

# So, You Applied For Post-Completion OPT...Now What?



# Will you graduate in Spring 2026?

ISSS is hosting an international student recognition ceremony.

Enjoy a reception with refreshments, photo opportunities, and spend time with your fellow graduates and families.

**Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>**  
**5:00pm – 8:00pm**

**Center for Community (C4C) JD Abrams Lounge**

Graduating students can pick up a gold cord during office hours in April from the ISSS front desk from through. A Buff One card is required.



# What to Do If You Will Not Complete Your Degree by the I-20 End Date

Please notify ISSS immediately.

You may be able to finish your degree while on OPT, but in most cases, you will be limited to working 20 hours per week until your coursework is completed.

## If You Have NOT Submitted Your OPT Application to USCIS:

- ISSS can cancel the OPT recommendation in your SEVIS record.
- This allows you to preserve your OPT eligibility for this degree level.

## If You HAVE Submitted Your OPT Application to USCIS:

- ISSS cannot cancel the OPT recommendation in your SEVIS record.
- You can request to withdraw the application directly with USCIS.
- Important Notes:
  - The application fee will not be refunded.
  - There is a chance that your OPT may be approved before the withdrawal is processed.

**Reach out to ISSS to discuss your situation further.**



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# What to Keep In Mind If Your OPT Application is Pending...



# While Your OPT Is Pending

- Pay attention to notifications and any mail you receive from USCIS.
- When you receive the OPT **receipt notice**, review it carefully. If your name or address is incorrect on the receipt notice, you should contact USCIS immediately.
- If you do not receive a paper receipt notice, please **verify your address** in the [MyUSCIS Portal](#).
  - **Sign up for USPS Informed Delivery.**
    - Please note: Your name (or the name of the "In Care Of" recipient) should be physically listed on the mailbox.
- Contact ISSS if your OPT application is **rejected, denied**, or if you receive a **Request for Evidence (RFE)**



# How long will it take USCIS to process my OPT application?

- Check this Processing Times website
  - Form: *I-765 Application for Employment Authorization*
  - Form Category: *Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]*
  - Field Office or Service Center: *Service Center Operations (SCOPS)*

Example (subject to change):

Processing time for Application for Employment Authorization (I-765) at Service Center Operations (SCOPS)



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# Check Your Case Status Online

USCIS offers several online tools

- Check your case status online.
- Get automatic updates about your case.
- Submit an online case inquiry or service request.
- Get a tracking number and register for Informed Delivery through USPS to get previews of the mail in transit.

## Case Inquiry

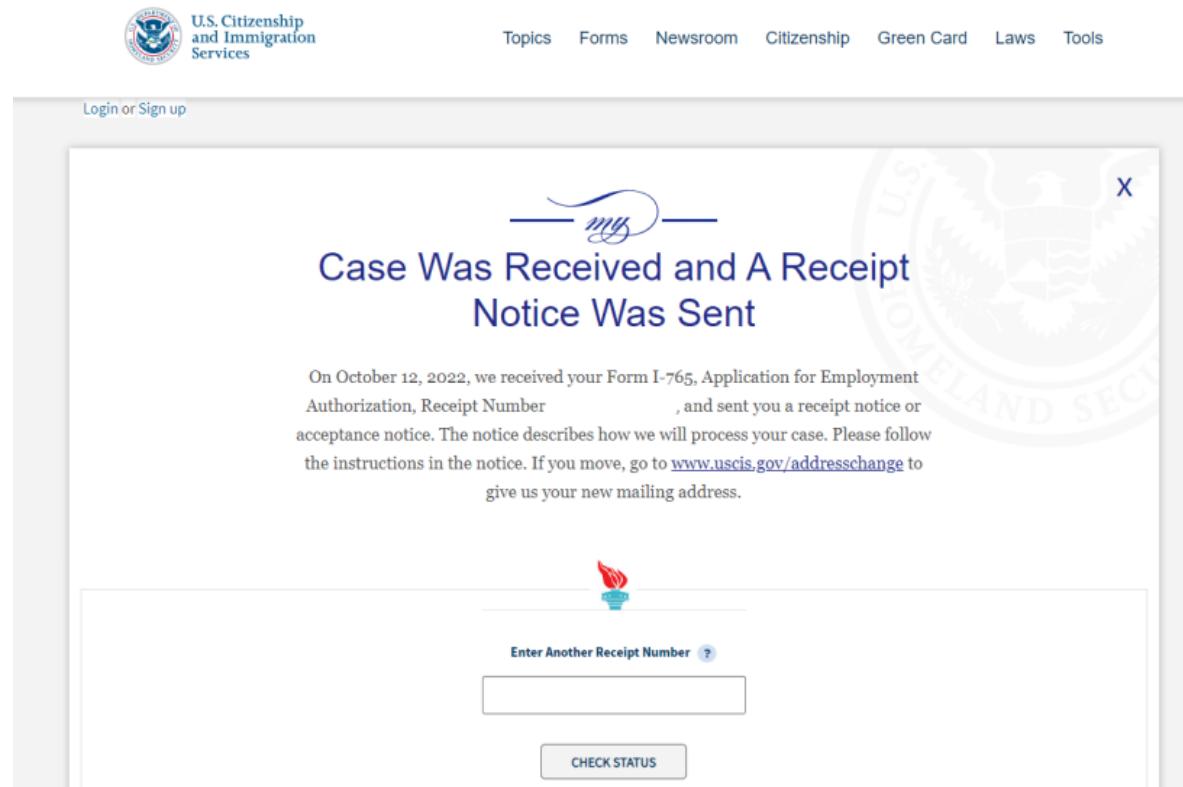
			
Case outside normal processing time <small>Think a case is taking longer than expected?</small>	Did not receive notice by mail <small>Think a notice is lost or missing?</small>	Did not receive card by mail <small>Think a card is lost or missing?</small>	Did not receive document by mail <small>Think a document is lost or missing?</small>

## Service Request

	
Appointment Accommodations <small>Request accommodations for an interview appointment</small>	Typographic Error <small>Make typographic corrections for a case</small>



Your USCIS case status will likely remain in initial review up until approval and card production, unless a Request for Evidence is issued.



The screenshot shows a web page from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Topics, Forms, Newsroom, Citizenship, Green Card, Laws, and Tools. To the left of the main content, there is a "Login or Sign up" link. The main content area features a large, stylized "my" logo above the text "Case Was Received and A Receipt Notice Was Sent". Below this, a message states: "On October 12, 2022, we received your Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, Receipt Number [REDACTED], and sent you a receipt notice or acceptance notice. The notice describes how we will process your case. Please follow the instructions in the notice. If you move, go to [www.uscis.gov/addresschange](http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange) to give us your new mailing address." At the bottom of the page, there is a "Enter Another Receipt Number" input field with a question mark icon, a "CHECK STATUS" button, and a small icon of a flame.

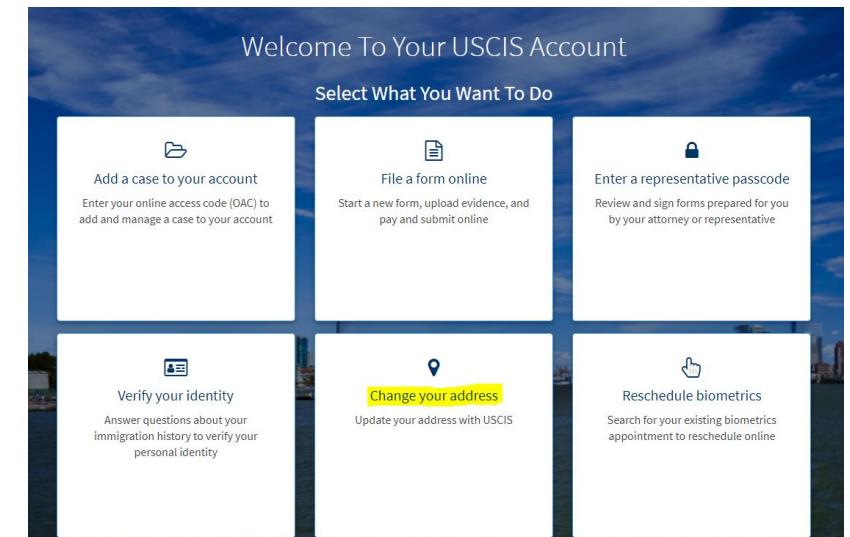


# Updating Your Mailing Address

If you move or stop receiving mail at the mailing address you entered on the I-765:

- **Immediately** update your address information in your personal [USCIS Account](#) and [USPS](#)

- Sign up for mail [forwarding with U.S. Postal Service](#).
- Sign up for [Informed Delivery service](#) with the U.S. Postal Service.
- Add a name label to your physical mailbox.



# Case Inquiry Date

Check your USCIS case inquiry date if your I-765 is pending beyond USCIS's posted processing time and no Request for Evidence has been issued:

- After selecting the form, form category and the office processing your case, you can enter your receipt notice date to get your inquiry date
- Learn more about the Case Inquiry Date

On or after your inquiry date you can send USCIS questions about your case by submitting a Service Request online.

## When can I ask about my case?

Many routine factors affect how quickly a case may be processed. To facilitate resolution of these factors, we only allow questions for certain cases.

[Learn more about the Case Inquiry Date](#).

Enter your receipt date below to find out if you can contact us with questions.

**When is your receipt date?**

mm / dd / yyyy 

**Get Inquiry Date**



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

What to  
Expect  
When Your  
OPT Is  
Approved...



# When Can I Start Working?

You can only work in the U.S. after your I-20 program end date **if**:

- You have received your EAD card.
- You are within the OPT employment authorization period noted on the EAD card.
- You are working in a job *directly* related to your major field of study.



# Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

**OPT work authorization is granted in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).**

Dates of employment authorization are listed on the EAD.

You CANNOT work before or after these dates.



# Lost EAD

1. Check the mailing address accuracy on the form I-765.
2. Check with neighbors to see if the EAD was misdelivered.
3. Use the USPS tracking number that USCIS provided; check with [USPS](#) to see if they have confirmation of delivery.

**Option 1:** Open an inquiry with the USCIS Contact Center using the [USCIS Self Service Online Tool](#).

- Use this option if there was a USCIS error.
- No work is permitted during this time without the physical EAD.

**Option 2:** File a new I-765 application for a replacement EAD. Use this option if there is no explainable USCIS/USPS error.

- File a new [Form I-765](#) for a replacement card.
- What is your reason for applying? Please select “Replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged employment authorization document.” Indicate that yes, you have previously filed a Form I-765.
- Pay filing fee again.
- Upload copies of I-797 approval notice and the I-20 showing the original OPT recommendation.
- Receive receipt for replacement card filing. Verify with your employer/I-9 office: You may work up to 90 days with the I-797 receipt while awaiting your replacement card. (See USCIS Handbook for Employers M-274, Section 4.0 Completing Section 2 of Form I-9 and [Section 4.3 Acceptable Receipts](#).)



# Complying with the F-1 Regulations While On OPT



# Maintaining F-1 Status While on OPT

- When you are authorized for OPT, you remain in F-1 status
- Your F-1 status is maintained by working in a job, internship or volunteer work that is directly related to your major field of study

## **What You Need to Know:**

- You must continue to follow F-1 immigration regulations throughout your OPT authorization period.
- ISSS is here to support you during your OPT:
  - We can answer questions and advise on OPT-related issues.
  - We assist with SEVIS OPT reporting requirements.
  - We will continue to send important updates via email — please check your email regularly.



# Unemployment Days

**Students are allowed up to 90 days of unemployment during the 12-month Post-Completion OPT authorization period.**

- Unemployment starts to accrue from the USCIS approved start date indicated on the EAD.
- Unemployment days are there to use! It is not bad to use unemployment days
- If you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment, you are considered out of status. Your F-1 status could be auto-terminated once you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment.



# Nearing 90 Unemployment Days?

Options:

1. Leave the United States *before* you reach your 90th day of unemployment.
  - **Let ISSS know so that we can complete your SEVIS record.** If you do not let ISSS know of your departure, you will continue to accrue days of unemployment.
2. Apply for a SEVIS transfer or change of level.
3. Talk to an [Immigration Attorney](#) to seek a change of status to another visa type.



# Employment on Post-completion OPT

**Training/employment on post-completion OPT can be:**

- Paid or unpaid
- Full-time or part-time (you must work at least 20 hours/week)

**You may have multiple jobs and are also able to change jobs if:**

- 1) Training is within the authorization period indicated on the EAD;
- 2) Every job must be *directly* related to your major field of study;
- 3) You are working at least 20 hours/week in your major field of study; AND
- 4) You report all new employment and changes **within 10 days** via the SEVP Portal.



# Acceptable Training During Post-Completion OPT

## Payment by Multiple Short-Term Employers

Obtain offer letter and maintain a list of all short-term employment including the employer's contact information and the dates and duration of employment.

## Work for Hire (1099 employment)

An individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship.

## Self-Employed Business Owner

You may start a business and be self-employed. Should be able to prove you have proper business licenses.

## Employment through an Agency

Must be able to provide evidence showing you worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.



# Volunteering on OPT

- Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns but should proceed with caution when considering volunteer positions as a way to meet the F-1 regulatory employment requirements while on OPT.
- Students must be prepared to demonstrate:
  - The volunteer position does not violate U.S. labor laws; and
  - That the position was a bona fide practical training opportunity requiring at least 20 hours per week.
- Whether the training is paid or unpaid does not determine whether an activity is a volunteer experience. Please review the U.S. [Department of Labor's webpage](#) about volunteers.
- Students and their employers must confirm that the volunteer opportunity does not violate any U.S. labor laws. ISSS advisors are not U.S. labor law experts.
  - If you have questions or concerns about the legitimacy of a volunteer position, we recommend consulting with an employment attorney.
- To participate in volunteer work at CU Boulder, the activity must be a formally established volunteer opportunity.
- CU Boulder departments creating formal volunteer positions should consult the [University Risk Management](#) website for guidance and ensure the project is formally recognized by the university as a volunteer work opportunity. Questions can be directed to: [urmucbdirs@cu.edu](mailto:urmucbdirs@cu.edu)



# Work in Marijuana (Cannabis) Related Industries is Prohibited

International students in F-1 status should avoid marijuana use or anything associated with it as it may have negative immigration consequences. This includes working in industries associated with marijuana and cannabidiol (CBD) (e.g. working in a lab extracting CBD oils for medical purposes).

Please review these articles and videos:

- [Legal Colorado Marijuana Workers Denied Citizenship Over Work](#)
- [Colorado's 9News: Marijuana can disqualify you for citizenship](#)
- [Unless You're a Citizen, Legal Marijuana Isn't for You](#)



# OPT authorization comes to an end if...

1. An international student in F-1 status completes a **SEVIS transfer** to another school. OPT ends on the day the SEVIS record is released to the new school.
2. An international student in F-1 status begins study at another **educational level**. OPT ends on the day the new academic level is registered in SEVIS.

Consult with ISSS to plan the timing of a future SEVIS transfer and/or beginning a new level of study.





Ok...What Do I  
Need to  
Report?

# Reporting Requirements - SEVP Portal

- The SEVP Portal allows students to update the following information:
  - Address
  - Telephone
  - Employer Information
- Immigration regulations require you to report changes to the above information within 10-days
- You will receive an email from do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov with instructions to create your SEVP Portal account on the first day of your authorized OPT start date.
  - If you do not receive the SEVP email and are in your approved period of post-completion OPT, please submit the *SEVP Portal Account Help: Email Address Update/Account Reset* e-form (available in MyISSS portal under “Training/Employment-Related Forms”).



# Reporting Requirements – Reporting to ISSS

- After entering your employment information in the SEVP Portal, submit the *Post-Completion OPT Employment Reporting* e-form (available in [MyISSS portal](#) under “Training/Employment-Related Forms”).
- ISSS will email you an updated I-20 with your employer information.

## MyISSS

Home  
Arrival & Immigration Check-In  
Departmental Services  
General Forms  
Immigration & Academic-Related Forms  
Insurance and Finances  
Training/Employment-Related Forms

## Training/Employment

### Tasks

-  Cap-Gap I-20 Request
-  EAD Card Submission
-  Post-Completion OPT Employment Reporting



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# How Training Relates to Major

## **Logical Connection:**

- [SEVP Policy Guidance](#) states there needs to be a “logical connection” between the duties involved in the practical training opportunities and the student’s major field of study.

**Student’s responsibility:** It is the student’s responsibility to make the argument that their training relates to their field of study.

## **Key Questions to Assess Relevance:**

- Does the training require a degree in my field of study?
- Do the job duties utilize knowledge from my studies?
- Are there specific courses I have taken that align with the job responsibilities?
- Does the job description mention qualifications or knowledge that aligns with my field of study?

## **ISSS advisors are not familiar with the specifics of your degree program.**

- If you’re unsure about the relevance of a position, reach out to your academic advisor or faculty member for guidance.
- If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to your degree, you should obtain a signed letter from your hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how your major field of study is related to the work performed.



# Example of a Weak OPT Relevance Statement

**Major Field of Study:** Computer Science

**How is employment directly related to major field of study?**

I work as a computer scientist. It is related to computer science.

# Example of a Strong OPT Relevance Statement

**Major field of study:** Computer Science

**How is employment directly related to major field of study?**

I am employed as a Computer and Information Research Scientist at ABC Research Institute. I work as part of a team of scientists and engineers that designs experiments to test the operation of various software systems. My work builds on research in complex algorithms and machine learning which I studied as part of my dissertation.



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# Sample Explanations of a Direct Relationship

- *Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering*: I work full time as an Electrical Engineer at ABC Corp., a government contractor. In my job, I analyze client requirements for electrical systems and provide them with cost estimates of such systems. My work requires understanding of electrical circuit theory, which I studied in-depth at the University of ABC.
- *Bachelor's degree in Business*: I work full time as a Loan Officer at a mortgage company, Happy Homes, where I meet with clients and evaluate, authorize and recommend approval of loan applications. On a daily basis, I use the knowledge I gained in my credit analysis, sales and marketing classes that I took as part of my major program of study.
- *Master's degree in Music*: I am working at a hospital playing the harp in patient rooms. I also conduct hands-on harp beginner workshops for long-term patients. On average, I work at the hospital 35 hours a week. My duties directly utilize the skills and knowledge I acquired from my coursework and degree in music therapy.
- *PhD in Computer Science*: I am employed as a Computer and Information Research Scientist at ABC Research Institute. I work as part of a team of scientists and engineers that designs experiments to test the operation of various software systems. My work builds on research in complex algorithms and machine learning, which I studied as part of my dissertation.
- *Master's degree in Kinesiology*: I am working 25 hours a week in a health food store as a consultant for Self-Made Inc., designing and teaching exercise classes that are incorporated into a customer's overall nutrition and exercise plan. My designs and customer instruction draw upon my studies and classwork in exercise therapy and physical reconditioning.



# Reporting is your responsibility!

## 1. Enter every job you have into the [\*\*SEVP Portal\*\*](#).

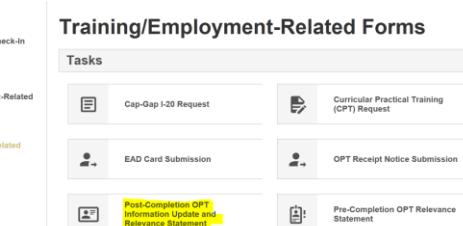
- If you fail to report your employment in the SEVP Portal within 10 days of the employment start date, an ISSS advisor will need to assist you with report employment. See **step 2 below**.
- **Failure to update within the 10-day reporting period could be seen as a failure to maintain status!**

## 2. Fill out the *Post-Completion OPT Employment Reporting* e-form in the [\*\*MyISSS Portal\*\*](#) for every job you have and request a new I-20 through that form.

### Address Updates:

Update your address and telephone number in the [\*\*SEVP Portal\*\*](#) and [\*\*MyUSCIS Portal\*\*](#).

For alumni purposes, you can update your address in the [\*\*Buff Portal\*\*](#) and with the [\*\*Alumni Association\*\*](#)



# Document Your OPT Employment!

## Offer letters and agreements/contracts:

- job title and duties
- start/end dates
- pay rate
- number of weekly work hours
- Location
- supervisor's contact information.
- If you worked for an agency or consultancy, keep evidence of the projects you worked on.

## Financial documentation:

- pay vouchers/pay stubs
- bank statements with direct or corresponding deposits
- W-2 tax forms



# What Happens If I Don't Report My OPT Employment?

- If you try to enter your OPT employment in the SEVP Portal more than 10 days after your employment start date, you will be **prevented by the SEVIS system** from doing so. You will need to ask ISSS for assistance.
- You will **accrue unemployment days** starting on your OPT authorization start date. If you reach more than 90 days, you are considered out of status and your SEVIS record could be auto-terminated.
- Failure to report OPT details in a timely manner could be reflected on your SEVIS record and may **negatively impact your ability to apply for immigration benefits later** - such as an H-1B or an STEM OPT Extension.



A photograph of an airplane wing and tail against a sunset sky with clouds. The sky is a gradient of orange, yellow, and blue. The airplane's wing and tail are visible in the upper left corner. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Traveling While On OPT

---

# Travel with OPT Pending

**Travel while your OPT application is pending after your I-20 end date is not recommended.**

- If your OPT is denied while you are outside of the United States, then you cannot re-enter the United States in F-1 status or reapply for OPT.
- If you are outside of the U.S., you may miss a Request for Evidence (RFE), should USCIS issue one.
- Your OPT could be approved during your absence, in which case, you would need the EAD and proof of pending employment to re-enter the U.S.
- If you must travel while your OPT is pending, travel with your OPT receipt notice from USCIS as proof of having filed for the OPT benefit. See [ICE Travel FAQ](#) for additional information.

**ISSS strongly encourages you to attend an [ISSS advising session](#) to discuss your travel plans with an ISSS advisor**



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# Travel When OPT is Approved

If you do not have a job, travel outside of the U.S. is **not recommended** as the regulations allow re-entry to the U.S. to **resume training**.

**A temporary absence from the U.S. should be less than 5 months**

- Even with a job offer and valid EAD, an absence greater than 5 months will not be considered temporary and you could be denied re-entry to the U.S.

**If you seek a renewal of your F-1 visa during your OPT authorization, you must:**

- Apply in your country of nationality or permanent residence
- Present your OPT I-20 signed within the last **6 months**, passport, valid EAD, official job offer letter, SEVIS fee receipt, and financial support documents.
- Prove your eligibility for F-1 non-immigrant status and that you do not have immigrant intent.

**\*\*REMEMBER! Your EAD is not a visa. You will still need a valid F-1 student visa in your passport in order to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status after most international travel.\*\***



# What Comes After OPT?



**WHAT'S  
NEXT?**

# 24-month STEM OPT Extension

Who is eligible? Those who are...

- Currently in an authorized period of post-completion OPT with qualifying STEM degrees (previous U.S. degree or current U.S. degree).
- Have an employment offer with an E-Verify employer.
- Have employment is directly related to their major STEM field of study.
- Have not accrued more than 90 days of unemployment.



# Cap-Gap Extension I-20

## Eligibility for Cap-Gap Extension:

- You are the beneficiary of an H-1B cap-subject petition
- The H-1B was filed as a Change of Status
- Your OPT end date is prior to the requested H-1B start date

## If Eligible:

- Your F-1 status is automatically extended to your approved H-1B start date
- The cap-gap extension also applies to any F-2 dependents

## How to Request a Cap-Gap I-20:

- Complete the ***Cap-Gap I-20 Request*** e-form available in the [MyISSS portal](#)
- You must have your H-1B receipt or approval notice before completing this request

The cap-gap extension terminates automatically if the H-1B change of status petition is denied, withdrawn, or rejected.



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# I-9, Social Security, & Taxes

- **I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification Process:** All employees in the U.S. must complete the I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification Form with their employers within 3 days of starting a job.
- **Social Security:** Employment in the U.S. requires a Social Security Number (SSN).
- **Taxes:** Typically, non-resident F-1 students with authorized CPT or OPT are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A) and Medicare taxes if they are considered a non-resident for tax purposes.
- Federal, state, and local taxes will be withheld from your paycheck by employers unless you qualify for a tax treaty exemption. More information is available at the IRS website and ISSS website

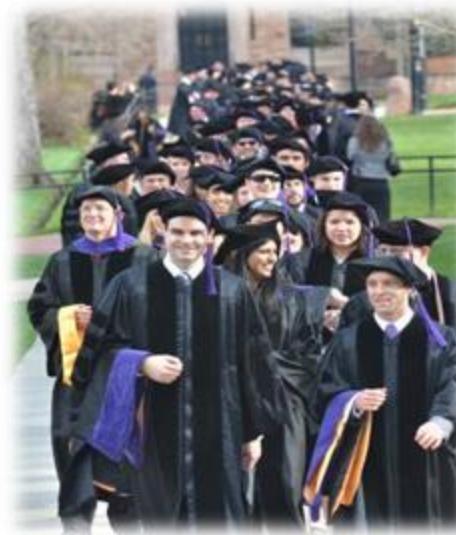
**ISSS does not provide tax information or advice. Please use the resources above or contact a tax attorney or specialist with questions or concerns.**



# Congratulations on this next step!

**If you have questions after reviewing this presentation:**

- Email your questions to [isss@colorado.edu](mailto:isss@colorado.edu).
- Speak with an advisor during [advising hours](#).



**Congratulations on completing your degree program at CU Boulder!**



International Student & Scholar Services  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER