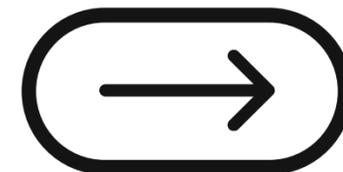




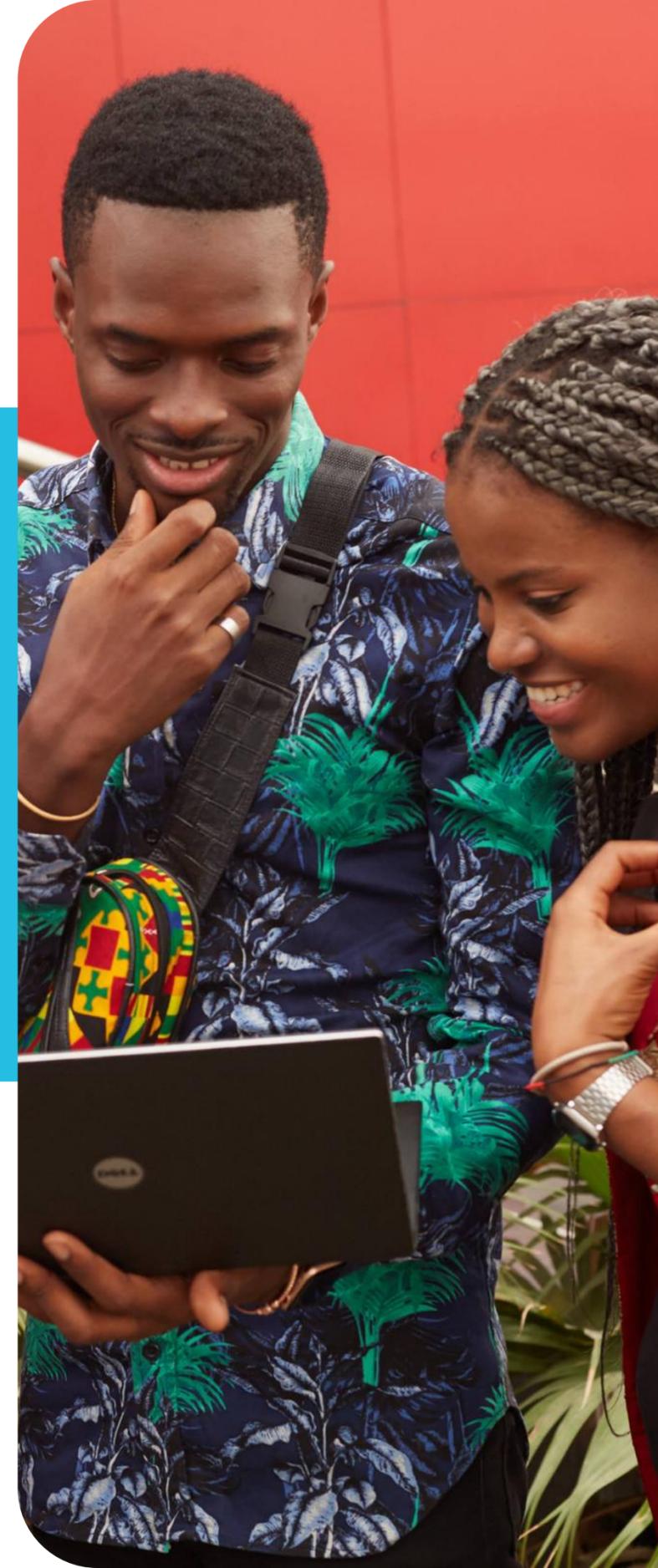
**Immigration Services**  
*Office of Global Engagement*  
**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

# Optional Practical Training

Employment Authorization for F-1 Students



OPT Workshop Spring 2024





# Overview of Workshop

**Part 1** Introduction to OPT

---

**Part 2** Eligibility

---

**Part 3** UGA Application Process

---

**Part 4** USCIS Application Options

---

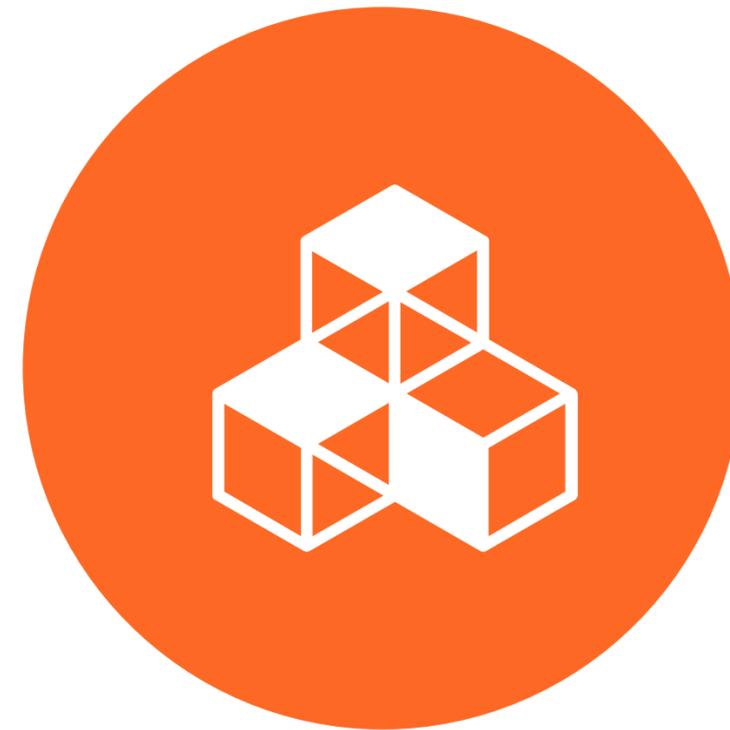
**Part 5** Life on OPT

---

## Section 1

# Introduction to OPT

Use these slides to learn the basics  
of Optional Practical Training



# About the Workshop

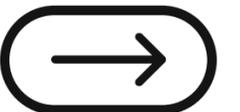
04

This workshop is required for all Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) applicants.

Unless specified otherwise, all information in this presentation refers to post-completion OPT.

After viewing this presentation, you must visit [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu) to request the OPT recommendation I-20 form. This is required for your OPT application to the government.

Immigration Services recommends that you complete this online workshop at the beginning of the last semester before you plan to graduate.



## Introduction to OPT

Optional Practical Training, or "OPT," is off-campus work authorization that allows a student to work off campus in their major field of study for a maximum of 12 months.

Students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) majors may also be eligible for an additional 24-month extension for OPT. Additional information can be found on [our website](#).

Work authorization for OPT is achieved once you have received the Employment Authorization Document (EAD card), which is issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

If you complete a degree at a higher educational level, you may be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT.

## Section 2

# OPT Eligibility

Use these slides to learn more about OPT Eligibility.



# OPT Categories

OPT can be granted for 3 different reasons.  
Each authorization requires a new OPT application submitted to USCIS.



## Pre-Completion

Pre-completion OPT is authorized for work before the student's program completion date. Both undergraduates and graduates are eligible for pre-completion.

Please see an advisor if you have more questions about pre-completion OPT

## Post-Completion

Generally, Post-completion OPT is appropriate for students seeking work authorization after completion of the academic program.

## 24-Month STEM Extension

The 24-month extension of post-completion OPT allows students in STEM fields work authorization for a total of 36 months.

# OPT Eligibility

## Maintained Status

Students must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application.

Students must be in good academic standing.

Students must have been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two full semesters/9 months)

## Final Semester

Students must be in the final semester of the academic program.

## New OPT at Academic Level

Students must not have a previously approved OPT authorization at the same or higher academic level.

Example: If you are applying for OPT now on the basis of your Bachelor's degree, and if you later obtain a Master's degree, you will be eligible to apply for another 12 months of OPT on the basis of the Master's degree.

## Who is Not Eligible?

Students may not qualify for OPT if:

12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) have been used at the current academic level

The student has NOT been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two academic semester/9 months)

The student has violated their immigration status.



# Completion of Academic Program

|                           | OPT BASED ON GRADUATION  | OPT BASED ON COMPLETION OF COURSEWORK<br>(APPOINTMENT RECOMMENDED)                           |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Who's Eligible            | Any F-1 who's maintained status  | Only Master's Thesis or Doctoral students  |
| Requirements              | Must apply for graduation and be able to graduate in the same semester                     | Completed all major coursework and have a set/thesis defense date (including research hours) |
| New I-20 Program End Date | Last Day of Finals for that semester   | Last Day of Finals<br>OR<br>Date You are Admitted to Candidacy or Thesis-Only                |
| OPT Start Date            | Within 60-day grace period after program end date  |  |
| OPT End Date              | 12 months following OPT Start Date. End Date must be within 14 months of program end date. |  |
| When to Apply to USCIS    | Up to 90 Days before program end date and 60 days after.                                   | Up to 90 days before program end date.   |



## Academic Advisor Confirmation

When OPT e-forms are submitted in [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu), your academic advisor will confirm the anticipated graduation in the current academic term.

## Application Held Until Confirmation Received

The OPT application cannot move forward until the confirmation from the academic advisor is complete.

# Undergraduate & Non-Thesis Master's Students



## Required Evidence of Completion: Master's

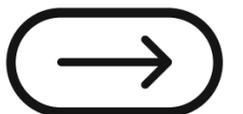
MASTERS students will have their academic department confirm their admission to thesis-only hours through the Compass portal OPT Application e-form.

## Required Evidence of Completion: Doctorate

DOCTORATE students will need to fill out the Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degrees form, turn in to the Graduate School, and upload the Graduate School's letter of admission to candidacy when you are applying for OPT on [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu).

[Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degrees](#)

# Thesis/Dissertation Graduate Students



## Section 3

# UGA OPT Application Process

Use these slides to learn more about how to request an OPT I-20 from UGA Immigration Services.



# OPT Process

Begin the OPT application process by following the steps below.



## View this Online Workshop

View this workshop and submit OPT Quiz in [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu)



## Complete OPT Request Forms in Compass

Complete OPT Request Forms In [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu)



## Receive OPT I-20

Receive your NEW OPT I-20 from Immigration Services



## Prepare Materials & Submit Application to USCIS

Review application assembly guide and submit OPT application by mail or online



# Employment Start Dates

Students may not begin PAID or UNPAID employment until AFTER receiving the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and on the start date of the authorized employment period noted on the EAD.

## Example

Robin's EAD start date: May 15, 2024

Robin received EAD on April 15, 2024

Employment can begin on or after start date on EAD, May 15, 2024.

## End Date on I-20

Because your I-20 end date may be shortened, you should be 100% certain you will complete your studies before you apply for OPT!

If you fail to complete your last degree requirements after filing an OPT I-765 Employment application, you may lose lawful status.

You must inform your on-campus employer about your new I-20 end date!

You must stop working on-campus in a student position on the day of your new program end date!

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate Assistants, please make sure to inform your Department. Graduate Students applying based on Coursework completion should talk to their hiring Department about how ending your student employment or assistantship mid-semester will impact your funding.



# Application Timeline

Important Reminders about the timeline for applying for OPT.

## 90 Days Before

Applications can be submitted to USCIS NO EARLIER than 90 days before the program end date. UGA uses the last date of finals as the program end date.

## 60 Days After

The DEADLINE to apply is 60 days after the program end date. The deadline is not flexible.

Please note: USCIS must send the OPT Receipt Notice dated prior to the 60th day of your grace period.

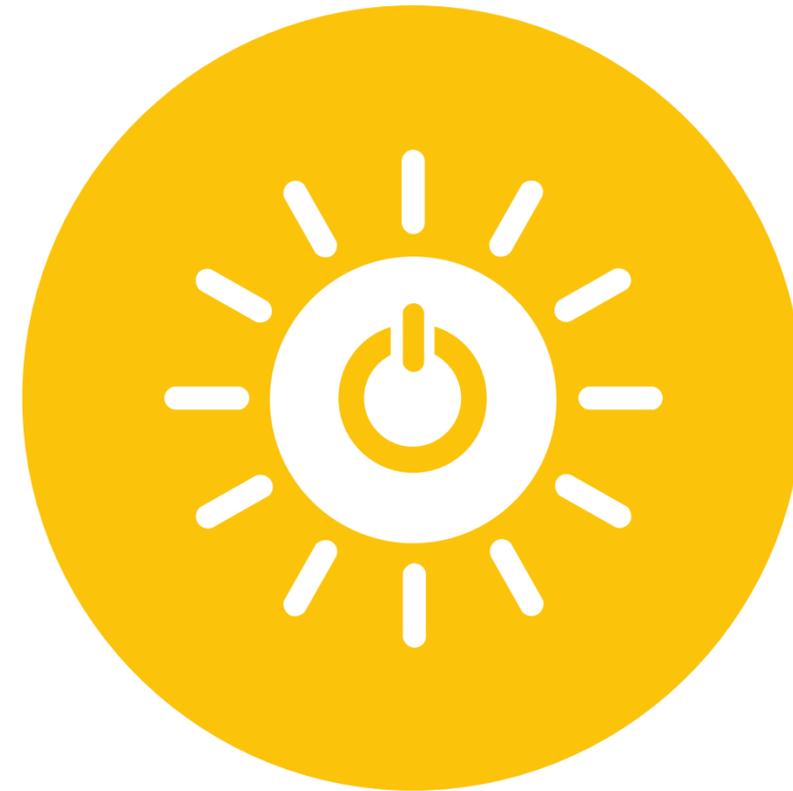
## Processing Times

On average, USCIS may require 3 months to process and issue the Post Completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the receipt date.

## Section 4

# USCIS Application Process

Use these slides to review the necessary materials and options for applying for OPT with the USCIS.





## 2 Ways to Submit the USCIS OPT Application

18

The USCIS provides two ways to submit the OPT application.

### Online:

Applicants who wish to submit the OPT application online may do so by creating an online account on the USCIS website. All materials and payment will be uploaded to the online e-form.

### By Mail:

Applicants who wish to submit the OPT application by mail may do so by preparing the required paper forms, printed materials, and necessary fees.

### Instructions:

Complete, step-by-step instructions on applying to USCIS by mail or through the online application system will be sent to students when their immigration advisor processes their OPT request.

# Application Materials for OPT: ONLINE APPLICATION

- [USCIS Online account](#) creation and online I-765 submission

- \$410.00 paid by Credit Card on Pay.gov

\*This fee will increase to \$470.00 on April 1, 2024.

New: [Premium Processing](#) for quicker adjudication.

- Scanned copy of I-20 with OPT recommendation on 2nd page, **signed by Immigration Services advisor and student applicant** on the 1st page. This is issued after an advisor reviews your OPT request. You must print the I-20 and sign it with ink before uploading to the online application.

- Scanned copy of a passport-style, color photo of yourself taken within 30 days of filing application

- Scanned copy of passport biographical information page (showing passport expiration date & photo)

- Scanned copy of your F-1 visa

- Scanned copy of your I-94 record from [cbp.gov/194](https://cbp.gov/194) OR copy of I-94 card—front and back (dark enough to show the red stamp on the front of it)

- Scanned copy of I-797 Approval Notice if you changed status in the U.S. (if applicable)

- Scanned copies of all old I-20s for Full-Time CPT (if applicable)

- Scanned copies of all previous EAD cards (if applicable)



# Application Materials for OPT: MAIL SUBMISSION

- [G-1145](#) Electronic Notification Form, Paper App Only

- Completed and signed [I-765](#)

Only print the form I-765 found on the USCIS website.  
The USCIS will NOT accept outdated forms.

- \$410.00, payable to The U.S. Department of Homeland Security by check or money order OR use a completed [G-1450](#) form to pay by credit card.

\*This fee will increase to \$520.00 on April 1, 2024.

- I-20 with OPT recommendation on 2nd page, **signed by Immigration Services advisor and student applicant** on the 1st page. This is issued after an advisor reviews your OPT request.

- Two identical, passport-style, color photos of yourself taken within 30 days of filing application

- Photocopy of passport biographical information page (showing passport expiration date & photo)

- Photocopy of your F-1 visa

- Print-out of your I-94 record from [cbp.gov/194](https://cbp.gov/194) OR photocopy of I-94 card—front and back (dark enough to show the red stamp on the front of it)

- Photocopy of I-797 Approval Notice if you changed status in the U.S. (if applicable)

- Photocopies of all old I-20s for Full-Time CPT (if applicable)

- Photocopies of all previous EAD cards (if applicable)



## Section 5

# Life on OPT

Use these slides to review the reporting requirements and responsibilities while on OPT.



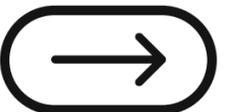
# Employment Requirements

22

- Employment must be within the student's field for which OPT was authorized (listed on the I-20).
- At least 20 hours/week (for standard post-completion OPT).
- Employment may be paid or unpaid as long as the unpaid work does not violate labor laws. The [Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division](#) determines labor laws.

## Which documents should I have to prove that I have been employed?

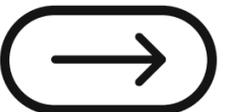
- Copies of job offer letters and agreements/contracts with all OPT employers including start and end dates.
- Copies of job descriptions including job title, duties, location, pay rate and proposed number of hours to be worked per week.
- If you worked for an agency or consultancy, keep evidence of the projects you worked on.
- Keep copies of your pay vouchers or pay stubs for all periods of employment.
- Maintain copies of your bank statements that show direct or corresponding deposits from your employer(s).
- Copies of your W-2 tax forms.



# Allowable on both pre-completion & standard post-completion OPT

23

- **Regular paid employment** in a position directly related to the student's program of study. Students may work for multiple employers, as long as it is directly related to the student's program of study.
- **Payment by multiple short-term employers:** Students such as musicians and other performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Work for hire:** This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students should be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner:** Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student should be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- **Employment through an agency:** Students on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Volunteers or unpaid interns (for standard pre or post-completion OPT):** 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 she or he worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment



# Unpaid Employment Recommendations

24

If you engage in employment that is not paid while on OPT, we recommend you keep the following records:

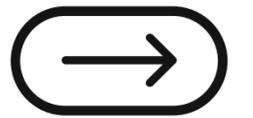
- Copies of employment agreements or contracts with the employer including start and end dates, training mode (on location, online, etc.) and location of the internship/unpaid training for each employer.
- Copies of all diplomas, completion certificates and/or certifications that you received related to the training programs identified.
- If you worked/trained as an unpaid employee for a third party, keep evidence of the projects/contracts you worked on.
- Copies of company time and attendance records that document your daily tasks in detail for all employers during the unpaid internship or training.
- You will not be required to submit this proof of employment to Immigration Services, but it may be requested by USCIS if you are applying for future immigration benefits.



# OPT Reporting Requirements

**During OPT, you are required to:**

- Keep your address updated in Compass
- Get your I-20 signed for travel, by your immigration advisor
- Work a minimum of 20 hours per week
- Report your employer's information in Compass
  - ALL employment must be directly related to your major. A logical explanation must be outlined and provided.



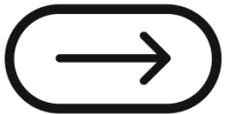
**Remember, there is no limit on:**

- How much money you can make
- How many jobs you can have
- The maximum hours you can work

# OPT Reporting Requirements

Keep the following in mind:

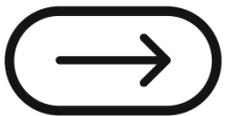
- OPT approval allows for a maximum of 90 days of unemployment.
- Failure to report your employment in [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu) will result in a violation of your F-1 Status, if the period exceeds 90 days.
- Please wait to report your employment until you receive your EAD card. Visit Compass to report employment or address changes.
- Remote employment is approvable within the U.S. Working remotely outside the U.S. on OPT is not permitted. Speak with your Immigration Advisor if you have questions about Remote Employment while approved for OPT.



# Address Reporting

Keep the following in mind:

- Students with pending or approved applications to the USCIS must report changes to their residential or mailing address to UGA Immigration Services **AND** USCIS using the E-COA.
- When reporting your address changes to **UGA Immigration Services**, please visit [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu). Select F-1 Employment – Practical Training. Submit the OPT Personal Information Update.
- When reporting your address changes to **USCIS** using the E-COA, follow the instructions linked below: <https://www.uscis.gov/addresschange>



# Unemployment

## LIMITED TO 90 CALENDAR DAYS DURING THE INITIAL 12 MONTH OPT PERIOD

Remember to report any employment in [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu) to avoid accruing unemployment days. Weekends and Holidays are counted.

Unemployment is counted from the OPT start date EVEN if you have not yet received your EAD.

You are considered unemployed if you do not have eligible OPT employment AND/OR if you have not reported your employment in Compass.

No 60-day grace period is allowed if 90 days of unemployment is reached; you must leave the U.S. immediately.

**ALWAYS REQUEST AN EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION LETTER FROM YOUR EMPLOYER IF THE POSITION IS UNPAID.**



## International Travel on OPT

After you have completed your studies, you will need the following documents for travel on OPT:

- Original I-20 signed for travel by an Immigration Advisor within the last six months and
- An Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- A valid F-1 visa (unless you are eligible for automatic revalidation of an expired visa)
- A valid passport (valid for six months at the time of re-entry to the U.S.) and
- Employment verification (an offer/employment verification letter from your prospective/current employer with dates of employment, position title, dates of authorized leave for vacation or business).

We do not recommend travelling outside the U.S. if your OPT application is pending. USCIS may cancel your application if you leave the country.

Students who do not meet these requirements may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S.

# TRAVEL



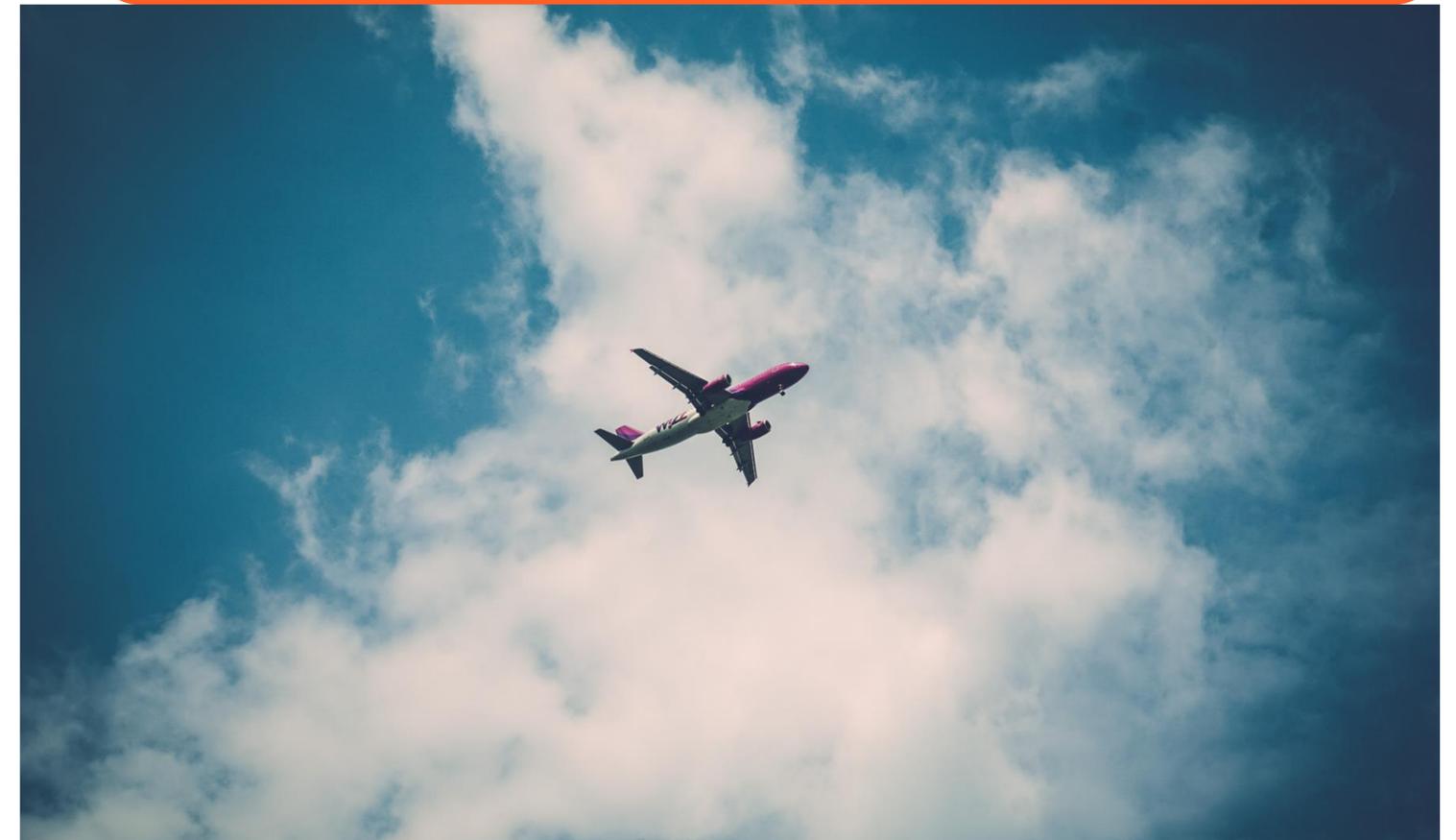
## F-1 VISA RENEWAL ON OPT

While on OPT, your immigration status is F-1. Your visa sponsorship & SEVIS record is still under UGA's sponsorship.

It is possible to renew your F-1 visa based on OPT participation.

Immigration Services does not recommend visa renewals on OPT towards the end of your OPT period, because the non-immigrant intent could be difficult to prove at that point.

## VISA RENEWAL



# When OPT Ends: 60 Days

## 60 DAY GRACE PERIOD

When your OPT ends, you have a 60 day grace period to remain inside the United States.

### OPTION 1

Depart the United States.

### OPTION 2

Enroll in another degree program of study as an F-1 student & receive an I-20 from that university. This step involves possibly transferring your SEVIS record.

### OPTION 3

Change your Visa Status.

We strongly recommend consulting a reputable immigration attorney for guidance.



## Employment Visa Options After OPT

The H-1B visa is the most common employment option & is sponsored by employers.

There are two types of H-1B Visas:

- (1) Cap-Subject and
- (2) Cap-exempt.

For more detailed information on H-1B Visas, please see the USCIS Website- [USCIS.gov](https://uscis.gov).

**Immigration Attorney Recommended**

Additional options for visa sponsorship may be possible. Please consult with a reputable immigration attorney for options.





## CAP-GAP Extension

An F-1 student filing for H1-B status on April 1 with a benefit start date of October 1 may qualify for an extension of status and/or employment authorization.

Students should always maintain regular contact with their potential employer to receive updates on the status of the H-1B petition, if they have filed one for the student.

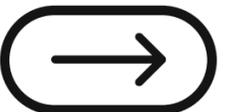
Please review full details of [Cap Gap Extension](#) information by visiting the website.

Immigration Services will assist qualified students at the appropriate time.

# YOU'RE READY

Now that you have reviewed and understood the following, you may continue the OPT application process:

- What is OPT?
- Who is Eligible for OPT?
- UGA I-20 Request Process
- USCIS Application Process
- Reporting Requirements
- Options Beyond OPT



# REVIEW: OPT Application Process



## View this Online Workshop

View this workshop and submit OPT Quiz in [Compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu)

## Complete OPT Request Forms in Compass

Complete OPT Request Forms In [Compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu)

## Receive OPT I-20

Receive your NEW OPT I-20 from Immigration Services

## Prepare Materials & Submit Application to USCIS

Review application assembly guide and submit OPT application by mail or online

# International Student Compliance Fee

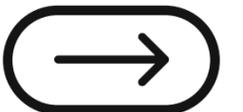
36

As the Immigration Services Office is a cost recovery program, we are funded in large part through fees. The ISCF revenue is used to assist staff in compliance with Student and Exchange Visitor Program regulations, and in supporting our international student and scholar populations. During your time at UGA, this fee was paid through your student account.

Immigration Services will continue to assist and advise you during your OPT application process and your time on OPT. UGA-sponsored F-1 or J-1 students who are applying for work authorization through the Immigration Services office continue to pay the ISCF fee through the payment portal below.

Please pay the fee using the link below. You will be asked to upload your receipt of payment when requesting the OPT I-20.

[ISCF Payment Portal](#)



## OPT WORKSHOP

CONGRATULATIONS!  
You have completed the  
OPT Workshop!

### REMINDER

You may apply for OPT with USCIS for up to 90 days prior to and up to 60 days following your program end date. If you do not file your application within these timeframes, your application will be rejected or denied.

### REMINDER

There are 2 ways to file the OPT application- By Mail or Online. You must choose only one method to apply for OPT.

### REMINDER

Visit [compass.uga.edu](https://compass.uga.edu) to request the OPT recommendation I-20s needed for the application. *Detailed Filing Instructions will be provided after this step.*