OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

F-1 OPT TUTORIAL

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OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING IS…

Temporary employment authorization that allows F-1 visa students to gain practical work experience (**on- or off-campus**) by applying their academic knowledge to a position **directly related to their area of study**.

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OPT TYPES

PRE-COMPLETION

- Used before degree completion
- Part-time during Fall/Spring semester
- Deducted from 12-month OPT (part-time deducted at 50%)

POST-COMPLETION

- Use after degree completion
- Full-time
- Permitted 12 months each education level

STEM EXTENSION

- Additional 24 months
- Eligible if on approved OPT and in certain Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics fields

https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf

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TIMELINE

12 MONTHS

Pre-Completion /
Post-Completion OPT

24 MONTHS

STEM OPT Extension
(if eligible)

60 DAYS

Grace Period

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ELIGIBILITY

- Maintained F-1 status for one full academic year

PRE-COMPLETION:

- Apply any time after one academic year
- Part-time OPT during semester
- Full-time enrollment

POST-COMPLETION:

- Apply up to 90 days before or 60 days after I-20 program end date

- Have not used OPT at current education level, or 12+ months of full-time CPT
- Passport valid 6+ months
- I-94 shows F-1 status with D/S
- *Job offer not required to apply*

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APPLICATION TIMELINE: POST-COMPLETION

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EXAMPLE TIMELINE*

February 11

90 DAYS BEFORE END DATE

May 12

I-20 PROGRAM END DATE

July 11

LAST DAY OF 60-DAY GRACE PERIOD

FIRST DAY TO FILE WITH USCIS

May 13

FIRST POSSIBLE EMPLOYMENT DATE = DAY AFTER END DATE

LAST POSSIBLE EMPLOYMENT DATE

LAST DAY TO FILE WITH USCIS

*Always verify your dates yourself before submitting an application

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APPLICATION PROCESS

Submit OPT Request Form
https://iss.ucmerced.edu/sites/iss.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/opt_request_form_fillable.pdf

Receipt of I-797 Notice of Action

Prepare & Submit I-765 application & supporting documentation
https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

Employment Authorization Document (EAD card)

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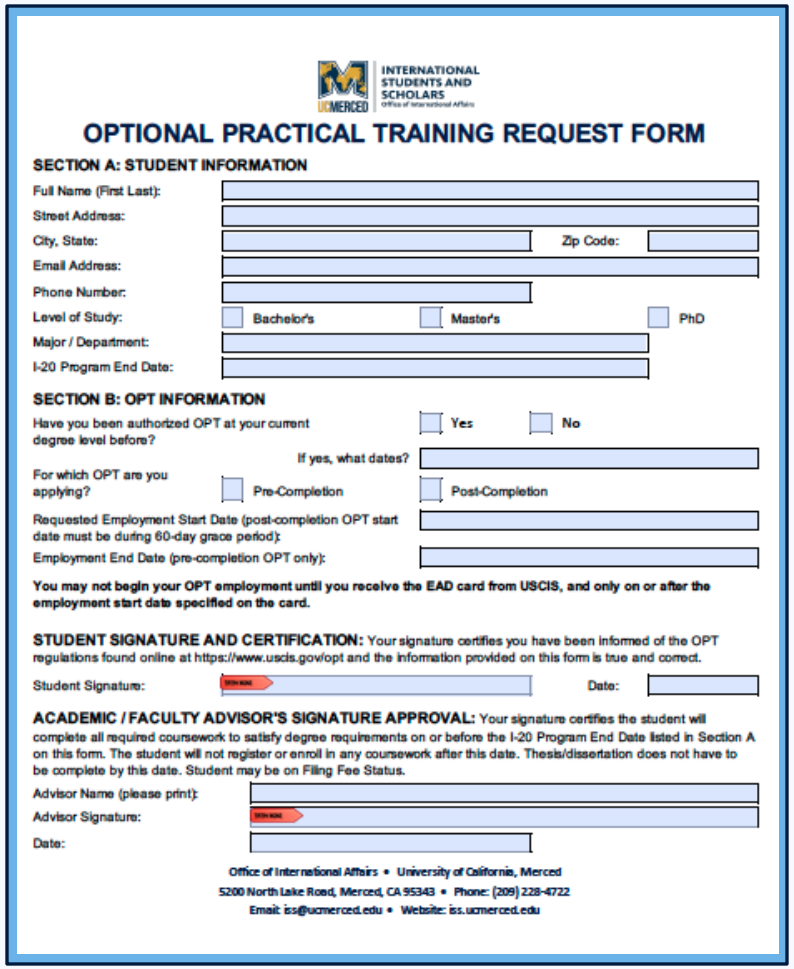

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS
Office of International Affairs

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING REQUEST FORM

SECTION A: STUDENT INFORMATION

Full Name (First Last):
Street Address:
City, State: Zip Code:
Email Address:
Phone Number:
Level of Study: Bachelor's Master's PhD
Major / Department:
I-20 Program End Date:

SECTION B: OPT INFORMATION

Have you been authorized OPT at your current degree level before? Yes No
If yes, what dates?
For which OPT are you applying? Pre-Completion Post-Completion
Requested Employment Start Date (post-completion OPT start date must be during 60-day grace period):
Employment End Date (pre-completion OPT only):

You may not begin your OPT employment until you receive the EAD card from USCIS, and only on or after the employment start date specified on the card.

STUDENT SIGNATURE AND CERTIFICATION: Your signature certifies you have been informed of the OPT regulations found online at https://www.uscis.gov/opt and the information provided on this form is true and correct.

Student Signature: Date:

ACADEMIC / FACULTY ADVISOR'S SIGNATURE APPROVAL: Your signature certifies the student will complete all required coursework to satisfy degree requirements on or before the I-20 Program End Date listed in Section A on this form. The student will not register or enroll in any coursework after this date. Thesis/dissertation does not have to be complete by this date. Student may be on Filing Fee Status.

Advisor Name (please print):
Advisor Signature:
Date:

Office of International Affairs • University of California, Merced
5200 North Lake Road, Merced, CA 95343 • Phone: (209) 228-4722
Email: iss@ucmerced.edu • Website: iss.ucmerced.edu

STEP 1: OPT REQUEST FORM

Complete & submit to ISS
https://iss.ucmerced.edu/sites/iss.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/opt_request_form_fillable.pdf

- I-20 Program End Date
- OPT Employment start date
- Academic / Faculty Advisor signature

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I-20 PROGRAM END DATE…

is the day you complete your final degree requirements (coursework).
You will not enroll in any more courses.

UNDERGRADUATES:

- Last day of last semester in which you will complete your final courses

GRADUATES:

- Last day of last semester (or Summer session) when all coursework for degree completed
- OR last day of semester when Filing Fee Status ends

Not permitted to work on or off-campus after I-20 program end date until you have EAD and on the start date printed on card

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OPT EMPLOYMENT START DATE

- Must be within 60-day grace period
  - First date = day after I-20 program end date
  - Last date = day 60 of grace period
- Prints on OPT I-20 (page 2)
- **Cannot change OPT start date once USCIS receives application**
- Not permitted to start work until employment start date on approved EAD card

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ADVISOR SIGNATURE

Verifies program completion date and registration status at the time of submission.

UNDERGRADUATES:

- Academic Advisor

GRADUATES:

- Faculty Advisor / PI
- Ensure Advisor understands signature verifies you're at end of program and:
  - **further enrollment would require you to cancel OPT**;
  - but you would be eligible for Filing Fee Status in subsequent term (academic/student appointment is NOT permitted on FFS)

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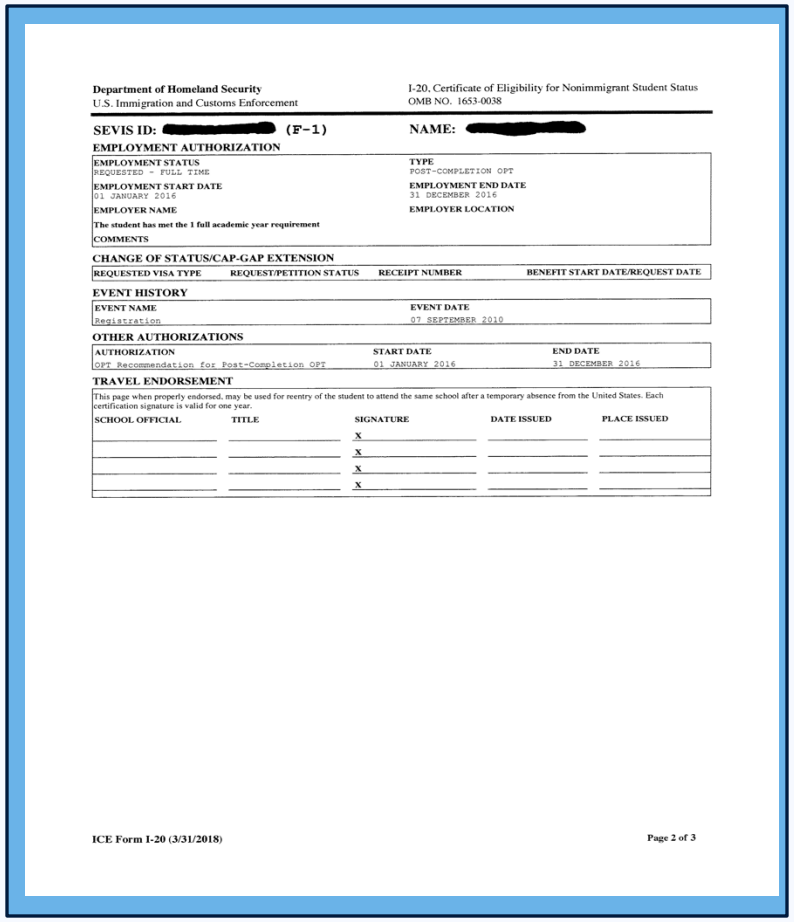

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status
OMB NO. 1653-0038

SEVIS ID: [redacted] (F-1) NAME: [redacted]

EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

EMPLOYMENT STATUS REQUESTED - FULL TIME	TYPE POST-COMPLETION OPT
EMPLOYMENT START DATE 01 JANUARY 2016	EMPLOYMENT END DATE 31 DECEMBER 2016
EMPLOYER NAME	EMPLOYER LOCATION
The student has met the 1 full academic year requirement	
COMMENTS	

CHANGE OF STATUS/CAP-GAP EXTENSION

REQUESTED VISA TYPE	REQUEST/PETITION STATUS	RECEIPT NUMBER	BENEFIT START DATE/REQUEST DATE

EVENT HISTORY

EVENT NAME	EVENT DATE
Registration	07 SEPTEMBER 2010

OTHER AUTHORIZATIONS

AUTHORIZATION	START DATE	END DATE
OPT Recommendation for Post-Completion OPT	01 JANUARY 2016	31 DECEMBER 2016

TRAVEL ENDORSEMENT

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.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL	TITLE	SIGNATURE	DATE ISSUED	PLACE ISSUED
		X		
		X		
		X		
		X		

ICE Form I-20 (3/31/2018) Page 2 of 3

OPT FORM I-20

Review OPT I-20 for accuracy

- Page 1 *(no change)*
  - Program End Date
  - Signatures (DSO & yours)
- Page 2
  - OPT Request Dates

Approved OPT dates and Employer will be added

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STEP 2: COMPLETE & SUBMIT I-765

Access Form I-765 & instructions
https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

Send to ISS Advisor for review (optional)

Gather required documents & passport photos

Submit application packet to USCIS:
Online or by mail

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ACCESS FORM I-765

https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

PAPER

- 7-page application
- Use current version
- Wet signature required

ELECTRONIC

- Create USCIS account online
- Start & stop as needed
- Only OPT-required questions
- Document upload

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REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Form I-765

Form I-20

- OPT request on page 2
- Issued within past 30 days
- Don't forget to sign!

Passport biographical page

I-94 record

- Most recent arrival record
  https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home

Passport photo

- Must meet US passport photo requirements
- **By mail (2):** Write I-94 & last name on back

Previous I-20s *(copies)* with

- Different SEVIS ID number(s)
- Any authorized CPT or OPT

Previous EAD card *(if applicable)*

- Front & back

Filing Fee

USCIS is increasing the filing fee April 1, 2024. Filing fee varies depending on mode of filing (online or mail) and whether biometrics are required:
https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees/frequently-asked-questions-on-the-uscis-fee-rule

- **Credit Card** provided on Form G-1450
  https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees/pay-with-a-credit-card
- **Check or money order** made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security *(do not abbreviate).* Include name, address, phone number & SEVIS ID number

Form I-907 – Request for Premium Processing *(optional)*

- $1,685 fee
- Expedites processing of the I-765 OPT application
- Guarantees USCIS will adjudicate application within 30 calendar days

https://www.uscis.gov/i-907

SUBMIT I-765 APPLICATION PACKET

USCIS must receive no later than 30 days after OPT I-20 issued
AND no more than 90 days before or 60 days after I-20 program end date

BY MAIL

- Ship with tracking & delivery confirmation *(recommended)*
- Account for mailing time
- Mailing addresses vary based on shipping method
  https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses
- Case status notifications received by mail or email/text (if G-1145 included)

ONLINE

- Submit via USCIS account
  https://myaccount.uscis.gov/
- Case status notifications added to account

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I-907 PREMIUM PROCESSING

What is premium processing?

- USCIS will process your OPT/STEM I-765 request within 30 days of submission of the fully completed I-907 form.

How can I request premium processing?

- File the Form I-907 via your USCIS account. For more information go to https://www.uscis.gov/i-907
- You can file the I-907 online *together* with your OPT I-765, or submit an I-907 for an already pending OPT I-765 request.

How much does it cost?

- See the current Premium Processing for Form I-765 under the "Filing Fee" section on the Form I-907. It was most recently $1,685 (as of September 2024).

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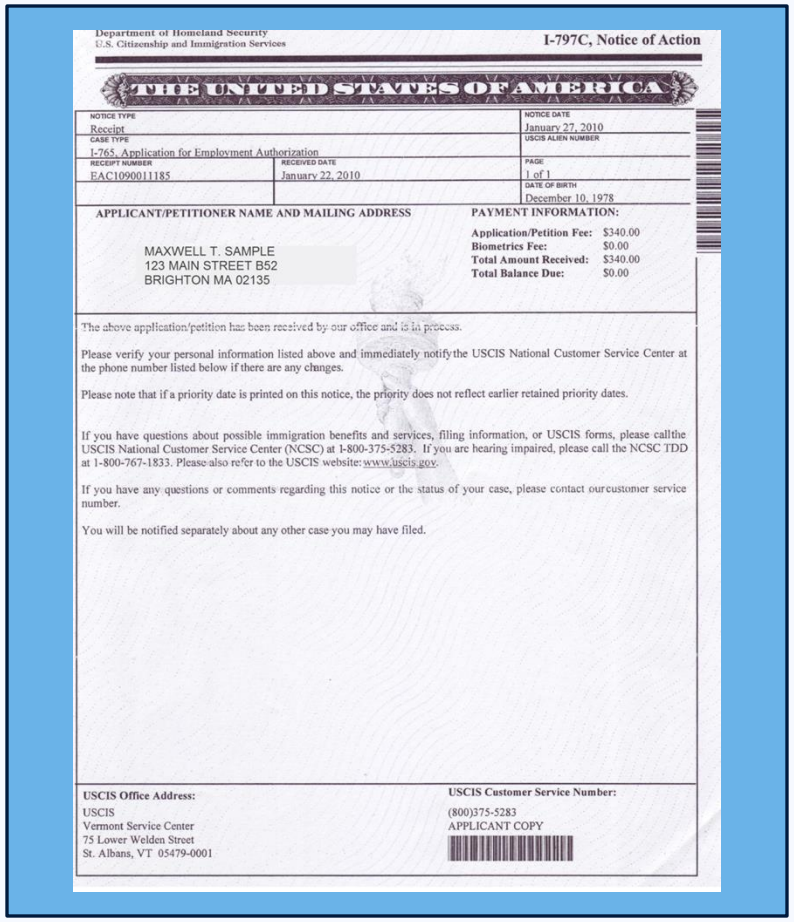

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

I-797C, Notice of Action

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NOTICE TYPE: Receipt	NOTICE DATE: January 27, 2010
CASE TYPE: I-765, Application for Employment Authorization	USCIS ALIEN NUMBER:
RECEIPT NUMBER: EAC1090011185	RECEIVED DATE: January 22, 2010
	PAGE: 1 of 1
	DATE OF BIRTH: December 10, 1978

APPLICANT/PETITIONER NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS

MAXWELL T. SAMPLE
123 MAIN STREET B52
BRIGHTON MA 02135

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

Application/Petition Fee:	$340.00
Biometrics Fee:	$0.00
Total Amount Received:	$340.00
Total Balance Due:	$0.00

The above application/petition has been received by our office and is in process.

Please verify your personal information listed above and immediately notify the USCIS National Customer Service Center at the phone number listed below if there are any changes.

Please note that if a priority date is printed on this notice, the priority does not reflect earlier retained priority dates.

If you have questions about possible immigration benefits and services, filing information, or USCIS forms, please call the USCIS National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at 1-800-375-5283. If you are hearing impaired, please call the NCSC TDD at 1-800-767-1833. Please also refer to the USCIS website: www.uscis.gov.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this notice or the status of your case, please contact our customer service number.

You will be notified separately about any other case you may have filed.

USCIS Office Address:
USCIS
Vermont Service Center
75 Lower Welden Street
St. Albans, VT 05479-0001

USCIS Customer Service Number:
(800)375-5283
APPLICANT COPY

STEP 3: I-797 NOTICE OF ACTION

Receipt mailed by USCIS 3-4 weeks after receiving I-765 application

- Includes number used to check case status https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do
- Required as proof of pending F-1 status for international travel
- **Cannot be replaced if lost**

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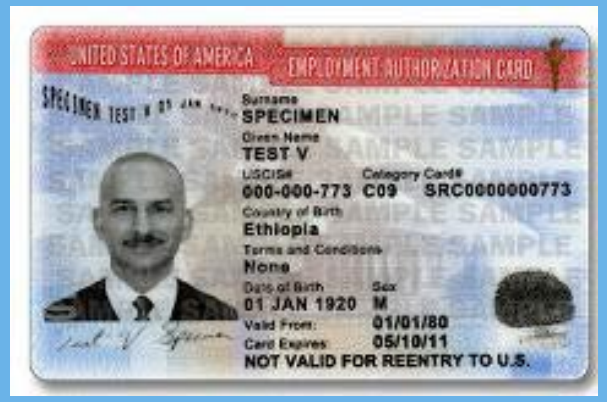

STEP 4: EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT (EAD CARD)

Official US work authorization approval

- USCIS average processing time: 90-120 days
- Review for accuracy
- Present to employer as employment eligibility
- International Travel: present at Customs with other required documents

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MAINTAINING STATUS ON OPT

- **F-1 visa student status sponsored by UC Merced while on OPT**
- Work at least **20** hours per week / employment must be directly related to your major/field of degree
- May not accrue more than **90** days of unemployment
- Report within **10** days:
  https://iss.ucmerced.edu/sites/iss.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/opt_reporting_form_fillable.pdf
  - Employment, start/end date, how it relates to degree
  - Unemployment
  - Name or address changes
- Obtain & keep job offer letter(s) *on official letterhead*
- Travel signature on OPT I-20 valid for **6** months

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EMPLOYMENT

Must provide evidence of hours worked & relation to major/field if requested by Department of Homeland Security

- Job offer not required to apply for OPT
- Can be anywhere in the US

Single or multiple employers

Work-for-hire

Contract or agency

Unpaid volunteer or intern

Short-term gigs

Self-employed

Proper business license required

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INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL ON OPT

Re-entering the US in F-1 visa status is necessary to maintain OPT

Re-entry documents *required & recommended*:

- Valid passport (6+ months)
- Valid F-1 visa
- OPT I-20 with valid travel signature (dated within 6 months)
- I-797 Notice of Action
- EAD card

- Proof of employment
  - Job offer letter(s)
  - or proof of job search / interview(s)
- Evidence of financial support

There is always a risk with international travel – there is no guarantee for re-entry

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F-1 VISA RENEWAL ON OPT

Required if your visa is or will be expired before re-entering the US when traveling internationally

Documents for renewal:

- Valid passport (6+ months)
- OPT I-20 with valid travel signature (dated within 6 months)
- I-797 Notice of Action
- EAD card
- Proof of employment
  - Job offer letter(s)
  - or proof of job search / interview(s)
- Evidence of financial support
  - Job offer letter, bank statement(s), letter from sponsor, etc.

Confirm documents needed with US embassy/consulate at which you will interview

Check visa appointment wait times before travel

https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html

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STEM OPT EXTENSION ELIGIBILITY

Starts the day after OPT expires and ends 24 months later

https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub & https://iss.ucmerced.edu/students/current/opt_extension

Degree in eligible STEM field
https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf

Employer is USCIS E-Verified
https://www.e-verify.gov/

Apply while on approved post-completion OPT

Training Plan Form I-983
https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf

Paid full-time employment
20+ hours/week

New I-765 application packet

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STEM OPT EXTENSION

- International travel while extension application pending – not recommended
- Additional 60 days of unemployment permitted during 24-month extension
  (unused unemployment days from post-completion OPT roll over)
- Can change employers
  - Must be USCIS E-Verified
  - Submit Training Plan I-983 *(final self-evaluation & new employer I-983)*
- Must report termination of employment to ISS – both you and employer
- Reporting requirements
  https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/assets/sevpstemoptreportingrequirementsfinal.pdf
  - Every 6 months: SEVIS validation report
  - Annually or at termination of employment:
    Self-evaluation *(page 5 of I-983)*

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

How can I check the status of my OPT application? You can use the receipt # on your I-797 Notice of Action to check the USCIS website at https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

How do I contact USCIS? The number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Be sure to have the receipt number ready before you call.

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. To update your address, contact the National Customer Service line at (1-800-375-5283). Canceling the OPT application is very difficult, and the fee is non-refundable. If the OPT has been approved, it is not possible to cancel.

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 during this time.

USCIS said that my EAD was approved, but I have not received it yet –can I start working? No. You must be able to show the employer the EAD when you begin employment.

USCIS said that my application was approved over six weeks ago and I still haven't received my EAD card. Is there a problem? Yes, there could be a problem. Contact USCIS with the number on the Notice of Action (1-800-375-5283) is the National Customer Service line. Be sure to have the receipt number ready before you call.

FAQS

How do I get an extension of my EAD? Only students who graduated with specific Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) majors and work for an e-verified employer are eligible to apply for an extension.

I lost my EAD card. How can I get a new one? You would have to submit a new application with fees, photos, etc. to obtain a replacement EAD card. This can only be done if you are in the US.

Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work? Yes. Full-time post-completion OPT is a minimum of 20 hours. Pre-completion OPT can be full-time only during semester breaks.

My EAD card says "not valid for re-entry". Does this mean I can't travel outside of the US while on OPT? You can travel while on OPT with the other required documents. The EAD card alone will not grant permission to re-enter. You will need a valid passport, visa, I-20 and job offer letter.

What counts as employment? There are many different types of employment, paid and unpaid that are permitted that include volunteer work and self-employment with the proper business license.

I have been unemployed for 80 days, What is going to happen on the 90th day? If you accumulate more than 90 days of unemployment, you will be violating your visa status. You would need to make arrangements to remain in valid status before the 90th day.

FAQS

Can I change employers while on OPT? Yes, you can change or have multiple employers as long as the employment is directly related to the field of your major. Be sure to notify ISS of changes in employment.

Do I pay taxes while working on OPT? Students in F-1 visa status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply.

What status do I have between my degree completion date and the start of my OPT? If you have chosen a start date after your degree completion date, you will remain in F-1 status while the OPT is pending. You may not work 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 speak to an ISS advisor.

Do I need to do anything for the UC Merced International Office while on OPT? Yes, you must report any change in address and employment information within 10 days by using the OPT Reporting Form.

Does my visa need to be valid while on OPT? While in the US, your visa may expire. It only needs to be valid if you wish to re-enter from abroad.

FAQS

What if my degree completion date is delayed after I apply for OPT?

Undergraduate students can continue with OPT application if they failed a course or due to unforeseen circumstances and need to take another course. If full-time registration is needed, an undergraduate student must cancel their OPT application and can reapply 90 days before the end of their next semester. The USCIS filing fee will not be refunded.

Graduate students with only dissertation/thesis remaining have two options:

Option 1

Continue with OPT application and file for Filing Fee Status for the next term. Students do not enroll in courses during Filing Fee Status and they DO NOT qualify for an academic or student appointment.

Option 2

Withdraw pending OPT application and register for next semester. Can reapply for OPT 90 days before the end of the next term.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS & SCHOLARS

On-Campus (KL-101)

- Tuesday & Wednesday 10:00am-4:00pm (KL 101)
- Friday 10:00am-2:00pm(KL-101)

Remote / Virtual

Monday & Thursday (Zoom)

Email: iss@ucmerced.edu

Web Page: https://iss.ucmerced.edu/

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