

Preparing Your Post-Completion Optional Practical Training Application

Please note, gold underlined text is hyperlinked – please click on the link for more information

What is Post-Completion OPT?

- **Employment authorization** directly related to your **major field of study**

Training is:

Temporary: OPT authorization up to 12 months

Optional: Not a required part of a curriculum.

It is a benefit associated with F-1 status.

Authorized by USCIS ([U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services](#))

Please note that 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 RCL) in 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 completed a higher degree level in the U.S. than your current degree level;**
- ✓ **Have not utilized an equivalent of 12 months of OPT work authorization for the same degree level or higher degree level;**



When should I apply?

- **First chance:** 90 days before your last day of required enrollment in your final semester
- **Last chance:** 60 days after your last day of required enrollment in your final semester

APPLY AS EARLY AS YOU CAN!



When can I apply?

Final Semester: **Fall 2021:**

- Apply between September 16, 2021 - February 13, 2022
- Last date of enrollment: **December 15, 2021**

Final Semester: **Spring 2022:**

- Apply between February 3, 2022 - July 3, 2022.
- Last date of enrollment: **May 4, 2022**

Summer graduates are encouraged to [contact ISSS](#). Your last date of enrollment depends on which summer session you are enrolled in.

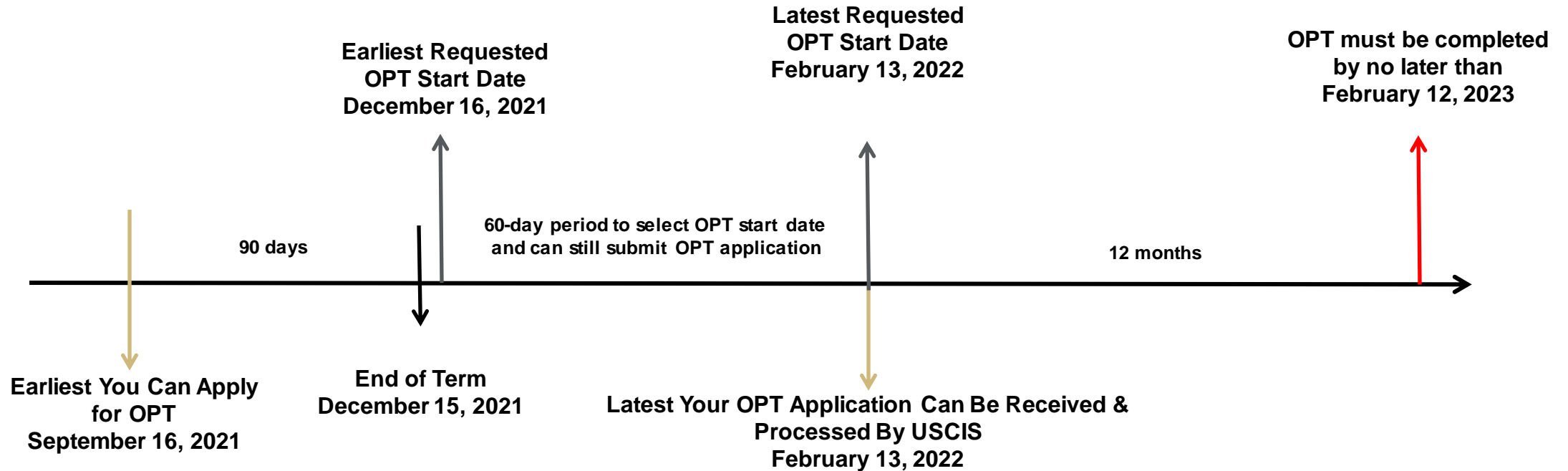


How much does it cost?

\$410



Post-Completion OPT Request Timeline Example



What is enrollment for administrative purposes?

- It is continued enrollment after completion of program requirements.
 - This type of enrollment is not allowed!
- ISSS wants to discuss your OPT timeline with you.
 - Master's thesis students and Ph.D. students: reach out to ISSS the semester prior to the semester in which you plan to defend your thesis/dissertation.





Applying for Post- Completion OPT

How do I apply for post-completion OPT?

1. Complete the Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request.
2. Once you complete your section of the form, it will automatically be **emailed to your academic advisor** based on the name and email you have provided.
3. After your academic advisor completes their section of the form, it will be routed to ISSS for processing. After ISSS receives your request form, please allow 2-5 business days for processing.
5. Once ISSS has reviewed your materials, **an I-20 recommending post-completion OPT will be issued to you.**
6. You will then need to submit your complete application to USCIS either by **mail** or by electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online.



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

- The post-completion OPT application will be **denied**, as the regulations require the recommendation be entered into SEVIS prior to the post-completion OPT filing.



What else happens while ISSS is reviewing my Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request Form and attached materials?

- ISSS will email you if any questions arise.
- ISSS will **shorten your I-20 program end date** based on your last date of enrollment (if necessary).
- ISSS will issue an I-20 recommending post-completion OPT to you. You must print, **sign the I-20 by hand with an ink pen**, and include a copy of the I-20 in your application that you submit to USCIS.





**The Form I-765:
Application for Employment
Authorization**

When should I fill out the Form I-765?

- If mailing your materials to USCIS for processing, you will be asked upload a copy to your OPT I-20 Request Form. ISSS will review your I-765 for completeness (not accuracy).
- If electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online, **WAIT** to fill out the I-765 until you have the I-20. You will not be required to submit a copy of your I-765 to ISSS for review.
 - The ISSS advisor who issues the I-20 recommending post-completion OPT welcomes the opportunity to review your draft I-765 before you make payment and submit your complete application to USCIS.



What resources should I reference while filling out my Form I-765?

- Please review the [I-765 instructions on the USCIS website](#) and prepare a complete OPT application.
- [Here is a sample I-765](#). Please note that this is one example. Student circumstances may differ and require different answers. Please be sure to review the USCIS I-765 instructions, read the I-765 carefully, and reach out to ISSS if you are still unsure.
- Written instructions can also be found on the [ISSS Post-Completion OPT website](#).



ISSS issued me an I-20 recommending OPT. Now what do I do?

- Make any **edits** that ISSS has recommended to your post-completion OPT application materials and review all your materials for completion and accuracy.
- **Compile** all the USCIS application materials. Ensure they are complete and accurate.
 - If filing by mail, ensure all forms are signed by hand with **black** ink.
- **Submit** your materials to USCIS either by electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online or by mailing your materials to USCIS.





Submitting Your Post- Completion OPT Application

When do I need to submit the I-765 and supporting documentation?

No matter how you file, USCIS must receive your post-completion OPT application **within 30 days** of the date ISSS enters the recommendation for post-completion OPT into your SEVIS record.



Option 1: How do I mail my complete Post-Completion OPT application materials to USCIS?

- Mail post-completion OPT application materials to the USCIS Lockbox or Service Center that processes applications for your eligibility category and place of residence. The Post-Completion OPT eligibility category is: (c)(3)(B).
- The address depends on the mailing service you choose to use to mail the application. I-765 filing addresses are available on the [USCIS website](#).
- ISSS recommends that you use a mailing service that provides detailed tracking information.
- Please print your documents single-sided.



Option 2: How do I electronically file my complete Post-Completion OPT application materials?

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



The screenshot shows the USCIS My Account dashboard. At the top left is the USCIS logo and the text "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services". To the right is a "My Account" link with a user icon. Further right are "My Account", "Resources", and "Sign Out" links. The main heading reads "Welcome To Your USCIS Account" with the sub-heading "Select What You Want To Do". Below this are four white cards with icons and text:

- Add a paper-filed case**: View your case status and case history by adding your case to your account.
- File a form online**: Start a new form, upload evidence, and pay and submit online.
- Enter a representative passcode**: Review and sign forms prepared for you by your attorney or representative.
- Verify your identity**: Answer questions about your immigration history to verify your personal identity.

Is there anything else I should be aware of while I work on submitting my application to USCIS?

- You **MUST** submit your application to USCIS while you are **inside of the United States**.
 - You are not eligible to apply for post-completion OPT if you have already graduated and have left the United States.
 - You are not eligible to apply for post-completion OPT if you are completing your degree from outside of the U.S.



**While Your Post-Completion
OPT Application is Pending**



When can I start working?

- Take note of your new OPT request I-20 program **end date** (see “Program of Study” section on p. 1 of your I-20). It reflects the semester you complete all academic program requirements.
- You are **NOT eligible to work on-campus** (e.g., assistantship, hourly job) or off-campus (e.g., CPT, economic hardship) after the I-20 program end date on your OPT request I-20 unless you meet ALL of the following criteria:
 - You have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD/OPT card)—it is in your hands;
 - It is within the OPT employment authorization period noted on the EAD card; and
 - You are working in a job directly related to your major field of study as noted on your OPT request I-20.
 - You have successfully completed all coursework for your degree.

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



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

- Check this processing times website

- Select *I-765 Application for Employment Authorization*
- Select *Potomac Service Center*
- Scroll down until you see *Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]*

Example (subject to change):

Estimated time range	Form type	Receipt date for a case inquiry
3 Months to 3.5 Months	Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]	June 05, 2021



Updating Your Delivery Address

If you **move** from or are no longer receiving mail at the address you entered in item 5 of the I-765, and have not yet obtained your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card):

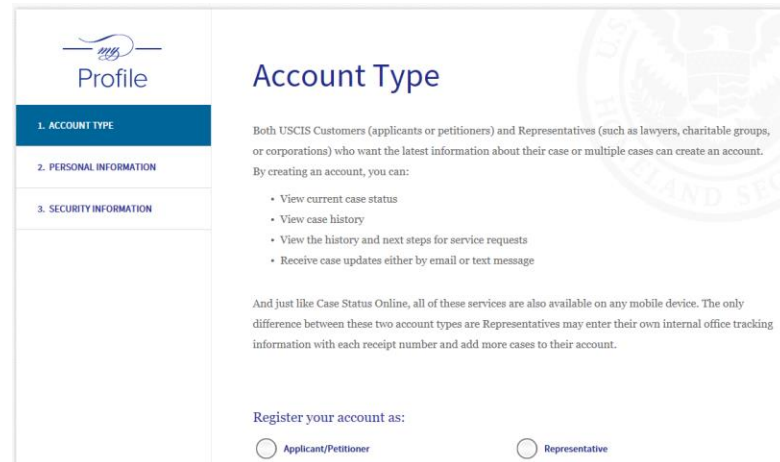
- You must update your address information in the [USCIS Online Change of Address System](#)
- Questions regarding the address change should be directed to the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at 1-800-375-5283
 - Have your receipt notice number ready when contacting the NCSC



USCIS Process

Your USCIS case status will likely remain in initial review up until card production or a Request for Evidence is made.

- If you filed by paper, you can [sign-up for a USCIS account](#) to view case updates.
- If you filed online, you will already have a USCIS account.



The screenshot shows the USCIS Account Type registration page. On the left is a navigation menu with three items: '1. ACCOUNT TYPE' (highlighted in blue), '2. PERSONAL INFORMATION', and '3. SECURITY INFORMATION'. The main content area is titled 'Account Type' and includes the following text: 'Both USCIS Customers (applicants or petitioners) and Representatives (such as lawyers, charitable groups, or corporations) who want the latest information about their case or multiple cases can create an account. By creating an account, you can:' followed by a bulleted list: '• View current case status', '• View case history', '• View the history and next steps for service requests', and '• Receive case updates either by email or text message'. Below this is a note: 'And just like Case Status Online, all of these services are also available on any mobile device. The only difference between these two account types are Representatives may enter their own internal office tracking information with each receipt number and add more cases to their account.' At the bottom, it says 'Register your account as:' with two radio button options: 'Applicant/Petitioner' (selected) and 'Representative'.



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

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

 Appointment Accommodations <i>Request accommodations for an interview appointment</i>	 Typographic Error <i>Make typographic corrections for a case</i>	
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Can I leave the United States while my post-completion OPT application is pending?

Answer: Part 1: If you choose to leave the country, travel with:

- your post-completion OPT I-20
- a valid travel signature
- active visa
- receipt notice from USCIS that shows you have applied for post-completion OPT.



Can I leave the United States while my post-completion OPT application is pending?

Answer: Part 2: Travel with a pending application is risky for these reasons:

- If your post-completion OPT application is **denied** while you are outside of the U.S., you cannot re-enter the US in F-1 status to re-apply for post-completion OPT. It may be possible to re-enter the US in another visa category (for example, ESTA or tourist visa), but you would no longer be eligible for post-completion OPT.
- If additional information is needed for your post-completion OPT application, USCIS would mail you a **request for evidence** (RFE). If you receive an RFE you would need to respond in a certain amount of time and you may have difficulty responding to any request(s) for evidence from USCIS while you are outside of the U.S. which could result in a post-completion OPT denial.
- Future **travel restrictions** could impede your ability to return to the U.S.; travel restrictions may change at a moment's notice. You will need to carefully consult both the airline and the travel restrictions for the country to which you will be returning to the U.S. from.
- If your post-completion OPT is approved while you're abroad, you should have your **EAD** card with you on your return. Please review the [International Student Travel FAQ for students on OPT](#).



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

There are reporting requirements.

- The [SEVP Portal](#) allows F-1 students to monitor their employment authorization and update their address, telephone, and employer information in order to meet regulatory reporting requirements.

For full details:

- Attend our **‘So You’ve Applied for OPT... Now What?’** Workshop
 - Workshop: Dec. 2, 2021 at 3:30 p.m.
 - Workshop: Dec. 7, 2021 at 11 a.m.
- Review our Post-completion OPT [web page](#).
- Or see our [Complete Guide](#).



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.



Employment

Training/employment can be:

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

You may have **multiple jobs** and **change jobs** as long as:

- 1) Training is always within the **authorization period** indicated on the EAD;
- 2) Each job is directly **related to your major field of study** indicated on the I-20;
- 3) You **report all new employment** and changes within 10 days via the SEVP Portal



Acceptable Training During OPT

Payment by Multiple Short-Term Multiple 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. You must meet an average of 20 hours per week in a month.

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.



What should I be aware of if I choose to volunteer while on post-completion OPT?

- SEVP OPT Policy Guidance states that, "Students **may work as volunteers or unpaid interns**, where this practice **does not violate any labor laws**. The work should be **at least 20 hours per week** for students on post-completion OPT. A student should be able to **provide evidence**, acquired from the student's employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment."
- Students should **exercise caution** when undertaking volunteer activity as a form of OPT employment. Should the volunteer activity be seen as a violation of [U.S. labor law](#), then the activity will not stop the accrual of unemployment days and the activity could result in loss of status.
- If you would like to participate in volunteer work at CU Boulder, then the opportunity needs to be a **formally established volunteer activity**. If a CU Boulder department wishes to create a formal volunteer position, then ISSS recommends the CU Boulder department consult [University Risk Management](#) website for guidance in establishing a volunteer program. The volunteer guidelines will help 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

A legal permanent resident or anyone on immigrant or non-immigrant visas should **stay away from marijuana use or anything associated with it** as it may have a 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).

Travel Considerations

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 for 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 post-completion OPT authorization, you must:**
 - Present your post-completion 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
- **Do NOT leave the U.S. if you have a change of status application pending as it will likely be considered abandoned.**



Potential Issues

If your I-765 is pending outside of USCIS's posted processing time and no Request for Evidence has been issued, it is possible to contact USCIS.

- Call USCIS Contact Center at 1-800-375-5283 to ask that they create a service request.
- Have your receipt notice number ready when contacting the USCIS Contact Center
- Note the day and time of the call, the representative's name, and the referral ID number.

Please consult an ISSS advisor immediately if:

- You **do not complete your course work** prior to the end date on your OPT I-20.
- You want to **cancel** an OPT request prior to mailing or submitting the application to USCIS.
- You want to **withdraw** your OPT application after mailing or submitting it to USCIS.
- You qualify for cap-gap relief and require a cap-gap extension I-20.



Do I get a grace period when I finish Post-Completion OPT?

- Yes, there is a **60-day grace period following the completion** of your post-completion OPT (starting from the EAD end date) for students who maintained status and did not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment.
 - You are not eligible for employment or to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status during the 60-day grace period.
 - F-1 students in the 60-day grace period can request that their SEVIS record be transferred to another institution if they have been admitted and will begin the program within 5 months.
 - F-1 students can also apply for a change of status during the grace period.



What happens if I begin a new degree level or need a SEVIS transfer while I am on OPT?

- During post-completion OPT, **employment** in your major field of study is the basis for maintenance of F-1 status.
 - If you choose to **enroll** while participating in OPT, it may impact your OPT work authorization. Consult ISSS if you are considering beginning a new course of study or will seek to transfer your SEVIS record to another institution.
 - 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.



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:

Social Security and Medicare Taxes

Typically, non-resident F-1 students with authorized CPT or OPT are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A) and Medicare taxes as long as are considered a non-resident status for tax purposes.

Federal, State, and Local Taxes

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.

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.



Applying for post-completion OPT can be a complicated process.

If you have questions after reviewing our [Post-completion OPT website](#) and [Comprehensive ISSS Post-Completion OPT Guide](#)

- Email your questions to iss@colorado.edu
- Speak to an advisor during [ISSS Advising](#)



Congratulations on completing your degree program at CU Boulder!