

# OPT & STEM OPT



Office of INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
University of Colorado Colorado Springs



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## Your folder contains:

- The OPT Information handout
- The OPT Request Form
- Handout 'What Employers Need to Know'
- OPT reminders cheat-sheet
- Your ISA's card

*OPT information is also available on the IA webpages and/or from your international student advisor electronically.*



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## Contents:

- OPT Definition & Eligibility
- OPT Request, Application, and Filing
- OPT regulations and requirements
- Requesting OPT from your International Student Advisor
- Travel and Reentry during OPT
- STEM OPT Overview and rules
- Tips for finding a job

## Resources:

- IA information handouts and forms
  - OPT Information Handout
  - OPT Request Form
  - OPT Update Form
  - STEM OPT Request Form
  - OPT Employers Handout

- **STEM OPT Hub:**

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>

*Currently there are many changes, happening, very rapidly, in OPT and STEM OPT. Check with your ISA and pay attention to updates from your ISA*



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## OPT Basics

OPT: OPT is a BENEFIT of F-1 student status, and stands for ‘Optional Practical Training’

- It is not available to ESL students.
- OPT is practical work experience *in your field of study*, usually after completion of a degree, for a **maximum of one year (in most cases)**.
- OPT is obtained with an application that **YOU** prepare, and submit to the U.S. government, with an updated OPT I-20 from your international student adviser in International Affairs.
- Timeline – currently post-completion OPT applications take between 60 and 120 days to adjudicate
- **In 2018 OPT is becoming a focus of government attention on compliance and is becoming stricter in many facets**
- Student is responsible for proper and complete OPT applications
- Student is responsible for compliance with all OPT regulations and practices



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## OPT can be:

***Pre-completion***, part-time or full-time

***Post-completion***, full-time only (TODAY'S TOPIC)

***STEM Extension OPT*** for STEM degrees only, full-time only, **AFTER** one year of post-completion OPT

**\*\*Important** – During OPT of any kind, you remain in F-1 Status. OPT is not a status, it is a benefit. UCCS holds your SEVIS record and you are required to report via UCCS to the US government.



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## ELIGIBILITY:

To be eligible for post-completion OPT you must:

- Have been enrolled as an F-1 student in the previous 9 months before applying and be in status.
- In most cases, be in your last semester of study.
- Have a valid passport.
- Be present in the U.S. for the previous 9 months before applying unless you are enrolled in a study abroad program.
- **Not have done 12 months of full-time CPT\*\***
- Eligible for only 12 months of OPT at each higher degree level (plus any STEM extension)

**\*\* This is a changing interpretation with government interpretation currently, becoming stricter.**



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# THE APPLICATION PROCESS

## IMPORTANT TIMELINES

USCIS must receive your OPT application:

- No more than 90 days BEFORE program completion date
- No more than 60 days AFTER program completion date
- OPT I-20 no more than 30 days old
- **Complete, with properly completed I-765 and all required items**

**... OR YOUR OPT APPLICATION  
WILL BE DENIED!!**



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## OPT REQUEST, APPLICATION, and FILING

The process of application for OPT consists of:

1. Student attends this workshop
2. The student gathers all items on the OPT application checklist and completes the OPT Request Form
3. Student makes an appointment with international student advisor to request OPT I-20, brings all documents to appointment for review
4. After determining eligibility and reviewing all documents, the ISA submits an OPT recommendation in SEVIS and prepares a new I-20 (overnight)
5. The student files the complete application including the new I-20, the form I-765 with fee, and supporting documents to the USCIS Service Center
6. Student receives a receipt, with case number, can check online
7. If/when the application is approved, USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization card (EAD)



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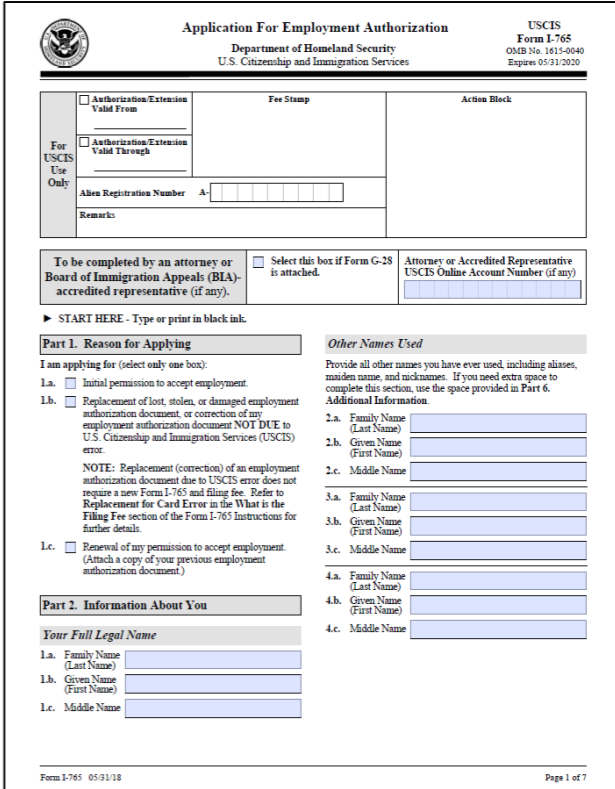




## Requesting OPT I-20 from your International Student Advisor

GATHER ALL ITEMS ON THIS CHECKLIST  
THEN MAKE APPOINTMENT WITH GEO:

1. Memo from academic advisor verifying your expected graduation date
2. Completed I-765: 
  - Go to <http://www.uscis.gov> to find the form – 7 pages long
  - Download instructions and follow carefully (basic instructions begin on page 16)
  - TYPE in all items, save, and email to your advisor
  - U.S. address – Make sure your mailing address is absolutely 100% solid!
  - Code for #27 is: (c) (3) (B) for post-completion OPT  
(c) (3) (C) for STEM OPT
  - Make sure you have the latest version of I-765!
  - Document all previous SEVIS IDs, OPT and CPT, in part 6
  - Don't forget to sign, in BLACK, and make sure your signature fits INTO the signature box
  - Enter 'N/A' for all items that do not apply to you
  - Include all pages with NONE and N/A entered in appropriate places



The image shows the USCIS Form I-765, 'Application for Employment Authorization'. The form is titled 'Application For Employment Authorization' and includes the USCIS logo and 'Form I-765' in the top right corner. It is divided into several sections: 'For USCIS Use Only' (with checkboxes for 'Authorization/Extension Valid From' and 'Authorization/Extension Valid Through'), 'Fee Stamp', and 'Action Block'. Below these are fields for 'Alien Registration Number' and 'Remarks'. A section for 'To be completed by an attorney or Board of Immigration Appeals (BLA)-accredited representative (if any)' includes a checkbox for 'Select this box if Form G-28 is attached' and a field for 'Attorney or Accredited Representative USCIS Online Account Number (if any)'. The main body of the form is divided into 'Part 1. Reason for Applying' and 'Part 2. Information About You'. Part 1 includes options for 'Initial permission to accept employment' and 'Replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged employment authorization document or correction of any employment authorization document NOT DUE to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) error'. It also includes a 'NOTE' about replacement of a document due to a USCIS error. Part 2 includes fields for 'Your Full Legal Name' (Last, First, Middle) and 'Other Names Used' (Family, Given, Middle). The form is labeled 'Form I-765 05/31/18' and 'Page 1 of 7'.





## Requesting OPT from your International Student Advisor

3. Photocopies of passport ID page, F-1 visa, latest I-94, and ID (DL or UCCS ID)
4. Photocopies of all I-20s containing previous CPT or OPT
5. Check or money order for the I-765 filing fee of \$410 (to 'US Dept. of Homeland Security') – **UPDATE – paying by CC now possible!**
6. 2 passport photos taken within 30 days (see next slide for guidelines)
7. OPTIONAL – G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance, and G-1450, Authorization for credit card transactions.

*BE SURE TO HAVE ALL ITEMS!*

*You will also need to complete the IA OPT I-20 REQUEST form.*



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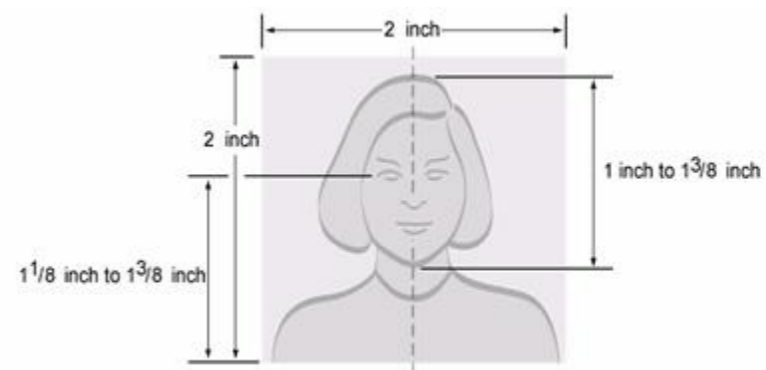




## OPT Photo Guidelines

- All photos must be of only the applicant and must be identical.
- All photos must meet the specifications for full frontal/passport photos and must be no more than 30 days old when an application is filed.
- Do NOT cut the pictures!
- Get photos at Walgreens, Costco, Walmart, etc.

### Sample photos and size:



**Full frontal/passport**  
(head facing camera)







## EMPLOYMENT START DATE

YOU will choose your requested start date. Consider:

- Your permission is not official until you have your card in hand, and the start date has arrived
- OPT applications may take 90 days, sometime longer, to be approved
- You absolutely cannot work until:
  - The date has been approved, and has arrived, and
  - you have your card in hand

*General guidelines:*

- *Apply early to be able to select your ideal 12-month work time in the 14-month window!*
- *Select a Monday start date*
- *Sometimes, choosing a later date is better.*



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# MAILING YOUR APPLICATION

~~U.S. Postal Service Deliveries:~~

~~USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036~~

For Courier or Express Deliveries:

**USCIS  
Attn: NFB AOS  
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S  
Suite 100  
Phoenix, AZ 85034**



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## RESTRICTIONS ON OPT STUDENTS:

### ■ 90 DAY UNEMPLOYMENT LIMIT:

- During OPT, maintaining your F-1 status properly depends on employment and reporting of that employment. You may not be unemployed more than 90 days in total during your 12 months of OPT.
  - Time spent outside the U.S. is counted if you do not have a job.
  - >90 days of unemployment can affect future immigration benefits
  - 150 days aggregate unemployment limit if continuing to STEM OPT
  - At 90 days of unemployment, the U.S. government expects you to depart the U.S.

### ■ LIMITATIONS ON STUDY:

- Post-completion and STEM OPT students cannot study, except part-time, and non-degree
- If you enter a new degree program, transfer schools, attend school more than half-time – your OPT and F-1 status will end at UCCS.

*The U.S. government considers a post-completion OPT student to be a ‘worker’ – they must be employed, full-time, and (basically) should not study.*



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## SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

- During OPT, you are eligible – and required – to have a social security number.
- You may apply for an SSN with your OPT application (on the I-765 form), if you wish
- Otherwise - find the nearest SSN office (Social Security Administration) in Google, there is an SSA office finder.
- If you already have an SSN from prior employment, do not apply for a new one.
- Take your passport with I-94, I-20, and your EAD card (you cannot apply until you have an EAD card and the start date is reached).
- Complete the SS application form.
- You may begin working (following all OPT rules) while waiting on an SSN.







## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

While on OPT, you are still an F-1 student with UCCS. Reporting is REQUIRED within 10 days of ANY change:

Report the following, in email to your international student advisor:

1. Your legal name, UCCS ID, and current address (not a PO Box)
2. Degree major your OPT is based on (level, and major)
3. EAD Card start and end dates
4. How the employment reported is directly related to your degree in detail
5. Employer/Company/Business name
6. Employer's EIN
7. Job Title
8. Start and end (if known) dates of employment
9. Hours per week
10. Employer/Company/Business address (where you actually work)
11. Employer/Company/Business address (if your hiring/supervisor is located elsewhere)
12. Supervisor's name and contact information (phone number and email address)

***\*\*Make sure you check your UCCS email account often!\*\****

***\*\*Send copies of your OPT documents – receipt, approval, EAD card front and back, and mailer\*\****



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## DOCUMENTING your EMPLOYMENT

For any job you have on OPT, you need a 'letter of employment' from your employer. This letter should be on letterhead paper (not a copy), and have the following information:

1. Your name
2. Your job title, work location, and duties
3. The start date of your employment (and end date, if relevant)
4. Number of hours to be worked per week
5. Supervisor's name and contact information

**NOTE:** This letter will be important for you to have to document your job(s) if the U.S. government ever has a question. It is also a necessary document to carry if you travel during OPT.

Send a copy to your international student adviser with your OPT reporting.

Also, keep your pay records, work schedules, etc. – ANYTHING that will help prove your OPT employment was legitimate.



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## EMPLOYMENT RULES

### What work can you do on regular OPT?

- **Any legal work** related to YOUR field and level of study
  - Paid, unpaid, contract, temp
  - Full-time or multiple part-time
  - Job title **doesn't** matter...
  - Nature of work **does**
- No job offer needed to apply!
  - Keep in mind, that for STEM OPT you do need a job, and it must be FT, paid, documented, E-Verify, and genuine employment (no unpaid work, no volunteering).



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## TRAVEL and RE-ENTRY DURING OPT

During OPT, you can travel outside the U.S. and be readmitted to begin or resume employment, if:

- You present a valid I-20 signed by your International Student Advisor signed within 6 months (request a new I-20 with your employer info on it if possible)
  - You present an unexpired EAD card;
  - You are returning to begin or resume employment;
  - You can present a letter of employment from your employer;
  - Your passport is valid 6+ months in the future
  - You present a valid unexpired visa.
- ❖ IF YOU ARE ON OPT AND DO NOT HAVE EMPLOYMENT, TRAVEL OUT OF THE U.S. IS NOT RECOMMENDED!
- ❖ TRAVEL BEFORE YOUR OPT IS APPROVED IS USUALLY A BAD IDEA!



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## STEM Extension

Students in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics fields may be eligible for an extension of their approved OPT:

- STEM extensions are for an additional 24 months
- STEM extensions are limited to two in your lifetime
- Another full (slightly different) application and payment for the extension is required.
- Students applying for STEM extension must have employment with an E-Verify employer (employment info is required on the application)
- Your employer has obligations on your STEM application and reporting during your employment
- A ‘training plan’ with detailed information about your job, duties, training objectives is required
- To be eligible, your major **MUST** be listed on the official ICE list of STEM majors
- Additional reporting from you is required during the 24 months, including evaluations of your progress
- Part-time work, Volunteer work, work for non E-Verify employer, work for self – **NOT ELIGIBLE FOR STEM EXTENSION!**



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## STEM Extension

### How to apply:

1. Complete the STEM OPT Request Form
2. Complete (with employer) I-983 Training plan – do not complete the evaluations
3. Submit both of above to international student adviser for review
4. Revise as necessary
5. Complete I-765 once more, for STEM OPT (slightly different)
6. International student adviser will issue I-20 if eligible
7. Send in the complete packet (including degree proof), scan for yourself and for advisor
8. Can work up to 180 additional days while waiting



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# Finding a job

- Start early – Do not wait to begin looking!
- Network- Faculty, staff, colleagues
- Build a great resume
- Develop your interviewing skills, hand-shake skills, eye contact
- Be prepared for ‘the usual questions’
- Be prepared to talk about your status, OPT, H-1B (if relevant)
- Understand U.S. job culture – dress, schedules, timeliness, deadlines
- Research the employer BEFORE the interview and have good questions for them
- Be persistent, polite, positive, and patient!



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# Finding a job

- Use your UCCS resources:
  - Career Center
  - Resources in your college
  - IA international student adviser (to explain OPT)
- Attend events:
  - STEM Job Fair
  - Job fairs in Denver, elsewhere
- Networking!!! Follow-up, be dependable, and be a great candidate!



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# More questions?

Be sure to contact your international student adviser with any further questions, and to schedule an appointment when you have your application complete!



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