OPT)

Employment while on OPT must be related to your major field of study. A job offer is not required to apply for OPT, but you must obtain authorization by USCIS prior to beginning employment. OPT is granted for specific dates and cannot be adjusted after it is approved. Once the application is submitted, please allow at least 90 days for processing.

There are three types of OPT: pre-completion, post-completion, and STEM Extension. The information in this document is for Pre-Completion OPT only.

For more information, please visit the USCIS website on OPT.

Pre-completion OPT is used during the F-1 visa holder’s program of study (before the program end date on the I-20 form) and is either part-time (during the semester) or full or part-time during annual vacations (e.g. summer break).

To apply for Pre-completion OPT: prepare all of the documents as outlined in this packet. Complete the OPT Request application in the ISSS Student Portal (Terra Dotta) to get your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, in order to complete the OPT application process online.

The government takes at least 3 months to process OPT applications, which is why it is important to plan ahead!
Pre-Completion OPT Online Application Process

STEP 1 Submit the **OPT Request** through the **ISSS student portal** (Terra Dotta)
You will need to select a **start date** and an **end date** for your OPT authorization.
You will need to get the new I-20 Form **BEFORE** you submit the OPT application online.

STEP 2 Begin **OPT application** by working on the **I-765 Form online** through the **USCIS Portal**

STEP 3 **Have ISSS check your I-765 Form**
It is strongly recommended that an ISSS advisor review your I-765 Form, especially if you have questions or concerns about the information you are submitting. Before submitting payment, you will be able to download a “Draft Snapshot” — send that PDF to ISSS for review.

STEP 4 Submit payment for **application fee = submit I-765 Form**
*Once payment is submitted, your application has been submitted to USCIS! You will not be able to edit your application after you submit payment. The application fee is non-refundable, and if you need to submit the application again, you will need to pay the application fee again.*

**NOTE:** if you submit the application without a valid OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, your application will be denied and you will need to apply again.

**Documentation checklist for Pre-Completion OPT application online:**

- Screenshot or PDF of your most recent **I-94 Arrival Record**, which can be retrieved **online**
- Scans of front and back of any previous **Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** card(s), if previously issued
- Scan of your **academic transcript**, as proof of enrollment
- Scans of previous **CPT-endorsed and OPT-endorsed I-20s**, if applicable
- Scan of **OPT-endorsed I-20 Form** (you will get this from ISSS)
- **Passport-sized photo** (2 inches by 2 inches) taken in the past 6 months, not used before
  - See additional specifications in application or Completion Guide below.
- Credit card, debit card, or bank routing information to pay the **$470.00 application fee**

Use the **Completion Guide** to help you complete the online I-765 application.
After OPT is filed:

You should receive three documents from USCIS:
1. Receipt notice (issued immediately after submitting online)
2. Approval notice
3. EAD Card (normally within 1-2 weeks after receiving the approval notice; scan front and back of the card to ISSS for your immigration file)

➔ If you receive an R.F.E. (Request for Evidence), contact ISSS immediately.

Employment Reminders

- You MAY NOT work before you receive the EAD card or before the start date on the EAD card.
  - You should receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) within 3-4 months from the date on the receipt notice. If it is not received in this time, contact ISSS.
- Employment must be directly related to your major field of study.

➔ Any violation of these and other employment regulations can cause your immigration status to be terminated.

Reporting Requirements

While on OPT, you will remain in F-1 status under the sponsorship of James Madison University, and as such, you must maintain your immigration status:

➔ Report employer name and address, part-time (less than 20 hours per week) or full-time employment (20-40 hours per week), and start date to SEVIS through your SEVIS Portal Account as soon as you start employment.
  - You will need to provide a statement about how employment is related to your major.
- Update your SEVIS record of a change in employment immediately and report all criteria listed above, including end date of previous employment.
- Update MyMadison of any change in address within 10 days.
- Keep all immigration documents safe and in valid status.

➔ Any violation of these and other regulations can cause your immigration status to be terminated.
Pre-Completion OPT Timeline

Can submit application

Apply for OPT

90 days

EAD start

OPT Employment

EAD end

You can submit your application as early as 90 days before you want it to begin.

Allow for at least 90 days for government processing before employment start date.

Cannot begin work until:
- you receive the EAD card and
- until the start date listed on your EAD card

Report any change of address or employment.

Stop working by end date on EAD card

Continue in F-1 status (e.g. full-time enrollment, graduation, grace period)
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/).

You will first need to **create an account**.

The USCIS system will send you a **confirmation email**.

Then they will send you a **verification code** to enter online.
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/).
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/).

Read the instructions before you start your application and then click Next.

- **Getting Started**
  - Basis of eligibility
  - Reason for applying
  - Preparer and interpreter information

- **About You**

- **Evidence**

- **Additional Information**

- **Review and Submit**

**What is your eligibility category?**

⚠️ You can file your request online only for certain eligibility categories.

If your eligibility category does not appear on the dropdown list, you must file a paper Form I-765. If you submit online and are not eligible for one of the listed categories, your application may be denied.

Select (c)(3)(A) Student Pre-Completion OPT from the dropdown menu.

**What is your reason for applying?**

- Initial permission to accept employment
  - Replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged employment authorization document or correction of my employment authorization document NOT DUE to US Citizenship and Immigration Services error
  - Renewal of permission to accept employment

**Have you previously filed Form I-765?**

- Yes  Select Yes if you have.
- No   Select No if you have not.
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Is someone assisting you with completing this application?

- Yes
- No

What is your current legal name?

Your current legal name is the name on your birth certificate, unless it changed after birth by a legal action such as marriage or court order. Do not provide any nicknames here.

Given name (first name)  Middle name

Family name (last name)

Complete with your information.

Have you used any other names since birth?

Other names used may include nicknames, aliases and maiden names.

Select Yes if you have used names other than those listed above.
Select No if you have not.
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

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**I-765, Application for Employment Authorization**

**Getting Started**

**About You**
- Your name
- Your contact information
- Describe yourself
- When and where you were born
- Your immigration information
- Other information

**Evidence**

**Additional Information**

**Review and Submit**

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**How may we contact you?**

- **Daytime telephone number**

- **Mobile telephone number (if any)**
  - This is the same as my daytime telephone number.

- **Email address**

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**What is your current U.S. mailing address?**

We will use your current mailing address to contact you throughout the application process. We may not be able to contact you if you do not provide a complete and valid address. Please provide a U.S. address only.

- **Address line 1**
- **Street number and name**
- **Address line 2**
- **Apartment, suite, unit, or floor**
- **City or town**
- **State**
- **ZIP code**

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**Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?**

- **Yes**
- **No**

Select Yes if you live at the address above.
Select No if you physically live at a different address, and provide that address.

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[Back] [Next]
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

What is your gender?  
○ Male  
○ Female  

What is your marital status?  
○ Single  
○ Married  
○ Divorced  
○ Widowed

What is your city, town, or village of birth?

What is your state or province of birth?

What is your country of birth?

What is your date of birth?  
Be sure to use the MONTH / DAY / YEAR format!
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

What is your country of citizenship or nationality?
List all countries where you are currently a citizen or national.

Select your country of citizenship from the dropdown menu

What is your Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)?

Get your most recent I-94 Record online at:

https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/

When did you last arrive in the United States?
List your arrival date, place of arrival, and status at arrival.

Information in your I-94 Record

Select the US airport you arrived into
If you arrived into Washington Dulles, select “DULLES INTL”

Select F-1 Student
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Complete with your information.

What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?

What is your travel document number (if any)?

What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?

What country issued your passport or travel document?

What is your current immigration status or category?

Select F-1 Student

What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)?

Enter your SEVIS ID number found on your I-20 Form
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Most F-1 students do not have an A-Number.
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Read the instructions!

2 x 2 Photo Of You

Upload a recent color photograph of yourself that measures 2 inches by 2 inches, with your face measuring 1 inch to 1 3/8 inch from your chin to the top of your head. Your eyes should be between 1 1/8 inch and 1 3/8 inch from the bottom of the photo.

Make sure your whole face is visible, you are facing the camera directly, and the background is white or off-white. Your head must be bare, unless contrary to your religious beliefs.

If you need help understanding the photo requirements or want to resize, rotate, or crop your photo, you can use the Department of State’s photo composition tools. Please note that we cannot approve your application without your photo.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, or PNG
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

...then upload your photo
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Read the instructions!

I-94, Arrival And Departure Record

Upload a copy of one of the following:

- Your Form I-94, Arrival-Departure Record (front and back);
- A printout of your electronic Form I-94; or
- Your passport or other travel document.

If you were admitted to the United States by CBP at an airport or seaport after April 30, 2013, CBP may have issued you an electronic Form I-94 instead of a paper Form I-94. You may visit the CBP website to obtain a paper version of an electronic Form I-94. CBP does not charge a fee for this service. Some travelers admitted to the United States at a land border, airport, or seaport, after April 30, 2013, with a passport or travel document, who were issued a paper Form I-94 by CBP, may also be able to obtain a replacement Form I-94 from the CBP website without charge.

If your Form I-94 cannot be obtained from the CBP website, it may be obtained by filing Form I-102, Application for Replacement/Initial Nonimmigrant Arrival-Departure Record, with USCIS. USCIS does charge a fee for this service.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: .JPG, .JPEG, .PDF, .TIF, or .TIFF
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

...then upload your I-94
After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Read the instructions!

Employment Authorization Document Or Government ID

Upload a copy of your last Employment Authorization document (EAD) (front and back). If you were not previously issued an EAD, you must upload a copy of a government-issued identity document (such as a passport) showing your picture, name, and date of birth; a birth certificate with photo ID; a visa issued by a foreign consulate; or a national ID document with photo and/or fingerprint. The identity document photocopy must clearly show your facial features and contain your biographical information.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

...then upload scans of your previous EAD card, passport main biographic page, or F-1 visa
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Read the instructions!

Proof Of Enrollment
Upload evidence of having been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year at a college, university, conservatory, or seminary approved by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) for attendance by F-1 foreign students.

File requirements
• Clear and readable
• Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF or TIFF
• No encrypted or password-protected files
• If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
• Upload no more than five documents at a time
• Accepted file name characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
• Maximum size: 5MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

...then upload your academic transcript

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I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/).

Read the instructions!

Previously Authorized CPT Or OPT

Upload evidence of any previously authorized CPT or OPT and the academic level at which it was authorized.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIFF, or TIFF
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

...then upload your previous CPT and/or OPT documents
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Read the instructions!

I-20, Certificate Of Eligibility For Nonimmigrant Student Status

Upload a copy of the Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status endorsed by the Designated School Official (DSO). For the (c)(3)(B) eligibility category, your DSO must have entered the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record within 30 days of you submitting Form I-765. If you fail to do so, we will deny your OPT request. For the (c)(3)(C) eligibility category, the Form I-20 must have been endorsed by the DSO within 60 days of submitting Form I-765.

Read the instructions!

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

This means that the DSO signature on page 1 of your I-20 cannot be older than 30 days.

...then upload your OPT-endorsed I-20
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/).

*If you have had other SEVIS ID numbers, should be included in this section.*

Type in “I have also had the following SEVIS ID number(s):” and list any other SEVIS ID number or numbers you have had. SEVIS ID numbers start with N00...
I-765 Completion Guide for Pre-Completion OPT

After you have your OPT-endorsed I-20 Form, complete online at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/.

Carefully review all of your information before you pay the application fee. Once the fee is paid, you cannot make corrections.

If you would like an ISSS advisor to review this, download the “Draft Snapshot” and email it to an ISSS advisor before you click submit.

Check your application before you submit

We will review your application to check for accuracy and completeness before you submit it.

We encourage you to provide as many responses as you can throughout the application, to the best of your knowledge. Missing information can slow down the review process after you submit your application.

You can return to this page to review your application as many times as you want before you submit it.

Your fee

Your form filing fee is: $470

Refund Policy: USCIS does not refund fees, regardless of any action we take on your application, petition or request, or how long USCIS takes to reach a decision. By continuing this transaction, you acknowledge that you must submit fees in the exact amount and that you are paying the fees for a government service.

Alerts and warnings

You have one or more alerts and warnings based on the information you provided in your application.

A red alert means you have incomplete responses or inconsistent data. You cannot submit your application with any alerts.

There are errors in About You: Your name

Edit my responses

This section will also alert you to missing or incorrect information.
After you agree to the Application Statement, where you digitally sign and submit the form, you will be directed to pay.gov site, a secure government portal, to pay for the application fee.

Enter the payment information. Make note of the form type and agency tracking ID at the top. Once you hit “Continue” to pay the fee, your I-765 Form will be submitted.

You will receive a confirmation message that your form has been submitted.

Click on “Go to My Cases” to see your case information and receipt notice.

All notices will be posted to your account and mailed to the mailing address that you entered:

- Receipt Notice
- Request for Evidence (RFE) – if you receive this, let ISSS know immediately!
- PDF of completed I-765 Form – email to your ISSS advisor to add to your immigration file.
- Decision letter

Let ISSS know if you have any questions during this process!