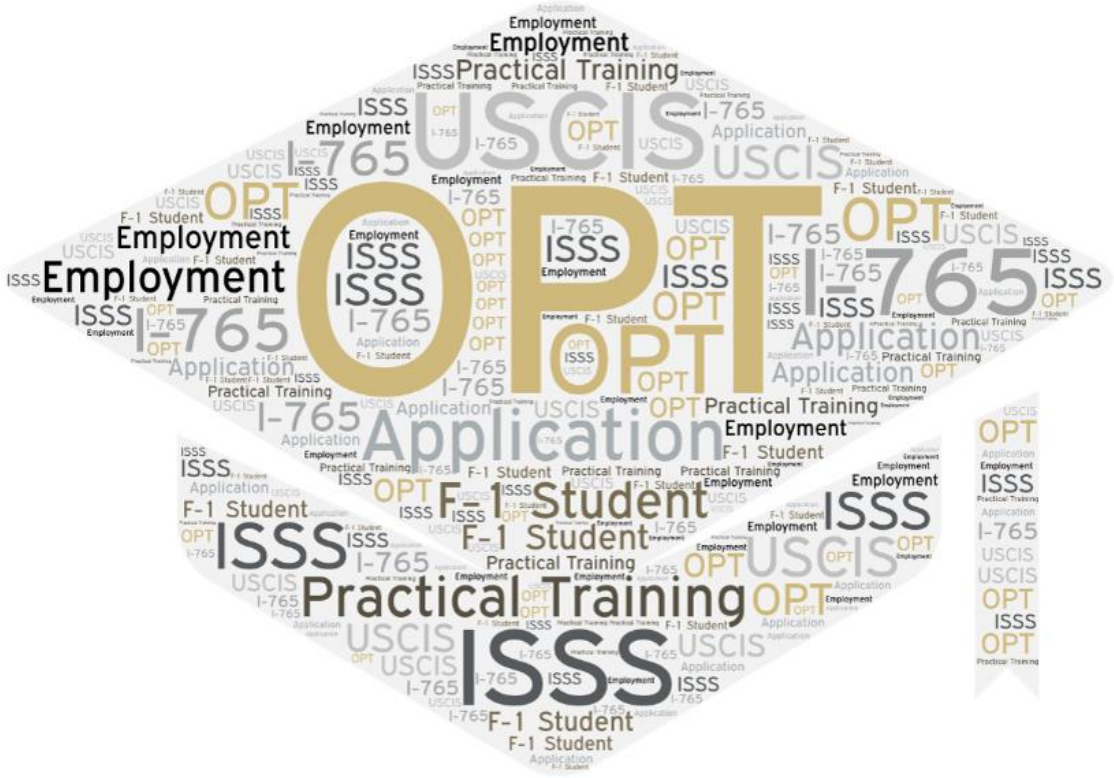


Preparing Your Post-Completion Optional Practical Training Application

Gold underlined text is hyperlinked – click on links for more information

International Student & Scholar Services
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

01/20/2026

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 1st

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.

International Student & Scholar Services
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

What is Post- Completion OPT?

Employment authorization is granted by USCIS ***after*** completing all degree requirements or coursework (excluding thesis or dissertation credits), allowing you to have a job, internship, or volunteer work that directly relates to your **major field of study.**

- ***Temporary***: up to 12 months
- ***Optional***: a benefit of F-1 status
- ***Authorized by USCIS*** (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services)
  - ISSS **only *recommends*** that your post-completion OPT application be approved; the final decision is made by USCIS.

A job offer is not necessary for employment authorization approval!

Am I eligible?

- ✓ Enrolled for at least **1 academic year in valid non-immigrant status in the U.S.** (Fall & Spring semester)
- ✓ **Enrolled full-time** (or authorized Reduced Course Load) during the semester you apply for OPT
- ✓ Have not completed more than **364 days of full-time Curricular Practical Training** (CPT) at your current degree level;
- ✓ Have not used **12 months or more of OPT work authorization** at the same degree level
- ✓ Have not been authorized for OPT at a higher degree level

When should I apply?

Earliest: 90 days before your last day of **required** enrollment in your final semester

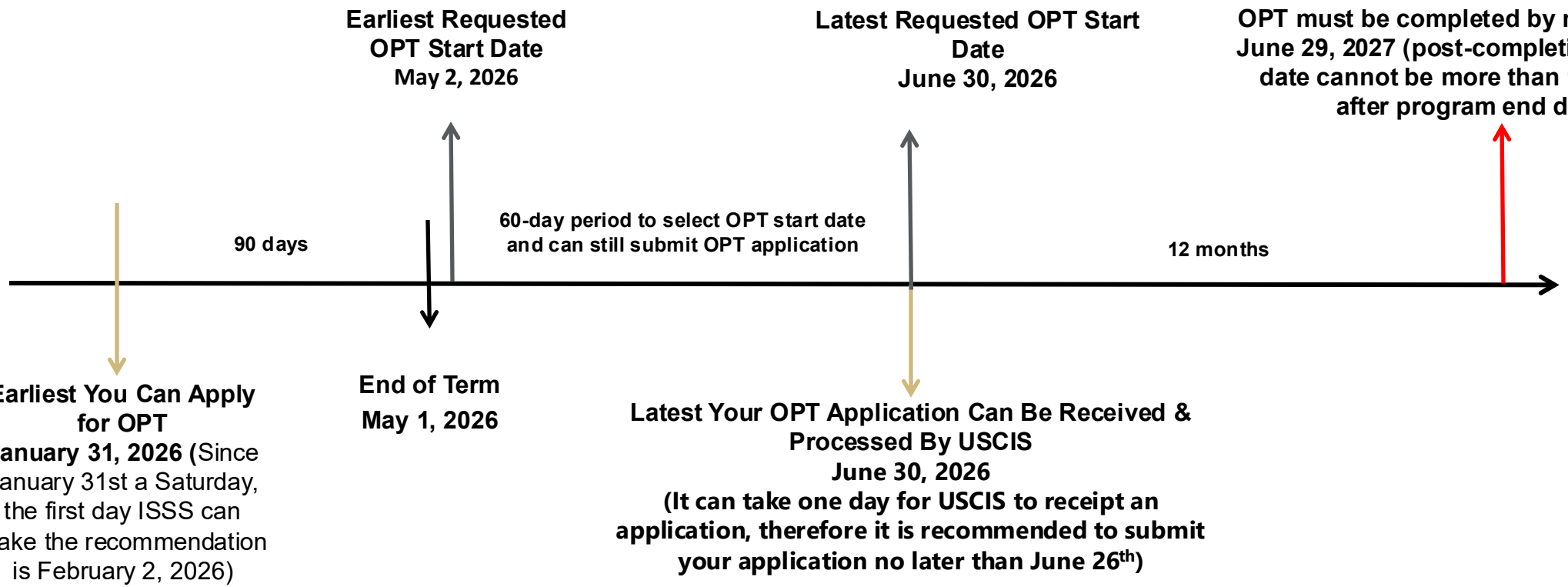
Latest: 60 days after your last day of **required** enrollment in your final semester

Example for Spring 2026:

- Last Day of Required Enrollment: May 1, 2026
- Apply Between: January 31, 2026 – June 30, 2026
  - *Since January 31 is a Saturday, the first day ISSS can make the recommendation is **February 2, 2026***
  - *Students should ensure their application is submitted by Friday, June 26th to be receipted by the June 30th deadline*

APPLY AS EARLY AS YOU CAN!

Post-Completion OPT Request Timeline Example (Spring 2026)



Choosing Your Post-Completion OPT Start Date

You do **NOT** need a job offer to apply for OPT. Most students will not have an offer letter when applying

- Your requested OPT start date must be within 60 days of your I-20 program end date
  - Your OPT end date will be one year minus one day, unless you used pre-completion OPT at the same degree level
- You must choose your requested OPT start date when you submit your OPT I-20 request to ISSS
- Once your OPT application is submitted to USCIS, your requested dates cannot be changed

Do not delay applying for OPT because you are waiting for an offer letter! It is often difficult to perfectly align your OPT start date with your training start date:

- This is expected, which is why OPT allows for unemployment days
- When applying for jobs, you will tell employers your anticipated start date based on your OPT requested start date

Choose a later start date if:

- You want more time to search for a training opportunity
- You want a break between the end of your studies before you begin your training

Choose an earlier start date if:

- You want to begin working as soon as possible

Example: Spring 2026 Graduates

- **Last Day of Required Enrollment:** May 1, 2026
- **OPT Start Date Options:** May 2, 2026 – June 30, 2026

Applying for Post-Completion OPT

How do I apply for post-completion OPT?

1. Complete the *Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request* e-forms available in the Training/Employment-Related Forms section of the MyISSS portal.
   - A complete *Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request* includes:
     - *Post-Completion OPT Essentials Quiz*
       - You must obtain an 80% or higher on this quiz to submit the e-form.
     - *Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request*
2. The *Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request* e-form will be automatically sent to your academic advisor/graduate program assistant
3. After your academic advisor signs off, the form will be sent to ISSS for processing. Please allow 2 to 5 business days.
4. ISSS will issue your new I-20 with the OPT recommendation and send it via email.
5. Print and sign your new I-20 under "Student Attestation“ in pen (not electronically)!
6. Submit your application to USCIS by **electronically filing** Form I-765 with USCIS online and paying the filing fee.

What happens if I apply to USCIS without an OPT recommendation I-20?

- USCIS will **deny** your application.
- Regulations require the OPT recommendation to be entered into SEVIS prior to the post-completion OPT filing and the applicant must include the recommendation I-20 with their application.
- If your application was denied, you will **not** be refunded the filing fee.

Submitting Your Post-Completion OPT Application to USCIS

How do I electronically file my complete Post-Completion OPT application materials?

Create a USCIS online account at myaccount.uscis.gov.

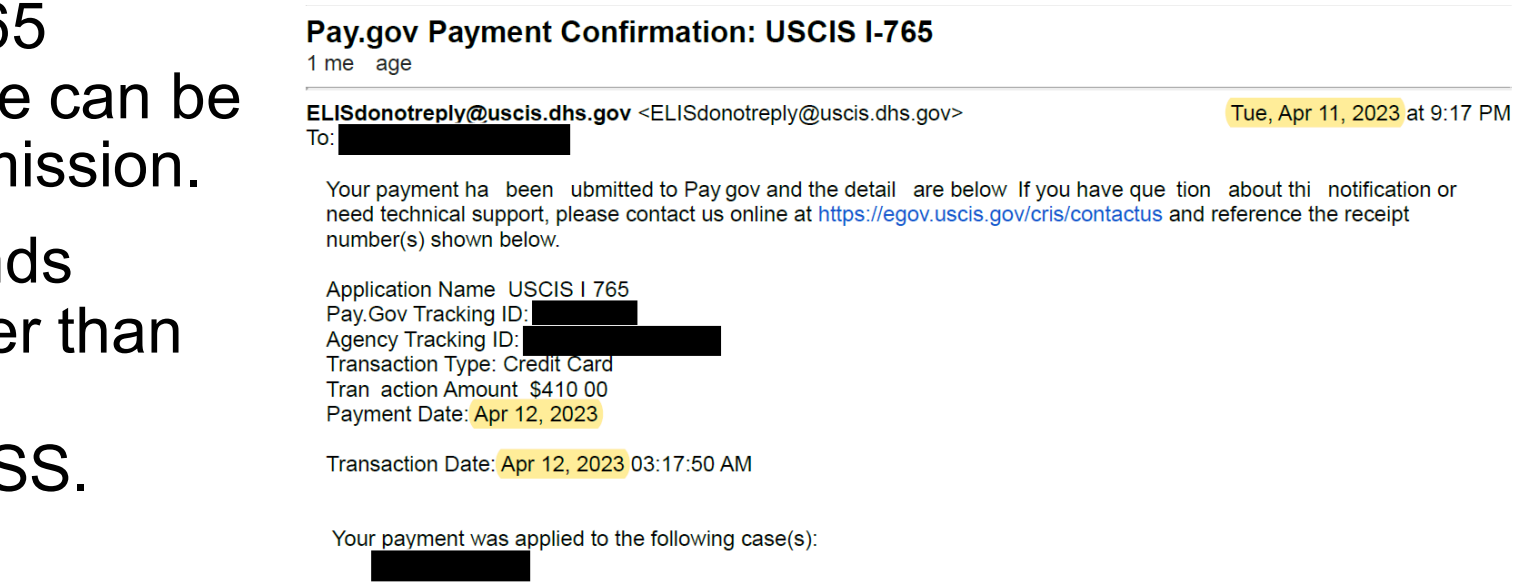
Submitting the Form I-765

- Wait until you have your OPT recommendation I-20 from ISSS before filing Form I-765 with USCIS.
  - Please review the I-765 instructions on the USCIS website and the ISSS Post-Completion OPT website
- USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of ISSS entering the OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
- You must be physically present in the United States to apply.

You may attend an ISSS advising session to review your draft I-765 before submission to USCIS

Timely Filing Consideration!

- ISSS has observed that I-765 applications submitted online can be receipted the day after submission.
- To be safe, ISSS recommends submitting your I-765 no later than 27 days after receiving your recommending I-20 from ISSS.



Pay.gov Payment Confirmation: USCIS I-765
1 me age

ELISdonotreply@uscis.dhs.gov <ELISdonotreply@uscis.dhs.gov> Tue, Apr 11, 2023 at 9:17 PM
To: [redacted]

Your payment ha been ubmitted to Pay gov and the detail are below If you have que tion about thi notification or need technical support, please contact us online at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/contactus and reference the receipt number(s) shown below.

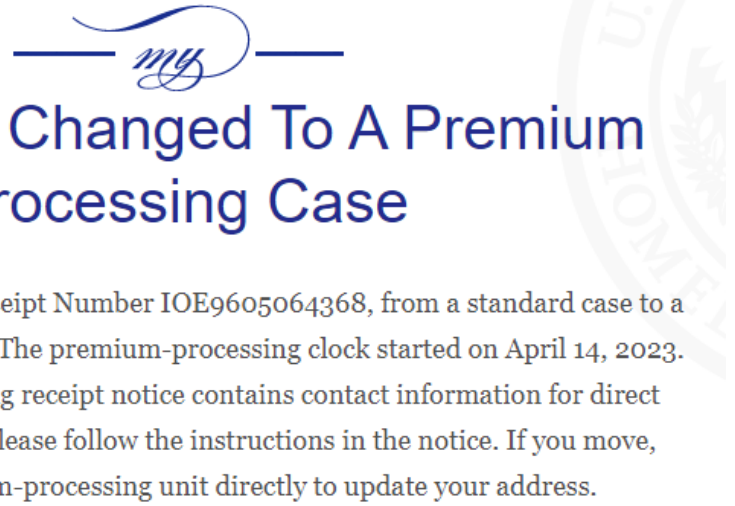
Application Name USCIS I 765
Pay.Gov Tracking ID: [redacted]
Agency Tracking ID: [redacted]
Transaction Type: Credit Card
Tran action Amount $410 00
Payment Date: Apr 12, 2023

Transaction Date: Apr 12, 2023 03:17:50 AM

Your payment was applied to the following case(s):
[redacted]

Premium Processing Option

- Option for online filing of Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service
- USCIS will respond within 30 business days of receipt of premium processing
  - Does not include time for printing and mailing the EAD
  - If your application requires additional security clearance, the review can take more than 30 business days
- Can include premium processing when first submitting I-765 or can be added to pending application
- Premium Processing fee is in addition to the I-765 filing fee
  - Fees are subject to change

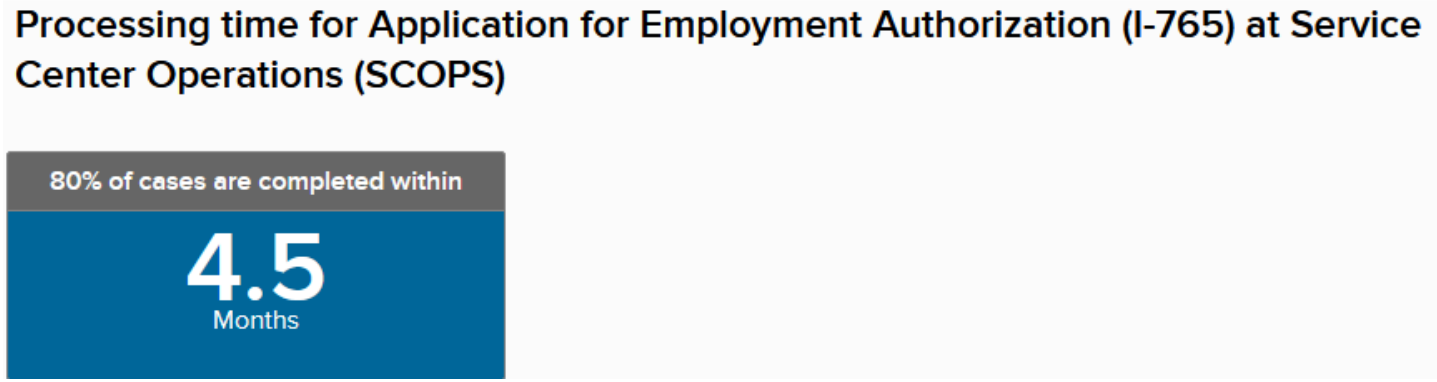


While Your Post-Completion OPT Application is Pending

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)*

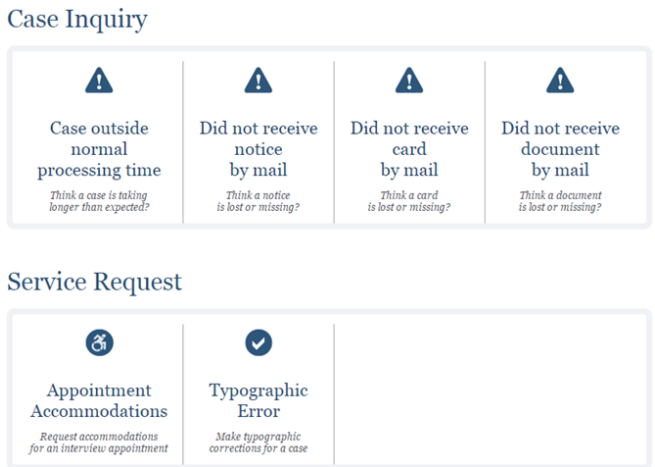
Example (subject to change):



What should I do while I wait?

Pay attention to receipt notices, mail, and notifications from USCIS

- Contact ISSS if your OPT application is rejected, denied, or if you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE).
- Use USCIS online tools or call the National Customer Service Number (800-375-5283) to submit an online case inquiry or service request.
- Check your case status online.

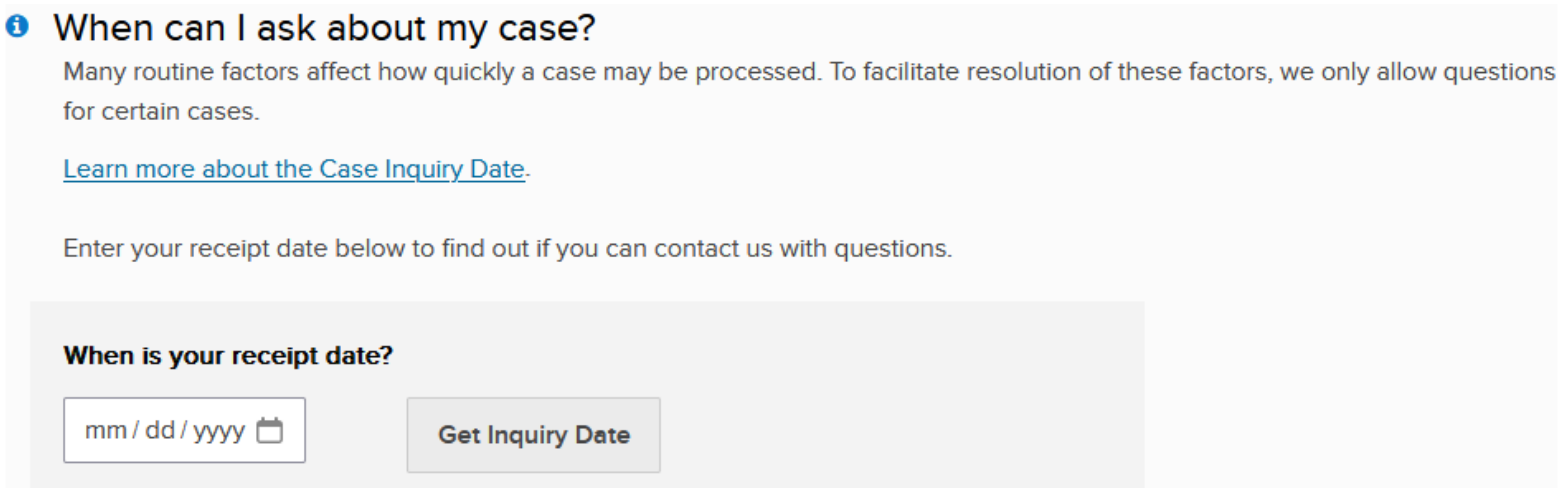


Case Inquiry Date

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

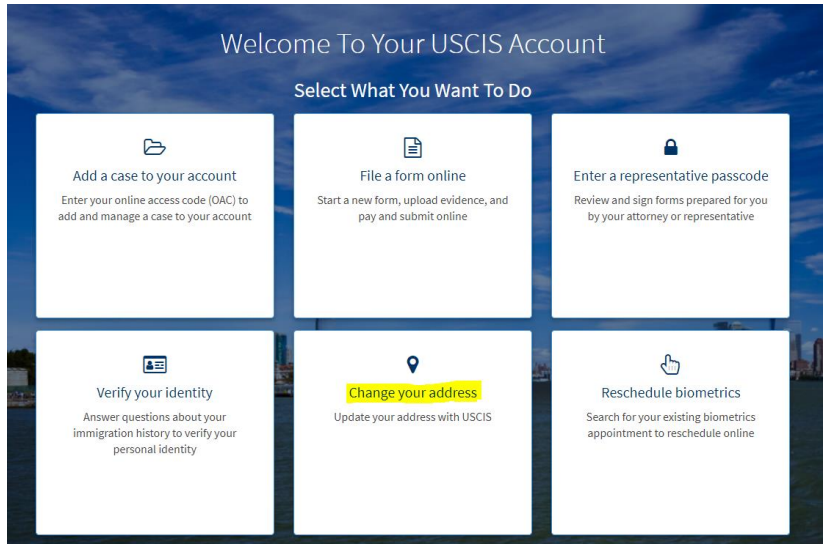
On or after your inquiry date you can send USCIS questions about your case by submitting a Service Request online.



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.



Can I leave the U.S. while my application is pending?

Yes, you can travel internationally, but be mindful:

- ISSS cannot guarantee you will be allowed re-entry to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has discretion to allow an individual to enter the U.S.
- Review the ISSS Immigration Alerts & FAQs webpage before departing the U.S., and before your return.
- Review the International Travel FAQs for Students on OPT and STEM OPT handout
  - The handout includes a list of all documentation you need when traveling with a pending or approved OPT application

Travel risk considerations:

- If USCIS submits a request for additional evidence (RFE) while you are outside of the U.S., you may have difficulties responding, which could lead to a denial
- If your OPT is denied while outside the U.S. and *after your I-20 program end date*, you cannot re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status to reapply

ISSS strongly encourages you to attend an ISSS advising session to discuss your travel plans with an ISSS advisor

When can I start working?

- You have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD/OPT card) in hand;
- You are within the OPT employment authorization period on your EAD card; and
- You are working in a job, internship or volunteer work directly related to your major field of study as listed on your OPT I-20.

Please note: If you do not complete your degree by your I-20 end date as expected, please contact ISSS immediately to discuss your options.

EAD: Employment Authorization Document

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

Dates of employment authorization

You CANNOT work outside of these dates

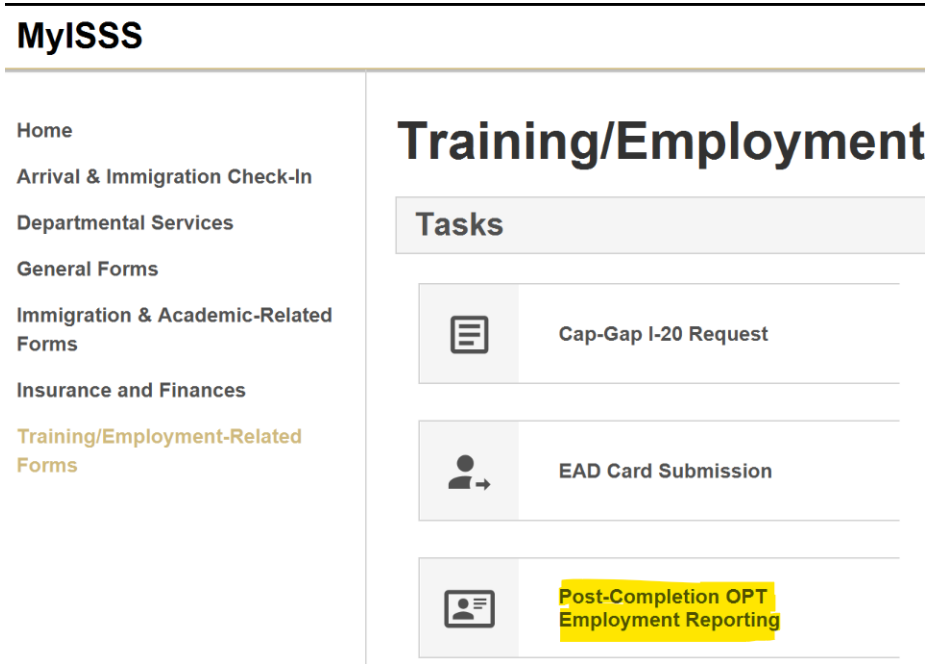
What else do I need to know about Post-completion OPT?

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 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.



How many unemployment days can I use?

- **90 days total**
- To stop the unemployment days from accruing, you need to enter your employment information into the SEVP Portal.
- Unemployment days start based on your approved OPT start date, not your requested start date

Employment

Hours:

- You must be performing your training for at least 20 hours a week.
- There is no maximum limit to the number of hours per week.

Multiple Jobs and Changes: This is allowed as long as:

- Employment is within the authorization period on your EAD
- Each job is directly related to your major field of study (as indicated on your I-20)
- You report all new employment and changes within 10 days via the SEVP Portal

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.

Acceptable Training During 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. Must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods (hours worked per week) and the name and address of the contracting company.

Self-Employed Business Owner

You may start a business and be self-employed. Must work full-time and be able to prove you have a proper business licenses and that work is degree-related.

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

Unable to Work in Marijuana (Cannabis) Related Industries

Legal permanent residents or individuals on immigrant or non-immigrant visas should **avoid marijuana use or involvement in marijuana-related activities** as it can have a negative immigration consequences.

This includes working in industries associated with marijuana and cannabidiol (CBD), such as working in a lab extracting CBD oils for medical purposes.

Travel Considerations on OPT

If you do not have a job, travel outside of the U.S. after your I-20 program end date is **not recommended** as the regulations allow re-entry to the U.S. to ***resume*** **training**.

- **An absence from the U.S. should be temporary, 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.
- **You need a valid F-1 visa to return to the U.S. while on OPT**
  - Review the ISSS Visa Renewal Handout for information on the renewal process
- **Travel Signatures are valid for 6 months on OPT I-20s**
- **Review the following resources prior to travel**
  - Travel Handout: Re-entry from Travel Outside the U.S. & Printing Your Electronic I-94
  - International Travel FAQs for Students on OPT and STEM OPT

Potential Issues

Consult an ISSS advisor immediately if:

- You **do not complete your degree requirements** prior to your program end date on your OPT I-20.
- You want to **cancel** an OPT request before submitting the application to USCIS.
- You want to **withdraw** your OPT application after submitting to USCIS.
- You qualify for cap-gap and require a **cap-gap extension I-20.**

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.

Grace Period After Post-Completion OPT

There is a **60-day grace period following the completion** of your post-completion OPT for students who maintained status and did not exceed 90 days of unemployment.

- You are not eligible for employment or to re-enter into the U.S. in F-1 status during the 60-day grace period.
- During the grace period, you may request to transfer your SEVIS record to another institution if you have been admitted and will begin the program within 5 months.
- You can apply for a change of status during the grace period

If you have a STEM qualifying field of study, you must apply for STEM OPT prior to your post-completion OPT end date

Studying on OPT

OPT **work authorization is terminated when your SEVIS record is transferred** to a new school and/or you begin a program at a new degree level.

Consult ISSS if you are considering beginning a new course of study or will seek to transfer your SEVIS record to another institution.

Career Services

CU Boulder Career Services empowers students and alumni to become more employable and find meaningful work.

- Some Features of Career Services:
  - **Mock Interviews**
    Practice and perfect your interview skills before the real deal.
  - **Resume & Cover Letter Help**
    Our career development advisors can help you create and edit these essential documents for applying to jobs and internships.
  - **Career Fairs**
    Large events where you can meet with a variety of employers all at once to find jobs and internships.

ISSS Workshops & Resources

Attend our '**So You've Applied for OPT… Now What?**' Workshop

Workshops are available on the ISSS Programs & Events page

Review our Post-completion OPT web page!

If you have questions after reviewing our Post-completion OPT website

- Email your questions to isss@colorado.edu
- Speak to an advisor during ISSS Advising

Congratulations on completing your degree program at CU Boulder!

International Student & Scholar Services
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER