
Applying for Post Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

This information is correct as of 7/1/2022.

***Check the USCIS website for updates of
applications, fees and procedures.***

Post Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience in your major field of study after graduating from Occidental. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization takes at least 90 days or more to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status is 12 months per degree level. OPT must be completed within 14 months of graduation from each degree level. You do not need to already have a job to apply for OPT.

While on standard OPT, you are still connected to Occidental. This is not a work visa, but a benefit of the F1 student visa. You may apply for and engage in OPT after each higher educational level – bachelor degree, master degree, Ph.D! You do not need to already have a job to apply.

Eligibility:

- Completing your academic program or graduating from Occidental.
- Have completed the entire final year at Occidental.
- Maintained lawful F1 status.
- Seeking employment in a field directly related to your major only.

Standard OPT Process Overview:

- Scan and email (mofford@oxy.edu) a **COMPLETED** and **SIGNED** Student OPT Information Form to IPO for processing.
- A new I-20 recommending you for OPT will be sent to you.
- Student applies on line through USCIS on form [I-765](#) no more than 30 days after the date the new I-20 recommending you for OPT was issued. The [I-765](#) can now be filed online!
- You may apply for and have a start date through the 60-day grace period – 60 days after the end date on your I-20.

Find more information about OPT on [Study in the States](#), the official website of the Department of Homeland Security.

[Qualifying STEM majors](#) may be eligible for a **24-month STEM OPT extension**. Applications for a STEM extension may be submitted no earlier than 90 days before your standard OPT is expired. STEM extension has different rules than standard OPT. Applying for the STEM extension is discussed separately in this document.

STUDENT STANDARD OPT INFORMATION FORM

Please complete and submit this form to IPO to request an I-20 recommending you for OPT. IPO will contact you when it is ready. Email to ipo@oxy.edu.

STUDENT'S NAME: _____ MAJOR: _____

SECOND MAJOR: _____ MINOR: _____

END Date on I-20 document: ____/____/____

For the SEVIS Record: In order to make the OPT recommendation, please provide the following information.

EMPLOYMENT START DATE: _____

EMPLOYMENT END DATE: _____

START & END DATES: The start date of the OPT period must be no later than 60 days from the end date of your program, as listed on your I-20. If your I-20 end date is May 16, your employment start date can be no later than July 15. The end date can be no more than 12 months within 14 months of the end date on your I-20. It can take 3 – 5 months for USCIS to process your application.

The US mailing address you provide on your I-765 is where all communications from USCIS will go. If you provided the IPO address on your OPT application, all receipts/documents will come to the IPO Office. Please provide reliable contact information during the process.

Current US Address: _____

Address where you will live after graduation (if known): _____

Current US phone number: _____

Non-Oxy e-mail (one that you check regularly!): _____

USCIS and IPO will use this address for correspondence.

Will you be traveling outside the US while the OPT application is in progress? Yes/No

If yes, you complete and **attach a pre-paid Federal Express label** so that we can send your EAD card to you abroad. You cannot reenter the US without it. Provide that address below.

Foreign Address: _____

IPO Processing

It is recommended that you start the OPT process as close to the 90 days as possible.

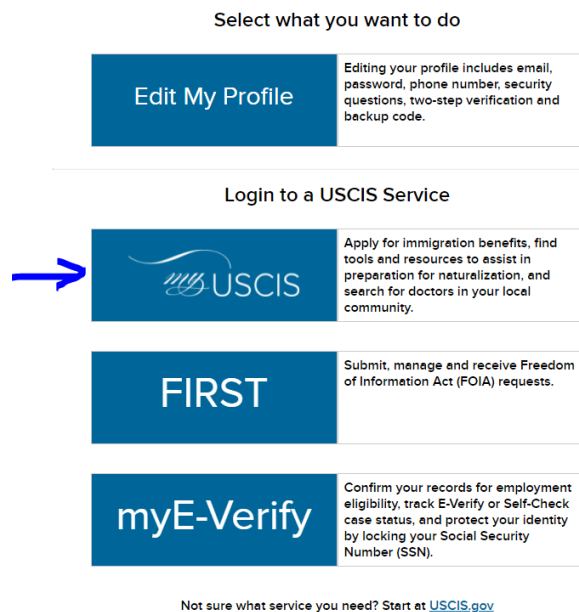
Submit the COMPLETED **Student OPT Information Form** to IPO for processing. IPO will print a new I-20 recommending you for OPT to be included in your OPT application. IPO will notify you when it is ready.

How to open a USCIS portal.

Tips for filing on line USCIS forms.

To file I-765 online, follow the following steps:

1. Go to the [I-765](#) page click on the “[File Online](#)” button.
2. Create a USCIS account with your non-Oxy email.
3. After you have logged in to your USCIS account, you would see this page:



4. Click on the “my USCIS” option.
5. Then, you are able to file an I-765 online.

All documents must be in a certain format and no more than 6 MB per file:

JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, OR TIFF (exceptions are specified below)

Name document with simple text (no special characters)

Biometrics are not routinely required for OPT applicants

The I-765 will indicate what documents you need to upload. They may include:

- I-20 recommending you for OPT (DSO electronic signature ok – student must print and sign in ink.)
- Previous I-20's authorizing you for CPT
- Previous EAD cards, if applicable
- ID page of passport
- Most recent I-94
- A recent photo. [See photo specifications.](#)

It is the student's responsibility to ensure the Form I-765 is completed fully, accurately, and includes all required document uploads before submitting the application to USCIS.

The online filing option allows F-1 students to apply for the post-completion OPT EAD, request a Social Security Number (SSN) (if needed), upload supporting application documents, pay the filing fee, track the status of the application, communicate with USCIS through a secure inbox, and respond to Requests for Evidence (RFE). **Check the progress of your application regularly.**

Tips for completing the I-765:

Read the instructions carefully and be sure that you have all required documents. You may start the online application, save and complete it later, if needed. Log into your myUSCIS account at least once every 30 days. Carefully **READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE I-765 FORM.**

IMPORTANT: Apply using the name on your SEVIS record – no nicknames.

Part 1:

Reason for Applying – I.a. – *Initial permission to accept employment.*

Part 2:

5.a. Your US Mailing address: **this is where correspondence and EAD card from USCIS will be sent.** If you don't know where you will be living and don't have a US based relative or friend, you can use IPO address – Occidental College – IPO – F-16, 1600 Campus Road, Los Angeles, CA 90041.

Other Information

8. Alien Registration Number (A number) (if any):

You will have an Alien Registration Number **ONLY** if you have submitted other applications or petitions to USCIS. If so, also provide USCIS Online Account Number (if any) in #9. If not, leave blank.

13.a. If you have had a campus job, you will have been issued a Social Security Number. Provide the SSN in 13.b. Skip questions 15 - 17.

If you do not have an SSN, answer yes to 14 and provide the information in questions 15 - 17 .

Information About Your Last Arrival in the US:

21.a – 26 - All information can be found on the most current I-94, passport and I-20.

Information about Your Eligibility Category

27. **(c) (3) (B)** is the code for standard post completion optional practical training after graduation.

(c) (3) (C) is the code for the 24-month STEM extension (must apply for standard OPT first)

28 – 31- for STEM Extension only – do not complete for standard OPT.

Payment of fee is made through Pay.gov. You can pay with credit or debit card – must be from a US bank!

Filing Limitations for Standard OPT:

- OPT applications **may be received by USCIS no EARLIER than 90 days** prior to program completion date (end date on your current I-20 document)
- OPT applications **must be received by USCIS no later than 60 days after program completion** date (end date on your current I-20 document)

- OPT applications **must be received by USCIS within 30 days of DSO recommendation** of the I-20 for OPT

While OPT Application is Pending:

After submitting the applicant, you will receive:

- A notice of Receipt (Form I-797) with a receipt number.
- A notice of Approval
- (Possible) Request for Further Evidence (RFE) – action required within a few days!
- The actual card.

Keep all of these documents with your important documents.

EAD application approvals can take approximately 3 - 5 months. The card will be mailed to the US address you indicated in your application. Check your portal and email regularly for communications.

Applying for STEM Extension

See [Study in the States](#) for a comprehensive overview of the STEM Extension requirements.

You must first apply for and be approved for standard 12-month OPT. 90 days before standard OPT ends you may apply for the 24-month STEM extension. Unlike standard OPT, STEM extension is job dependent; you must have been offered a job by a qualifying employer.

Eligibility:

- You are currently on standard OPT.
- Employment directly related to a [qualifying STEM major](#)
- Employment is paid.
- Employer is on E-Verify.
- Form I-983 completed by employee and student and submitted to IPO.
- IPO has recommended you for STEM Extension on new I-20.
- I-765 for STEM extension must be received by USCIS before the end date of standard OPT.

[Form I-983](#) must be completed by the employer and the student. This is a comprehensive 24-month training plan with a specific employer. Submit the completed and signed I-983 to IPO. IPO will issue the student a new I-20 recommending STEM extension. You must submit the I-765 no later than 60 days after the DSO issues the new I-20 AND before standard OPT ends.

Student applies for the STEM Extension on USCIS form I-765 – the same form used to apply for standard OPT. Complete all questions, including those pertaining to STEM extension. Student uploads required documents into the application and pays the application fee.

If you change jobs while on STEM Extension, or your duties change significantly, you and your employer must submit a revised I-983 to IPO.

While on STEM extension, you must ensure that you meet the [reporting requirements](#). Failure to comply puts you out of lawful status and may affect immigration benefits in the future.

FAQ's

Now that I've submitted my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the card to come?

Yes. However, your EAD card will only be sent to a US address. You need to show the EAD card to reenter the US. You must arrange to have your EAD card sent to a friend or trusted other who will send the card to you abroad. If the card will be received by IPO, you must complete and pay for a Federal Express label so that IPO can send it to you abroad. Additionally, you may receive a Request for Further Evidence (RFE) before approval. Ensure that the person at your US address will open all mail from USCIS.

Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?

No. You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS; working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. Nor can you begin work before the start date on the card.

What if I still have some time left on my student program? Can I travel during that time, even though my I-20 shows that I have been authorized for OPT?

Yes. You must be returning as a student to complete academic requirements. For example, a student who has applied for OPT in March, but whose program doesn't end until May (as listed on the current I-20), may still travel as a student until the program end date, re-entering the U.S. with a valid passport, valid F visa stamp, and the I-20 endorsed by the IPO.

I want to leave the U.S. for a little while during the time my OPT application is in process, but I need to return long before the card will have arrived. I have a tourist visa that is valid for 10 years. Can I enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I'm waiting to get the EAD card, then start work with the card once I get it?

No. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a tourist visa, you will have an entry record that shows that you have been admitted under visitor status, and you will have lost your F-1 status. Hence, your OPT application and card will be invalid.

Important Information after approval of Standard Post-Completion Optional Practical Training

IMPORTANT:

Read and keep all information below. It is important to your immigration status while you are on OPT.

1. Employment Authorization Card (EAD)

The EAD is proof that USCIS has approved your work permission under OPT. This card is very important. Do not keep this card in your wallet. Instead, keep it with your passport, I-20 and other important documents. You will need the EAD only when entering the U.S. after travel abroad and when beginning any new employment. Otherwise, you will not need to carry the EAD with you. Pay careful attention to the employment start and end dates as listed on the EAD! If the card is lost, you will need to pay the fee to have it replaced.

2. No Employment Without Permission

You may NOT work in the U.S. before the start date listed on the card itself. You must have the card in your possession. You must stop working by the end date on the card.

3. Reporting Requirements: Once your OPT is approved, you will receive an e-mail mail from Do-Not-Reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov with instructions on how to update certain information in your SEVIS record. Updates must be made within 10 days of any change. If you get locked out of the portal, contact IPO.

a. Address Reporting Requirement

Address updates needed! IMMIGRATION requires that, while you are on OPT, you report your home address and telephone number through the SEVIS Portal.

b. Employment Reporting Requirement

Employment updates needed! IMMIGRATION requires that, while you are on OPT, you report your employment through the SEVIS Portal. Do not delete old employment information ~ just add new information!

- Employer Name (this is the company name, not the supervisor)
- Employer Address (the company address where you work)
- Job position and how it relates to your major
- Start date of new employment

c. Employment Reporting Requirement

IPO update needed! IMMIGRATION requires that you send an e-mail to IPO (ipo@oxy.edu) describing how each new employment RELATES TO YOUR MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY. During OPT, you may change jobs. Each job must be related to your major. Provide IPO and SEVIS with the following information:

- Employer Name
- Job position and how it relates to your major
- Start date of new employment
- How employment is related to the major

International Programs

d. Additional Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT

IPO update needed! IMMIGRATION requires the following [reporting requirements](#) to IPO:

- Verification of your participation in STEM OPT (employer information and your address) every 6 months.
- 1st evaluation at the end of the first year of STEM OPT (on the I-983)
- 2nd evaluation at the end of the second year of STEM OPT – or at the end of your employment (on the I-983)

5. Penalty for Unemployment

An F-1 student with OPT who is unemployed for a significant period similarly puts F-1 status in jeopardy. The rule permits an aggregate maximum allowed period of unemployment of **90 days** for students on 12-month OPT. For STEM extension, aggregate maximum allowed is **150 days**. This period allows students time for job searches or a break when switching employers. Unpaid internships in your field of study count as employment.

6. Travel

YES - You may travel while on OPT! But, after graduation, you must be prepared to show an official employment letter or letter of request for an interview to an Immigration officer upon reentry, if asked to do so.

Documents for Travel While on OPT:

- I-20 *
- valid passport
- valid F-1 visa (Canadian citizens are exempt from this requirement)
- EAD **
- employment letter ***

* You must travel with the I-20 that shows the requested OPT dates; **with a signature made every 6 months**. You may also request a new I-20 after your OPT is approved which will show that the OPT has been approved.

** The EAD includes a notation that says, "Not valid for reentry." This means that the EAD alone is not enough documentation for your reentry to the U.S. If and when you travel, you must have the following documentation with you: I-20, valid passport, valid F-1 visa stamp, EAD, employment letter.

*** Letter of Employment / Letter of Request for Interview:

There are no guidelines for this letter other than it should be on business letterhead paper (recommended). And, although immigration officials have been instructed to request a letter of employment from F-1 visa holders entering the U.S. while on OPT, there is no guarantee that you will be asked to present a letter. As your International Advisor, I recommend that you have a letter ready, just in case. Keep the letter simple; include your name, the client (if freelance/contract work) or employer name, the start date of the employment (be sure the start date is AFTER the start date of your authorized OPT period), and a one- or two-sentence description of the work to be done.

7. Visa Renewal While on OPT

Remember that, while you are on OPT, you are still in F-1 status. OPT is not a "status." OPT is work authorization granted to you as a benefit of your F-1 status.

If you plan to travel outside of the U.S., be sure to check your F-1 visa stamp expiration date. If your F-1 visa stamp has expired, you must visit a U.S. embassy/consulate abroad to apply for a new F-1 visa before you travel to the US. You will also need your official school transcript and the other travel documents listed above as part of the “Travel” section.

CAUTION: If your F-1 visa has expired and you plan to travel outside of the U.S. AFTER being approved for H1B (employee visa status) but BEFORE H1B status actually begins, please talk to an immigration attorney before leaving the U.S.! Travel during this time is generally not recommended. Why? Because if the U.S. Consulate gives you an F-1 visa stamp, you risk the possibility that they will cancel your H1B approval. Or, if the U.S. Consulate gives you an H1B visa stamp, you might need to wait outside of the U.S. until the appropriate time to return in H1B status.

8. H-1B “Cap-Gap” Relief

USCIS is authorized to extend the status of F-1 students caught in a “cap gap” between the end of the student’s OPT and the start date of an approved H-1B petition. The rule automatically extends the status and employment authorization of an F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition that has been granted by, or remains pending with USCIS. This means that if the H-1B petition filed on behalf of the student is selected as a “cap case,” the F-1 student may remain in the United States and continue working until the October 1 start date indicated on the H-1B petition.

If USCIS denies a pending H-1B petition, the F-1 student has the standard 60-day grace period (from notification of the denial or rejection of the petition) before they have to leave the United States. Unlike the extension of post-completion OPT which is limited to F-1 students who have obtained STEM degrees, the extension of status for F-1 students in a cap-gap applies to all F-1 students with pending H-1B petitions.

9. U.S. Graduate School after OPT

If you apply to and are accepted by a graduate school after completing OPT, please send to IPO a scan of the acceptance letter and request your SEVIS record be transferred. Your SEVIS record will need to be transferred to the new institution. You must begin the new program within 5 months of completing OPT.

With thanks to the ISSS at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, CA.