Optional Practical Training

Required Workshop for All Applicants
OPT WORKSHOP

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

• After viewing this presentation, you must visit istart.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.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 1: View this online workshop.

STEP 2: Complete the Online OPT Request Form and Form I-765.

STEP 3: Pick up your new OPT I-20 form from the Office of Global Engagement (OGE).

STEP 4: Prepare your documents and mail them to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If you need help assembling your application, please email immigration@uga.edu.
IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

To begin, have the following documents in front of you:

- I-765 Paper or Online Visit uscis.gov/i-765
- Current I-20 Form
- Passport
- I-94 or Change of Status approval notice
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

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 the Employment Authorization Document or EAD card, issued by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services).

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

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.
You only get 12 months of OPT per higher degree level.
ELIGIBILITY

Maintained Status
Students must be in valid F-1 status at the time of application, in good academic standing, and 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 at the same or higher academic level.
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

• Students who have NOT been enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year (two academic semester/9 months)

• Students that violated the immigration status. Common reasons for students to become “out of status”:
  ◦ Failure to pursue a full course of study (i.e. 12 credits for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduates) without an authorized reduced course load
  ◦ Failure to follow immigration transfer procedures when changing schools
  ◦ Working without proper authorization
THREE TYPES OF OPT

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.

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

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

The remainder of this presentation will focus only on Post-completion OPT.

Click Here for More Information.
COMPLETION OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM

DEFINITION OF "COMPLETION"

For undergraduate and graduate non-thesis students:
Your Completion Date is the last day of final exams of the semester in which all your degree requirements are completed.

All other graduate students (thesis/dissertation students):
You can choose between two dates for the Completion Date:
• The date that you are admitted to candidacy/thesis-only
• The last day of final exams of the semester in which all your degree requirements are completed.
When OPT e-forms are submitted in istart.uga.edu, your academic advisor will confirm the anticipated graduation in the current academic term.

The OPT application cannot move forward until the confirmation form the academic advisor is complete.
THESIS/DISSERTATION GRADUATE STUDENTS

REQUIRED EVIDENCE OF COMPLETION

MASTER thesis/dissertation students will need to fill out an Application for Waiver of Graduate Out-of-State Tuition form, turn this into graduate school, and ask the graduate school for an approved copy. You will be prompted to upload a copy of this form when you are applying for OPT in istart.uga.edu

• Application for Waiver of Graduate Out-of-State Tuition

DOCTORATE students will need to fill out the Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degrees form, turn into the graduate school, and upload the graduate school’s letter of admission to candidacy when you are applying for OPT on istart.uga.edu.

• Application for Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degrees
END DATE ON I–20 FORM

WHEN APPLYING FOR OPT, THE END DATE ON THE I–20 WILL REFLECT YOUR COMPLETION DATE

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

If you fail to complete your last degree requirements after filing an OPT I–765 Employment application, you may fall out of lawful status.
APPLICATION TIMELINE

Applications can be submitted NO EARLIER THAN 90 days prior to the completion of your studies.

The DEADLINE to apply is 60 days after the completion of your studies. Please note: USCIS must send a receipt of your application dated prior to the 60th day of your grace period.

On average, USCIS requires 3-5 months to process and issue the Post Completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the receipt date. For current processing times, see: https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/

Your best option—Apply 90 days prior to your planned graduation or program completion date.

Applying prior to 90 day time frame will result in application denial.
CHOOSING A START DATE

EXAMPLE:

Josh’s program completion date: May 10, 2020

Josh may choose a start date between May 11, 2020 and July 9, 2020
CHOOSING A START DATE

It is better to use a start date closer to your completion date if you:
• Have an employment offer that starts soon
• Would like to be available for employment right after program completion

It is better to use a start date closer to the 60 day grace period if you:
• Do not have any employment offers at the time of OPT application
• Do not expect that you will be able to secure employment soon after program completion
• Submitted your application “late” (e.g. during the 60-day window after program completion)

OPT approval will ALWAYS have an end date no later than 14 months after degree completion.
Students may begin paid or unpaid employment after receiving the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and on start date of the authorized employment period noted on the EAD.

Example:
Josh’s EAD start date: June 15, 2020
Josh received EAD on May 15, 2020
Employment can begin on or after start date on EAD
STEPS TO APPLY

VISIT ISTART.UGA.EDU
Submit OPT Application E-forms
Review iStart Process

APPLICATION REVIEW
Applicants may schedule an in-person application review with an Immigration Services advisor

I-20 FORM PRINTED
Immigration Services advisor will recommend OPT in SEVIS. Student is notified to pick up OPT packet in the Office of Global Engagement

FILE APPLICATION
Student mails complete application to USCIS, receives receipt of application, then OPT Approval Notice & EAD
IMMIGRATION SERVICES ENCOURAGES YOU TO COMPLETE THE I-765 FORM WHILE REVIEWING THE NEXT FEW SLIDES.

THE FORM CAN BE FOUND AT: USCIS.GOV/I-765

COMPLETING THIS FORM IS THE APPLICANT'S RESPONSIBILITY.

IMMIGRATION SERVICES CANNOT OFFER LEGAL ADVICE REGARDING USCIS APPLICATIONS.
PART 1: REASON FOR APPLYING
1.a. Select “Initial permission to accept employment”

PART 2: INFORMATION ABOUT YOU
2.a–c: Your Full Legal Name: Enter your full legal name as it is shown in your passport.

2.a–4.c: Other Names Used: Enter other names you have used, if any.

NOTE: The name on your I-20 should also be the same as the name written on the passport biographical page. If your name is different, inform an advisor at time of application.
FORM I-765

PART 2: OTHER INFORMATION

5.a-f: Your U.S. Mailing Address: We recommend using OGE’s address for the mailing address:

5.a. Office of Global Engagement
5.b. 1324 S. Lumpkin Street
5.d. Athens
5.e. GA
5.f. 30602

NOTE: You may need to fill in portions of the address by hand due to limitations of the fillable PDF. If you provide an address that is not OGE’s address, please be aware that if you move residences while your application is pending, the US Postal Service cannot forward government mail to a new address. If your mailing address changes while the application is pending, follow the instructions on the USCIS Change of Address information website.

6. Your U.S. Mailing Address:
If the address you provided is where you physically reside, select “Yes”. If you do not physically reside at the address provided (i.e. you used the OGE address), select “No” and complete 7.a–e.

7.a–e: U.S. Physical Address: Enter your address where you physically reside.
PART 2: OTHER INFORMATION

8. Alien Registration Number (if applicable)

9. USCIS Online Account Number (if applicable)

10: Gender: Select the appropriate box.

11. Marital Status: Select the appropriate box for your marital status at the time of filing your application.

12. If you have applied for employment authorization through USCIS in the past, select “Yes” and provide copies of previously issued EAD cards.

13.a–b: If you have a Social Security Number (SSN), select “Yes” and provide the SSN number in 13.b.
If you do not have a Social Security card, select “No”.

14–17.b: If you have not already been issued a SSN and would like to apply for a SSN with your OPT application answer “Yes” and answer questions 15–17.b.

If you do not wish to apply for a SSN, select “No” and skip to question 18. You are not required to request an SSN using this application. Completing Item Numbers 14–17.b is optional. However, you must have an SSN properly assigned in your name to work in the United States.
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER REQUEST

APPLY FOR THE SSN WITH OPT

The form I-765 includes an additional question that allows applicants to apply for an SSN or replacement card without visiting the Social Security Administration. USCIS will transmit the additional data collected on the form.

Applicants should receive the Social Security card within two weeks after the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is received.
PART 2: YOUR COUNTRY & PLACE OF BIRTH

18.a-b: List all countries where you are currently a citizen or national.

19.a-c.: Place of Birth: Prove information about city, state and country of birth. Enter the name that your country held at the time of your birth (in case the name of your country has since changed).

20: Date of Birth: Use MM/DD/YYYY format.

PART 2: LAST ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.

21.a: Enter your most recent I-94 number here

21.b – 25: Enter travel history information & history here (last entry, last status granted upon entry)

26: Enter your current SEVIS number. You can find this number on the top left side of your I-20. If you have had more than one SEVIS number, use Part 6 on Page 7 to list all previously used SEVIS numbers (see instructions on slide 25).
FORM I-765

PART 2: INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR ELIGIBILITY CATEGORY

27: "(C)(3)(B)" should be used if you are applying for post-completion OPT
   • If you are applying for post-completion OPT, you do not need to answer questions 28-31.b.

PART 3: APPLICANT’S STATEMENT, CONTACT INFORMATION, DECLARATION, CERTIFICATION AND SIGNATURE

1-2: Applicant’s Statement: If you have filled the I-765 out yourself, select 1.a. You do not have to answer Part 4 or 5 if you did not use an interpreter or preparer to fill out the I-765.

3-6: Applicant’s Contact Information: Provide your contact information.

7.a-b: Applicant’s Signature: Sign by hand in black ink inside the box and enter the date you completed the application.

FAILURE TO SIGN THE FORM WILL CAUSE YOUR APPLICATION TO BE REJECTED.
PARTS 4 & 5:

Enter NA if you completed the form yourself without the use of an interpreter or someone filling out the form on your behalf.

PART 6: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you have been previously authorized for OPT, provide the SEVIS ID and academic level at which it was authorized. You will also need to provide copies of previously issued EAD cards. Reference Page 2, Part Number 2, Item Number 12.

If you have been authorized for CPT, provide the SEVIS ID, start and end date, part-time/full-time, and academic level at which it was authorized. Reference Page 3, Part Number 2, Item Number 27.

If you were previously in F-1 status, but had a different SEVIS number, provide all of the previously used SEVIS numbers and the academic level. Reference Page 3, Part Number 2, Item Number 26.
Make sure to have the documents below ready to mail while you wait for your I-20.

- **G-1145** Electronic Notification Form
- Completed and signed I-765 (**USCIS I-765**)
- $410.00, payable to The Department of Homeland Security by check or money order OR use a completed G-1450 Form to pay by credit card (**USCIS G-1450**)
- 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 visa
- Print-out of your I-94 record from [cbp.gov/194](http://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)

**APPLICATION MATERIALS**

Once you have completed the OPT request form in iStart and completed the I-765, you are almost ready to submit the application to the USCIS.
THE I-20 ON OPT

Your Immigration Advisor will email you when your new I-20 is ready at the front desk.

You will receive two copies (one for your record; one for mailing with your application). Your new I-20 will show the OPT recommendation on page 2.

Review all information on your I-20 to be sure it is correct.

When you pick up your new I-20 you will need to pay the 1 year ISCF fee online: UGA ISCF Fee

This fee covers the continued advising you will receive from Immigration Services during the OPT period.
MAILING YOUR APPLICATION

USCIS must receive your application within **30 days** of the issue date on your I-20, **AND** within **60 days** of your Completion Date.

**DO NOT WAIT TO MAIL THE APPLICATION!**
Mailing Option 1: eShipGlobal (UEMS) offers an option for students to send OPT applications to USCIS offices. You can choose the carrier (UPS, FedEx, or USPS), what type of delivery (next day, 2-day, etc.), and ship at discounted rates.

Instructions:
• Go to study.eshipglobal.com to log in or create a free account.
• Select "Send Documents to USCIS."
• Enter your mailing information and select the DALLAS USCIS location.
• Select the carrier you want to use, pay for shipping and print the label.

If you are having your packet reviewed by our office, bring the printed label with you and we will give you a mailing envelope. Otherwise, you may drop off your application at the nearest carrier location.

Mailing Option 2: If you prefer to mail your application without using eShipGlobal, you can only send the application using U.S. Postal Service. Do not send UPS or FedEx, because the application is being sent to a Post Office box.

Write the phrase “I-765” in the lower left-hand corner of the envelope. In the middle of the envelope write the address to USCIS as follows:

USCIS Dallas Lockbox
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266
WHAT NEXT?

After mailing your application, please remember the following information

You will receive a Notice of Action (Form I-797) Receipt about 2–4 weeks after you mail the application. Please allow 4 weeks for arrival before inquiring to Immigration Services about your receipt.

YSC number: Your receipt has a reference number or YSC number, which can be used to track the status of your application online at the USCIS Website.

If you used the OGE mailing address on the I-765 form, Immigration Services will notify you via email when your receipt arrives. You will need to visit the Immigration Services office to pick up the receipt and to confirm the accuracy of your name, address, and Date of Birth (DOB). If incorrect, contact your Immigration Advisor immediately.

If there is a problem with your application, USCIS will send a notice called a Request for Evidence (RFE) to the address listed on the Form I-765. If Immigration Services receives an RFE, you will be contacted immediately about its content and an advisor will assist you in responding to the RFE.

Please note that an RFE is not a rejection notice. You just need to send in additional documents before your EAD work card can be issued.

Please note the deadline to respond to the RFE. If you fail to meet this deadline, your application will be automatically canceled and you will have to file a new application with a new fee.

Receiving an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT. For this reason, it is important to make sure that you have completed the I-765 correctly and that you have sent the proper documents to USCIS.
During OPT, you are required to:
- Keep your address updated in iStart
- Get your I-20 signed for travel, by your immigration advisor
- Report your employer’s information in iStart

Remember, there is no limit on:
- How much money you can make
- How many jobs you can have
- The maximum hours you can work (you must work a minimum of 20 hours per week on OPT)
OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

OPT approval allows for a maximum of 90 days of unemployment.

Failure to report your employment in istart.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 iStart to report employment or address changes.
UNEMPLOYMENT

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

Remember to report any employment in istart.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 OR if you have not reported your employment in iStart.

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

KEEP TRACK OF UNEMPLOYMENT DAYS!

ALWAYS REQUEST AN EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION LETTER FROM YOUR EMPLOYER IF THE POSITION IS UNPAID.
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
- An Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- 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.)
- 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.

F-1 VISA RENEWAL ON OPT

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

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

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.
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 program of study as an F-1 student & receive an I-20 for that university

Option 3: Change your Visa status
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](https://www.uscis.gov).

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

Cap-gap benefits are available to F-1 students only with a properly filed cap-subject H-1B petition with USCIS. To trigger cap-gap benefits, the H-1B petition must:

• Request an H-1B employment start date of October 1; and
• Request a change of status from F-1 to H-1B; and
• Be timely filed with USCIS—AND accepted for processing

There are two aspects of cap-gap benefits:

• An extension of OPT employment authorization, if USCIS receives the H-1B petition prior to the expiration of the student’s approved post-completion OPT (standard or STEM)

• An extension of duration of status (D/S), if USCIS receives the H-1B petition before the expiration of the student’s grace period following completion of studies or practical training

Immigration Services will assist qualified students at the appropriate time.
UPDATED PRACTICE FOR CAP–GAP FY 2021

For the upcoming Fiscal Year 2021 H-1B cap season, employers wanting to file a cap-subject H-1B petition must first submit registrations during a March 1 to March 20, 2020 registration period, naming each individual they hope to file for.

USCIS will then conduct a lottery of all registrations received, and petitioners may not file a cap-subject H-1B petition for any beneficiary whose registration was not selected in the registration lottery.

Registration Requirement for Petitioners Seeking To File H-1B Petitions on Behalf of Cap-Subject Aliens

PLEASE CONSULT YOUR EMPLOYER & IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY WITH QUESTIONS IF YOU PLAN TO USE THE CAP–GAP EXTENSION.
OPT WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE

Congratulations! You are now ready to apply for OPT!

Please log into Compass to take the workshop quiz. Failure to pass the quiz will result in denial or delay of your application.

1. Log into compass.uga.edu
2. Under “F-1 Employment – Practical Training”, select “OPT Application Group”
3. Click “Post-Completion OPT Quiz”