Optional Practical Training (OPT)
·F-1 Employment Authorization Q & A

WHAT DO I NEED TO SUBMIT TO THE UC MERCED OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS TO REQUEST OPT?

Submit the OPT Request form and I-983 Training Plan form **(STEM extension applicants only)** to the Office of International Affairs. The OPT Request Form can be found on the OIA-ISS website at http://iss.ucmerced.edu/students/current/opt. A new I-20 requesting the OPT will be printed and provided to you. This new I-20 is mailed to USCIS along with your application, fee and supporting documents.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)?
Complete Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization on the USCIS government website:
https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

Mail the completed form I-765 to USCIS along with the following required items:
- ✓ New **ORIGINAL** I-20 requesting OPT (Be sure to sign at the bottom of page 1)
- ✓ Copy of Passport
- ✓ Copy of Visa
- ✓ Copy of I-94 (Most recent I-94 that you can print from CBP website)
- ✓ Copies of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (Front and back)
- ✓ 2 recent photos (White background, 2 x 2 inches, head height 1" to 1 3/8" from top to bottom of chin, eye height between 1 1/8 to 1 3/8 from bottom of photo. Using a pencil, write name and I-94 number on back of photos.)
- ✓ Previous I-20s if you engaged in CPT/OPT or had a different SEVIS ID number
- ✓ Filing fee in the amount of $410.00 payable by check or money order to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (No abbreviations.). You can also pay using a credit card https://www.uscis.gov/forms/paying-uscis-fees
- ✓ Copy of degree diploma and official transcripts **(STEM extension applicants only)**
- ✓ Job Offer Letter from Employer **(STEM extension applicants only)**

Note: Question # 27 on the I-765 application is (c)(3)(B) for Post-Completion OPT; OR for STEM OPT it is (c) (3) (C)

WHERE TO MAIL THE OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) I-765 PACKET?
Once you have received your new I-20 from ISS and you have gathered the above items, you can mail your OPT application to the appropriate USCIS address listed on the following link https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses. The filing address is based on the mailing address you put on your I-765 application. **USCIS must receive the OPT application within 30 days of the date on the newly printed I-20.** This is a strict rule and your application will be returned if USCIS receives it more than 30 days after the new I-20 was printed.

HOW CAN I FOLLOW THE PROGRESS OF MY OPT APPLICATION?
E-Notification: If you want to receive an e-mail and/or a text message that your Form I-765 has been accepted at a USCIS Lockbox facility, complete Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance and clip it to the first page of your application. Following receipt of your I-765 OPT application, USCIS will mail a Notice of Action to the address on your I-765 application. You can use the receipt number on this Notice of Action to check the status of your application online at https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

CAN I TRAVEL WHILE MY OPT APPLICATION IS PENDING?
It is not advisable to travel outside of the United States if you have completed your studies and your post completion OPT application has not been approved. USCIS may request additional information during the application period. Your EAD card and letter of employment would be requested for re-entry into the US.

WHAT DO I NEED TO REENTER THE US IF I TRAVEL WHILE ON APPROVED OPT?
- ✓ Valid passport
- ✓ Valid F-1 visa
- ✓ Valid Form I-20 endorsed for travel reentry
- ✓ Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- ✓ Letter from your employer showing temporary employment in the major field of your study
- ✓ If you do not have a job at the time of reentry, you may be asked to show documentation of your active job searches

WHEN CAN I BEGIN WORKING?
You are not permitted to work during your 60-day grace period. You may begin working only after receiving your EAD card and only on the approved employment start on your EAD card.

WHAT DO I DO AFTER MY EAD HAS BEEN RECEIVED?
Confirm the information on your card is correct. Your employer will request to see this card to verify your employment eligibility. Create your SEVIS Student Portal account. Further information is below.

HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY VISA STATUS AND RECORD KEEPING DURING OPT?
During OPT, your non-immigrant status remains as an F-1 visa student. You must report any change of address or employment within 10 days. Following USCIS approval of your OPT, you will receive an email with instructions on creating a student SEVIS Portal account. This email will come from the Department of Homeland Security do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov. If you do not see the email, check your spam or junk mail folder. If you still do not see it, contact me to have the email sent again.
If you do not use this self-report option, you are required to report your employment and any change of employment to the ISS office by completing the OPT Employment Reporting Form. You are not permitted to go more than 90 days unemployed. **SEVIS may cancel your I-20 if you go more than 90 days without reporting your employment. Students on approved STEM extension receive an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days.**

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER
- – Students applying for their initial OPT may not start employment until they have received the Employment Authorization Card (EAD) and are allowed to begin work on the start date specified on the card (STEM extension applicants are permitted to continue working up to 180 days as long as I-765 was timely filed before current OPT expired)
- – Students can change jobs or have multiple jobs but the employment must be directly related to their major field of study. Students on **STEM** OPT must be employed by an e-verified employer and have an I-983 Training Plan form on file.
- – Be sure pictures are recent (within 30 days) and the correct size
- – Be sure your signature on the I-765 application is within the designated lines
- – Once OPT has been approved and EAD issued, the OPT may not be cancelled or deferred
- – SEVIS may cancel your I-20 if you exceed the allowed days of unemployment. Use the OPT Reporting form to report your employment to the OIA/ISS office at UC Merced.