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** that allows you to have a job, internship or volunteer work that directly relates to your **major field of study**. You can use OPT to work anywhere inside the U.S.

**Training is:**

*Temporary:* OPT authorization up to 12 months

*Optional:* It is a benefit associated with F-1 status.

**Authorized by USCIS** ([U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services](https://www.uscis.gov))

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!
What is enrollment for administrative purposes?

• Continued enrollment after completion of program requirements.
  • This type of enrollment is not allowed!
• ISSS wants to discuss your I-20 program end date & 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.
When can I apply?

• Final Semester: **Fall 2022**
  - Apply between September 15, 2022 – February 12, 2023
  - Last Date of enrollment: **December 14, 2022**

• Final Semester: **Spring 2023**
  - Apply between February 9, 2023 – July 9, 2023
  - Last Date of enrollment: **May 10, 2023**
Post-Completion OPT Request Timeline Example (Fall)

- **Earliest You Can Apply for OPT**: September 15, 2022
- **End of Term**: December 14, 2022
- **60-day period to select OPT start date and can still submit OPT application**
- **Earliest Requested OPT Start Date**: December 15, 2022
- **Latest Requested OPT Start Date**: February 12, 2023
- **Latest Your OPT Application Can Be Received & Processed By USCIS**: February 12, 2023
- **12 months**
- **90 days**
- **OPT must be completed by no later than February 11, 2024**
Applying for Post-Completion OPT
How do I apply for post-completion OPT?

1. Complete the ISSS Post-Completion OPT Essentials Canvas Course.
   • [Instructions](#) are available on our website.

2. Complete the [Post-Completion OPT I-20 Request](#) and upload your OPT Canvas Course grade to the DocuSign

3. Request Form will automatically be **emailed to your academic advisor** based on the name and email you have provided

4. Once signed by your academic advisor, request form will automatically be emailed to ISSS for processing. Please allow 2-5 business days for ISSS processing

5. Once ISSS has reviewed your materials, an I-20 recommending post-completion OPT will be issued to you, and sent via email

6. Print your new I-20, sign under "Student Attestation"!

7. Submit your complete application to USCIS by [electronically filing](#) the Form I-765 with USCIS online

Please note: it costs $410 to apply for OPT. This is a USCIS fee
What happens if I apply to USCIS without an OPT recommendation 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 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 required 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?

- When **electronically filing** the Form I-765 with USCIS online, **WAIT** to fill out the I-765 until you have your new 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.

• 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** and upload all the USCIS requested application materials. Ensure they are complete and accurate.
- **Submit** your materials to USCIS by electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online.
Submitting Your Post-Completion OPT Application
When do I need to submit the I-765 and supporting documentation to USCIS?

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

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

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

80% of cases are completed within 2 Months

Check your case status to track the status of an immigration application, petition, or request.
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.
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 online, you will already have a USCIS account and may check your case status there.
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
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. and **after** your I-20 program end date 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.
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).

• 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.

**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.
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?
ISSS Workshops & Resources

Attend our ‘So You’ve Applied for OPT… Now What?’ Workshop

• Nov 15, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.
• Dec 1, 2022 at 11:00 a.m.

Review our Post-completion OPT web page.
Or see our Complete Guide.
Reporting Requirements - SEVP Portal

• The SEVP Portal allows students in F-1 status to update their address, telephone, and employer information. You must report your job within 10-days from your employment start date.

• You will receive an email from do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov with information on creating your SEVP Portal account on the first day of your authorized OPT start date. If you do not receive this email within 48 hours after your approved OPT start date, please notify ISSS.
Along with reporting your employment using the SEVP Portal, you must complete and submit the Post-Completion OPT Employment Relevance Statement to ISSS to report how your training relates to your major field of study.
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 total to stop using your unemployment days)

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.

**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 submitting the application to USCIS.
- You want to withdraw your OPT application after 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.
  • Students in F-1 status 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.
  • Students in F-1 status 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 in courses 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 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 students in F-1 status with authorized CPT or OPT are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A) and Medicare taxes as long as you 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 isss@colorado.edu
• Speak to an advisor during ISSS Advising

Congratulations on completing your degree program at CU Boulder!