

## Optional Practical Training Application

Please read the application in its entirety. Fill out all the required forms requesting information:

IES OPT information sheet

Academic advisor recommendation form (**Not required for STEM extension or Pre-completion OPT**)

I-765 form. Form is available from U.S.C.I.S. website at the link below. Please type if your writing is illegible. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>

Checklist of documents **required** to process your application: (**To be mailed out to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox**)

Form I-765 (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)

Copy of new I-20 **issued by international advisor** recommending OPT

Check/money order for **\$380 only** made out to the **Department of Homeland Security**. (Do not abbreviate)

2 passport size photographs.

Copy of your I-94 (front and back).

Copy of your passport biography page (include pages of passport extensions showing passport validity).

Copy of your F-1 visa (even if expired).

Copies of **ALL** previous I-20's (including previous schools).

Any previous OPT or EAD cards that have been issued to you under F-1 status (copy front and back).

If applying for STEM extension, you **must** include copy of **official transcript** or **diploma** showing acquired STEM degree.

- Bring the documents to one of the IES advisors for review (*make an appointment*)
- A new I-20 will be issued that includes recommendation for OPT on the 3<sup>rd</sup> page. A copy of this new I-20 must be sent in with your application.
- If living out of state you can email or fax (410-455-1130) the documents for review.
- Keep copies for your own records.
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The completed application should then be mailed to the following address:

**For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):**

USCIS  
 PO Box 660867  
 Dallas, TX 75266

**For Express mail and courier:**

USCIS  
 Attn: AOS  
 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business  
 Suite 400  
 Lewisville, TX 75067

## **Instructions for filling out form I-765**

Check first box “permission to accept employment” if applying for pre or post completion OPT or “renewal” if you are applying for a 17 month STEM extension.

**#3 Return Address:** Use your own address. This must be an address at which you will receive mail for at least 3 ½ months from the time USCIS receives your documents. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address as USPS (United States Postal Service) **does not** forward mail from U.S.C.I.S. Any mail that is undeliverable will be sent back to the processing center.

**Alternatively**, if you think you are going to move at the time you are graduating and are unsure whether you will still be residing at your current location, you can use our office address as the return address. The address is **UMBC, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Administration Building Room 224, Baltimore MD, 21250**. We will then mail the documents to you.

**#10 Alien Registration Number:** in most cases you will use your I-94 number found on the I-94 card that you received when you entered the U.S. (small white card given on the plane and attached on your passport)

**#11 Previous employment authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an OPT card at UMBC or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT, an EAD card under another visa category other than F-1, or an H1B visa. If you are applying for a 17 month STEM extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.

**#13 Place of last entry:** This would be the port of entry used to enter the U.S. Either by land, sea or air. Write the name of the port.

**#16 Eligibility Categories:** Fill out as follows:

- **For PRE-COMPLETION OPT (prior to graduation): ( C ) ( 3 ) ( A )**
- **For POST-COMPLETION OPT (after graduating): ( C ) ( 3 ) ( B )**
- **For 17 month STEM extension OPT: ( C ) ( 3 ) ( C )**

**#17 If applying for the 17 month extension, you must complete this section with your degree field, name of employer as listed in E-verify and your employer’s E-verify identification number.**

**Certification:** Remember to sign and date the I-765! Include a telephone number if available.

# **OPT – Frequently Asked Questions**

## **1. What is Optional Practical Training?**

OPT is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your field of study at an off-campus location before or after you complete your studies. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.C.I.S.). This authorization can take 2 to 3 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level plus a possible H1B cap gap extension OR a 17 month STEM extension for those who qualify. You may apply up to 90 days before your graduation date and immigration services **must receive** your application **no later than** 60 days after the program end date of your I-20. You **must** send your application within 30 days of getting the new I-20 from your advisor. If applying for pre-completion OPT, you can apply up to 120 days before your desired start date.

\*Optional practical training is “optional”. It is not required that you pursue it.\*

## **2. What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 Optional Practical Training?**

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must:

- (1) Have been in full time student status for at least one academic year
- (2) Maintain valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

## **3. If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second degree at a higher level of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?**

Yes. You are eligible to apply for another 12 month period of OPT after changing to a **higher degree level**. Eg: After your bachelors, master and PhD in that ascending order. If you seek OPT after your bachelors, then do a PhD, then masters, you only have 2 OPT opportunities. You cannot get 2 OPT opportunities if you have 2 degrees in the same degree level.

## **4. Can I use OPT before I graduate?**

Yes. You may use OPT before graduation by applying for pre-completion OPT. It can be used in the following ways:

- (1) Part-time employment while school is in session.
- (2) Full-time employment during school breaks
- (3) Full-time employment after you completed all course requirements for the degree and have only a thesis/dissertation requirement remaining.

\*These periods of OPT used before you graduate will be deducted from the total allowed period of 12 months. Part-time OPT will be deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

## **5. How long does it take the processing center to process my OPT application?**

It can take between 1-3 months to obtain OPT authorization. We recommend applying for the authorization early. You may apply as early as 120 days before projected employment start date for pre-completion OPT and 90 days before your program end date for Post completion OPT. You can apply **no later than** 60 days beyond the program end date of your I-20.

You **must** send your application within 30 days of getting the new OPT recommendation I-20 from IES. Within 2-3 weeks you will get a receipt notice with a case number beginning with the letters EAC. You can use the notice to track the processing of your application at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>. An approval notice and EAD card in separate mailings will follow.

## **6. Do I need to have a job to apply for OPT?**

No. You do not need to have a job offer before applying for OPT.

## **7. Do I need to get a job while I am on optional practical training?**

Yes. New regulations require that you have employment while on OPT. You are only allowed to accrue a maximum of 90 days of unemployment during your 12 month period of OPT, or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month STEM extension. Unemployment could result in you being out of status.

**8. Does my OPT employment have to be paid?**

Yes and no. During the first 12 months of OPT, the employment **does not** have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is volunteering, interning or self-employed in a position directly related to their major field of study would be considered “employed” for the purposes of OPT employment. 20 hours a week for any volunteer position is required. 40 hours a week is required for self-employed students.  
\*For the 17-month STEM extension, employment **must** be traditional paid employment.

**9. Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card?**

**No.** You may **not** begin employment before you receive your approval notice and EAD card from USCIS. Working before practical training has been authorized constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. In addition, you cannot begin employment before the start date that appears on your EAD card. Any such employment is unauthorized. This includes continuing current employment between your graduation and receiving your EAD card.

**10. Do I have to report anything to IES while I am on OPT?**

**Yes!** Immigration regulations **require** that while you are on OPT, you **must** report your employer, employment address and residential address changes to UMBC by emailing the IES office and updating us with any changes. You can change jobs while on OPT, but must report all changes to the IES Office. Email us at [ies@umbc.edu](mailto:ies@umbc.edu).

**11. Can I extend my OPT after the 12 months?**

Yes. There are two types of extensions available:  
(1) A 17 month extension for students in STEM fields.  
(2) An H1B Cap Gap Extension, which extends your work authorization under F-1 OPT through to the start of your H1B on October 1<sup>st</sup>. The cap gap covers any employment gap between the expiration of your OPT and the beginning of your H1B. The extension is normally automatic once your H1B application has been approved. You do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. Contact one of the advisors at IES to obtain an updated I-20 showing the automatic extension.

**FAQ on 17-MONTH “STEM” EXTENSION**

**12. What is the 17 month STEM extension of OPT?**

The “STEM Extension” allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), to apply for a **one-time** 17-month extension to one of their regular 12 month OPT periods. You **cannot** apply for 29 months of OPT all at once. The 17 month extension has the added benefit of allowing students to have extended work authorization in case they do not get an H1B visa in their first year after graduating. An H1B application does not need to be sought to be eligible to apply for the STEM extension.

**13. I think I qualify, how do I apply for the 17 month extension?**

FIRST: Students graduating now with degrees in these fields will first apply for the regular 12 month period of OPT. THEN, within 3 months of the end of the first 12 months of OPT, you can apply through the IES office for your 17 month STEM extension IF you meet the following criteria:

- Employer must be enrolled in the “E-Verify” program (see below).
- Must have graduated and be working in a STEM field.
- Must have maintained status while on OPT and be within 3 months of your initial OPT expiration

**14. What are the “STEM” fields?**

For a full list of STEM fields please see the following link:  
<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>

**15. What is “E-Verify”?**

E-Verify is an online-based system that is a partnership between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). USCIS oversees the program. E-Verify, which is free, helps employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers. More information is available at: [www.uscis.gov/e-verify](http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify)

**16. What happens if there is a delay in getting my STEM extension EAD card? Can I continue working?**

Yes. For those who have filed a timely application for the STEM extension, USCIS allows employment to continue while your OPT extension is pending for up to 180 days or approval of the extension, whichever comes first.

**17. Are there any other reporting requirements while I am on the 17-month extension?**

Yes. While on STEM extension, students are required to report any change in employer, employer address or residential address.

**TRAVELING WHILE ON OPT**

**18. Now that I've turned in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the EAD card to arrive?**

**Before you graduate**, you should be able to get back in to the U.S. without the OPT card as long as it is still at least one month in advance of your graduation. If you have to travel, talk to an advisor in the IES office before you leave.

**After you graduate**, in order to re-enter the U.S. you **must** have **all** of the following:

- (1) EAD card.
- (2) Your valid passport with a **current** F-1 visa.
- (3) I-20 signed within the last six months.
- (4) Your job offer letter or proof of employment.

**19. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my OPT application is pending, but I need to return before the card arrives. I have a tourist visa that is currently valid. Can't I just 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 B visa, you will have an I-94 card that shows that you have been admitted under B status, and you will have lost your F-1 status. Your OPT application and card will be rendered **invalid**. We **do not** recommend travel until you have documents required to return to the U.S.

**20. What if I have applied for the 17 month extension but I have not yet received the card, can I travel out of the U.S.?**

No, the immigration service advises that while you are waiting for the approval of the 17 month extension, you should **not** try to re-enter the country until you receive the new OPT card.

**21. My F-1 visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp at an embassy?**

If you are going to Canada or Mexico, and staying for less than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa stamp, with your I-94 card, a valid passport, your EAD card, an I-20 that has been signed within the last 6 months and your job offer letter or proof of employment. Otherwise, if traveling to any other country you will need to make an appointment at a U.S. consulate and obtain an F-1 visa. You will need all the documents listed above. The official job offer letter should sound **temporary** and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to utilize it there.

**22. If my F-1 visa expires while on OPT, can I have it renewed? What are the chances that I may be denied?**

The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp while on OPT is higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application could be denied. However, it is possible and many students on OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent in addition to having all documents required to successfully renew your visa. We suggest speaking to one of the IES advisors if you have more questions about this.

**23. How long will my new F-1 visa be valid while I am on OPT?**

In most cases the visa stamp given will be the same as the duration of your OPT.

# IES OPT Information Sheet

This form is to be filled out by the student. It is used by IES advisors to process your OPT I-20 recommending eligibility to apply for OPT to USCIS through SEVIS. The following information is required:

**First name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Last name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SEVIS ID:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address you will keep while on OPT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**OPT START DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **OPT END DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Graduation date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Major:** \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>To be filled out only if applying for OPT STEM extension</b> |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| End date of current OPT period: _____                           | Job title: _____             |
| Name of Employer: _____   |                              |
| Employer Address: _____   |                              |
| Employer E-verify ID: _____                                     |                              |
| Supervisor's Name: _____  | Supervisor's contacts: _____ |

## Deciding on your start date

For post-completion OPT, choosing a start date can be a difficult decision to make. You are allowed to choose a start date that is within 60 days of your program end date. We recommend thinking ahead and determine whether you want to begin employment early. If so we recommend requesting a start date soon after graduation. The same case applies if you think you are going to get a job right after graduation or soon after.

If job prospects are not looking promising at the time you decide to apply then you may want to request a later start date to give you more time to look for a job without losing time being unemployed and at the same time accumulating days of unemployment.

If you have a job offer, keep in mind that the OPT application will take at least 6-8 weeks to process. Don't request a start date before that window of time, as you will lose OPT time since you cannot work before you receive the EAD card.

\*Once you have decided on your start date, and have submitted your application for processing, you **cannot** change the dates. You cannot start employment before your start date on your EAD card regardless of whether you have the EAD card in hand.



AN HONORS UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND

International Education Services  
1000 Hilltop Circle, 222 Administration Building  
Baltimore, MD 21250  
PHONE: 410.455.2624 FAX: 410.455.1130  
E-mail: ies@umbc.edu  
WEB: www.umbc.edu/ies

## Academic Advisor's recommendation form

This form is to be filed out by the academic advisor during the last semester when the student is going to graduate and apply for OPT. If you have any questions please direct them to the IES office at 410-455-2624 or ies@umbc.edu. This form is only required if the student is applying for post completion OPT.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Advisors name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

By checking the box you are confirming that the above mentioned student is in their final semester at UMBC and is expected to graduate at the end of it. They will be eligible to work full time after graduation under optional practical training (OPT).

Advisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_