Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Online Workshop
What is OPT?

- Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a type of employment authorization approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for eligible F-1 students interested in engaging in employment in the U.S. directly related to their major field of study after their degree completion.

- F-1 students are eligible for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree level achieved.

- Applicants do not need an employment offer to apply for OPT.
Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible, F-1 students:

- Must have maintained valid F-1 status for at least one academic year

- Must **not** have had 12-months of OPT authorization for the same degree level

- Must **not** have accrued 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization for the same degree level
  - Part-time CPT authorization does not affect OPT eligibility.
  - Heavy CPT usage (either part-time or full-time) can cause your OPT application to be subject to additional scrutiny.

- Must be completing a UCLA degree program in the next 90 days

- Must **not** have completed a UCLA degree program more than 60 days ago
When To Apply

Students may request an OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center as early as 90 days before their program completion date (as confirmed on your Verification of Degree Completion Form).

It is highly recommended that students submit their OPT I-20 request to the Dashew Center at least 3 months before a student’s requested OPT start date.

USCIS requires approximately 3-5 months to approve an OPT application.
How To Apply

Application Process

STEP 1: Complete the OPT Online Workshop
STEP 2: Pay the $40 Dashew Center OPT Administrative Processing Fee
STEP 3: Request an OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center
STEP 4: Receive OPT I-20 from the Dashew Center via FedEx
STEP 5: Prepare and complete OPT application forms and supporting documents
STEP 6: Mail OPT application to USCIS for processing
To request an OPT I-20, please:

- Update your email address in MyUCLA (make sure that you will have access to this email address after graduation, because it will be listed in your F-1 SEVIS record and used to create your SEVP Portal account)

And email the following to dcissf1unit@saonet.ucla.edu:

- $40 OPT Administrative Processing Fee – Paid Online (copy of email payment confirmation)
- OPT I-20 Request Form
- Verification of Degree Completion Form

Your OPT I-20 will be issued within 10 business days and mailed to your address (as indicated on your OPT I-20 Request form) via FedEx service, free of charge.
You must choose your OPT start date to request your new OPT I-20.

Please indicate your requested OPT start date on your OPT I-20 Request form.
Students must choose their OPT start date at the time they request their OPT I-20.

A requested OPT start date can be as early as 1 day after the program completion date and up to 60 days after the program completion date.

**NOTE:** Graduate students may set their program completion date to their defense date, filing date, or the official quarter end date.
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<thead>
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<th>Degree Completion</th>
<th>Program End Date</th>
<th>OPT Start Date Window</th>
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<td>03/20/2020</td>
<td>03/21/2020 – 05/19/2020</td>
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Select any date within this period as your OPT Start Date.
Application Timeline

Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date

Program Completion date

90 days

Program Completion date
Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date.

Program Completion date

90 days

Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period.

60 days

60 days

Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date.
Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date

Program Completion date

Apply up to 90 days before Program Completion date

Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period

OPT End Date

12 months
Apply up to 3 months before Program Completion date

Program Completion date

90 days

Applied up to 3 months before Program Completion date

Requested OPT start date must fall within the 60-day grace period

12 months

Grace period: Students may remain in the U.S. but may not continue employment

Students must depart the U.S., transfer to another school or change visa status by this date

OPT End Date

60 days
Verification of Degree Completion

This form must be signed by an Academic Counselor or Student Affairs Officer (SAO).

Your Academic Counselor or SAO must confirm your expected program completion date.

Electronic signatures will be accepted.

Undergraduate students must be enrolled in at least one degree-required course taken on campus during their final quarter.

UCLA
Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars

VERIFICATION OF DEGREE COMPLETION

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide F-1 students an opportunity to gain practical experience in their field of study. Students may apply for OPT as early as 90 days before the completion date of their degree program. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) considers a student’s completion date as the date the degree requirements are completed, not the date that students participate in their commencement ceremony. Graduate students may use their defense date, thesis date, or the actual quarter and date as their completion date. Graduate students may not continue to work or receive funding/financial support from their department after their completion date.

Student’s Name: ____________________________

Last Name: ____________________________

First Name: ____________________________

UCLA ID #: ____________________________

Date of Birth: ____________________________

Month: ______ Day: ______ Year: ______

TO BE COMPLETED BY ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT

I verify that the student is expected to complete their degree requirements by:

__________________________

Month: ______ Day: ______ Year: ______

Academic Term: ____________________________

Academic Program / Major: ____________________________

Degree to be awarded at time of completion: ☐ Bachelor’s ☐ Master’s ☐ Doctorate

Student’s Cumulative GPA: ____________________________

Number of Units Currently Completed: ____________________________

Additional Comments:

Name of Student Affairs Officer (SAO) or Academic Counselor: ____________________________

Signature of SAO or Academic Counselor: ____________________________

School / Department: ____________________________

Phone / Extension: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
What does the OPT Administrative Processing Fee cover?

The DCISS OPT Administrative Processing Fee pays for systems required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to maintain a student’s F-1 SEVIS record during their OPT period.

SEVIS maintenance fees are covered for currently enrolled UCLA students through enrollment fees. Since students will not be enrolled at UCLA during their OPT period, they will be charged an OPT Administrative Processing Fee by DCISS, as SEVIS record maintenance is still required during a student’s OPT and STEM OPT Extension period to allow DCISS to process F-1 benefits such as travel authorization, I-20 requests, STEM OPT Extension and Cap Gap requests, and OPT employment and address updates.

Students are required to pay the DCISS OPT Administrative Processing Fee each time they apply for Post-Completion OPT or STEM OPT Extension.
The DCISS OPT Administrative Processing Fee for the initial 12-Month Post-Completion OPT application is $40.00

To Pay the fee:

- Log in to your DCISS account
- Click on the ‘Pay’ link for ‘F-1 OPT: Initial 12-Months’
OPT Administrative Processing Fee

- Follow the instructions on the payment site to pay the OPT Administrative Processing Fee by debit or credit card.

- To review your payment submission, click on ‘My Payments’ and a record of your payment submission will appear.

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Payment History

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<td>$40.00</td>
<td>Initial 12-Month Fee</td>
<td>10/1/2016 11:15AM</td>
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• Receipt of your payment will be sent to your email address from UCLA Corporate Financial Services.

• A copy of your payment receipt is required for your OPT I-20 Request.
After you submit your OPT I-20 Request documents to the Dashew Center via email, an F-1 Counselor will issue your new OPT I-20 and send it to you via FedEx (to the mailing address you indicated on your OPT I-20 Request form).

Once you receive your new OPT I-20, please sign the bottom of page 1 of the OPT I-20 and make a copy of pages 1 and 2 to include with your OPT application to send to USCIS for processing.

Prepare your OPT application for shipment to USCIS by following the [OPT Application: Preparation and Mailing Instructions](#).

- USCIS must receive your OPT application within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issue date (as indicated on page 1 of your OPT I-20, next to your F-1 Counselor’s signature)
OPT Application Materials (to send to USCIS)

- **I-765 Form**

- **2 U.S. style passport photos** – Photos must have been taken within 3 months of your OPT application submission. Write your name and SEVIS ID number on back of each photo.

- **$410 check or money order made payable to ‘U.S. Department of Homeland Security’** – Write your date of birth and SEVIS ID number on the front of the check in the memo section

- **1 copy of your I-94 Admission Record**
  - Electronic I-94: Print record from [CBP I-94 website](#)
  - OR Paper I-94: Copy both front and back sides

- **1 copy of the most recent U.S. entry stamp in your passport**

- **1 copy of passport biographical page**

- **1 copy of pages 1 and 2 of OPT I-20**

- **1 copy of all CPT I-20s (if applicable)**

- **1 copy of any previous F-1 I-20s and/or J-1 DS-2019s with SEVIS ID numbers that are different than your current SEVIS ID (if applicable)**

- **1 copy of any other previous U.S. employment authorization documents (e.g. EAD card), if applicable**
Please type and print the I-765 Form, or if completing by hand, use black ink only!
Select “Initial permission to accept employment”
Provide your full legal name as shown on your passport

Provide all other names you have ever used, including aliases, maiden name, and nicknames used on legal documents
• This address must be an address in the U.S.
• Your EAD card will be shipped to the address you provide here.
• This mailing address must be valid for at least 4 months into the future from your OPT application submission date to USCIS.
• This address may be a residential, commercial, or P.O. Box address.

If you listed a ‘U.S. Mailing Address’ that is NOT your current, physical address, select “No,” provide the name of someone who resides at that address in the ‘In Care of Name’ field, 5.a., and complete #7.a – 7.d.

This address will determine which USCIS filing location to send your application (See Slide 45 for details).
If you answered “No” for Question #6, please provide your physical address here.
If you have ever applied for benefits from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, you may have an A-Number (also known as a USCIS-Number).

F-1 students usually do not have a USCIS Online Account Number.
Check “No” if you have never applied for an EAD from USCIS
Check “Yes” if you have previously applied for an EAD. You must provide copies of your previous EADs
This question does not apply to previous on-campus employment or CPT

Answer #10 and 11

10. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

11. Marital Status
   - Single
   - Married
   - Divorced
   - Widowed

12. Have you previously filed Form I-765?
   - Yes
   - No
If you currently have a Social Security Number (SSN), check ‘Yes.’

If you do not have a Social Security Number (SSN), check ‘No.’

13.a. Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

NOTE: If you answered “No” to Item Number 13.a., skip to Item Number 14. If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 13.a., provide the information requested in Item Number 13.b.

13.b. Provide your Social Security number (SSN) (if known).
If you would like to apply for a new or replacement Social Security Number card with your OPT application, please check ‘Yes’ for Questions #14 & 15 and complete #16.a. - 17.b.

- If you are applying for a replacement Social Security Card, you will retain the same Social Security Number.

You will receive your Social Security Card in the mail 2 weeks after you receive your EAD card.

Check ‘No’ for Questions #14 & 15 if you do not want a new or replacement Social Security Card and skip #16.a. – 17.b.
List all countries of citizenship, as applicable.

Please submit copies of all country passports if you have more than one country of citizenship.

Make sure your Date of Birth is in the correct format: MONTH/DAY/YEAR (01/31/1998 not 31/01/1998)

List the name of the country as it was named when you were born, even if its name has changed.

Provide your birth city/town/village and state/province.
**Page 3**

### I-765 Form

#### Information About Your Last Arrival in the United States

21.a. Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)  
21.b. Passport Number of Your Most Recently Issued Passport  
21.c. Travel Document Number (if any)  
21.d. Country That Issued Your Passport or Travel Document  
21.e. Expiration Date for Passport or Travel Document (mm/dd/yyyy)  
22. Date of Your Last Arrival Into the United States, On or About (mm/dd/yyyy)  
23. Place of Your Last Arrival Into the United States  
24. Immigration Status at Your Last Arrival (for example, B-2 visitor, F-1 student, or no status)  
25. Your Current Immigration Status or Category (for example, B-2 visitor, F-1 student, parolee, deferred action, or no status or category)  
26. Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)  

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**Enter the information directly from your passport**

Enter your I-94 Number here.

This should match the country of citizenship on your I-20

Leave blank

Enter immigration status at your last arrival and current immigration status (for most applicants, this should be ‘F-1 Student’)  

The name of the Port of Entry city from your most recent entry can be found on your most recent admission stamp or Travel History  

You can find your SEVIS number on the top left side of your current I-20
Electronic I-94 Admission Record

Most Recent I-94

Admission (I-94) Record Number: 123456789 11
Most Recent Date of Entry: 2017 January 02
Class of Admission: F1
Admit Until Date: D/S
Details provided on the I-94 Information Form:

Last/Surname: BRUIN
First (Given) Name: JOE
Birth Date: 1996 January 01
Passport Number: A123456789
Country of Issuance: Bruinland

Retrieve a copy of your Electronic I-94 Admission Record on the CBP Website:

https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home
Sample

Most Recent U.S. Entry Stamp

Date of Last Entry to the U.S.: JAN 02 2017
Place of Last Entry: LAX
27. Eligibility Category. Refer to the Who May File Form I-765 section of the Form I-765 Instructions to determine the appropriate eligibility category for this application. Enter the appropriate letter and number for your eligibility category below (for example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii)).

Use the code (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT

Skip questions 28 – 31.b.
Select 1.a. to indicate that you have read and understood the questions.
Applicant's Declaration and Certification

Copies of any documents I have submitted are exact photocopies of unaltered, original documents, and I understand that USCIS may require that I submit original documents to USCIS at a later date. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information from any and all of my records that USCIS may need to determine my eligibility for the immigration benefit that I seek.

I furthermore authorize release of information contained in this application, in supporting documents, and in my USCIS records, to other entities and persons where necessary for the administration and enforcement of U.S. immigration law.

I understand that USCIS may require me to appear for an appointment to take my biometrics (fingerprints, photograph, and/or signature) and, at that time, if I am required to provide biometrics, I will be required to sign an oath reaffirming that:

1) I reviewed and understood all of the information contained in, and submitted with, my application; and

2) All of this information was complete, true, and correct at the time of filing.

I certify, under penalty of perjury, that all of the information in my application and any document submitted with it were provided or authorized by me, that I reviewed and understand all of the information contained in, and submitted with, my application and that all of this information is complete, true, and correct.

Applicant's Signature

7.a. Applicant's Signature

7.b. Date of Signature (mm/dd/yyyy)

NOTE TO ALL APPLICANTS: If you do not completely fill out this application or fail to submit required documents listed in the Instructions, USCIS may deny your application.
Part 6 needs to be completed ONLY if:

- You have previously had other SEVIS IDs (different than your current SEVIS ID)
- You have ever been authorized for CPT or OPT

If neither of these apply to you, leave Part 6 blank and you are done with the I-765
If you have been previously authorized for CPT:

If you have had previous CPT authorization, please list all periods of part-time or full-time CPT, the appropriate degree objective, the employer’s name, and dates.

Please submit copies of any/all CPT I-20s.

Copy this ‘Page Number, Part Number, and Item Number’ for previous CPT authorization.
If you were previously authorized for OPT:

- If you have previously been authorized for OPT, provide your USCIS # (located on your previous EAD card) here.

Please list any periods of authorized part-time or full-time OPT, and the appropriate degree objective(s).

Please submit copies of any/all EAD cards.

(you may need to contact your previous schools if you are missing any of this information)

Copy this ‘Page Number, Part Number, and Item Number’ for previous OPT authorization:
If you previously attended UCLA or another U.S. institution in F, J or M status and were issued a SEVIS ID number that is different from your current SEVIS ID:

Copy this ‘Page Number, Part Number, and Item Number’ for previous SEVIS IDs

Please list all previously used SEVIS numbers from all previous F/J/M programs in the U.S., including high school, short stays, community colleges, or previous I-20s at UCLA.

Please submit copies of those I-20s and DS-2019s.

(you may need to contact your previous school(s) if you are missing any of this information)
You have completed the I-765 Form!

Review all the information on the form for accuracy. You must submit ALL 7 pages of the I-765 to USCIS.

Make a copy of your completed I-765 application to keep for your records, in case there is a problem with the application.
USCIS accepts the following payment methods for the $410 OPT application fee:

- **Personal Check**: Use a check from your personal debit/bank account. Funds will be drawn directly from your personal bank account.

  Note: Providing a personal check with insufficient funds or a Canadian check will result in a denial of your application.

- **Cashier’s Check**: Go to your local bank (where you have your debit account) and request a Cashier’s Check. A Cashier’s Check is a draft guarantee drawn from your bank’s own funds. Your bank will withdraw funds from your personal account to create the Cashier’s Check.

- **Money Order**: A money order can be purchased at a U.S. post office, Western Union or CVS/pharmacy. Cash will need to be exchanged to obtain a money order for a specified amount.

  **Note**: DCISS recommends using a Personal Check or Cashier’s Check. A Personal Check or Cashier’s Check can be tracked, and are more secure payment methods since they are guaranteed by a bank.
Note: Do NOT write on the back of your Personal Check or Cashier's Check.

Write your Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY) and your SEVIS ID # in the memo section.
U.S. Style Passport Photos

Photo Requirements

- Photo must be new and recent (taken within 3 months of your OPT application submission)
- Photo cannot be the same photo used for your F-1 Visa or Passport
- Photo must be 2 inches by 2 inches
- White background only
- Neutral expression only
- Eyes and ears must be visible
- No glasses or eyewear
- Photos must be on photo stock papers and pre-cut (to 2 inches by 2 inches)

Recommended locations to have your photo taken:

Campus Photo Studio
Ackerman Union A-Level
310-206-8433

FedEx Office Ship & Ship Center
Westwood Location:
10924 Weyburn Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90024 • 310-443-5501

Wilshire South Location:
1520 Westwood Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90024 • 310-475-0789

Write LAST NAME, First Name and SEVIS ID Number on back side of photos.
Once you have prepared all of your OPT application forms and supporting documents using the OPT Application: Preparation and Mailing Instructions, please ship your application to a USCIS Lockbox location.

- USCIS filing locations depend on the U.S. state of the address you provided as your ‘Physical Address’ (Item # 5 or 7) on your I-765 Form. OPT application processing times are the same for both locations.

- For USCIS filing locations, please see this table.

- Please mail your OPT application in the order listed above to the USCIS Lockbox facility that processes applications for your state.

- Please ship your application to USCIS using a courier service with mail tracking.

- If you need USCIS’ phone number to process your OPT application shipment, please use: 800-375-5283
After OPT Application Submission to USCIS

- Applicants can check the status of their OPT application online using the receipt number in their I-797 Notice of Action Receipt Notice: USCIS Case Status: [https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)

- Applicants will receive a Notice of Approval letter from USCIS in approximately 3-4 months from the date their OPT application was received by USCIS.

- Applicants will receive their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card approximately 3-5 months from the date the OPT application was received by USCIS.

- Once your OPT application has been approved and your OPT start date has been reached, you will receive an email from SEVP with a link to create a SEVP Portal account. Follow the instructions provided in the email to create your account. If you are locked out of your SEVP Portal account, email [OPT@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:OPT@saonet.ucla.edu) for assistance.
After you receive your EAD card, submit PDF copies of the front and back of your card to 
OPT@saonet.ucla.edu (include your UID in your email)

Note: You may only begin employment once you have physically received your EAD Card and your EAD Card ‘Valid From’ date has been reached.
Students may not begin employment until they have received their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card and the start date as indicated on the EAD card has been reached.

Students may not continue working beyond the end date of the EAD card.

**Exception:** Students with a timely filed, pending 24-month OPT STEM Extension application or a valid Cap-Gap I-20 may continue employment beyond their OPT end date without receiving a new EAD card.
• Students on OPT have a total of **90 calendar days** (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment time during their 12-month OPT period that begins on the start date of their EAD card.

• OPT employment must be directly related to the student’s degree program/major field of study (employment directly related to minor fields of study is not allowed).

• OPT employment must be appropriate for the student’s degree level.
OPT Employment Types

- **Paid Employment:** A student may work part time (at least 20 hours per week), or full-time.

- **Multiple Employers:** A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student’s degree program. Employment for 1 employer must be at least 20 hours per week.

- **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists):** A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artist, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

- **Work for Hire:** This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.
OPT Employment Types

- **Self-Employed Business Owner:** A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s degree program. Employment must be at least 20 hours per week.

- **Employment Through an Agency or Consulting firm:** A student on OPT must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.

- **Unpaid Employment:** A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any U.S. labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student’s employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.
OPT Reporting Requirements

After you receive your EAD:

Submit Copy of EAD Card to DCISS

- Submit a copy of the front and back sides of your EAD card to DCISS by email: OPT@saonet.ucla.edu

F-1 students on OPT are required to report the following information during their OPT period within 10 days of any change through the SEVP Portal:

1. OPT Employment Status
   - Job title and description of how the job is related to your degree
   - Start and end dates of employment
   - Part-time (up to 20 hours/week) or Full-time (more than 20 hours/week) employment
   - Company name, address and phone number

2. Change of Contact Information
   - Change of residential address or U.S. telephone number
Cap Gap I-20: Transition to H-1B

- Cap Gap – a period in which a student’s F-1 status and OPT authorization is automatically extended to bridge the gap between the end of their F-1 status and the start of their H-1B status.

- The most common situation occurs when a student’s OPT ends in the spring or summer and their F-1 status expires 60 days later, leaving a gap of several months before the start of the student’s H-1B status on October 1.

- The Cap Gap I-20 will automatically extend a student’s F-1 status and OPT authorization without requiring a new EAD card.
The Cap Gap is available to F-1 students in all fields of study engaging in OPT with pending or approved cap-subject H-1B petitions.

Submit the following to DCISS to request a Cap-Gap I-20:
1. Completed I-20 Request Form
2. Copy of H-1B Receipt Notice or Approval Notice from USCIS
3. Copy of front and back of EAD Card
4. Report any/all OPT employment through the SEVP Portal
5. Current Shipping Address with Postal Code
   - Select Preferred Delivery Method:
     Option 1: Regular USPS Mail (no mail tracking or expedited delivery services, free-of-charge, 3-4 week delivery timeframe)
     Option 2: FedEx Express Mail (tracking and express delivery services, must provide DCISS with a FedEx Account # to cover shipping fees)
       Open a FedEx Account #:
       • Online: www.fedex.com
       • In-Person: Go to a local FedEx Office location to open an account
F-1 students who have applied for OPT are able to travel overseas and return to the U.S. in F-1 status as long as they have the required documents for re-entry:

**Documents required to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status BEFORE degree completion indicated on OPT I-20**:  
- Valid Passport  
- Valid F-1 Visa  
- Endorsed OPT I-20 (each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.)

**Documents required to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status AFTER degree completion date indicated on OPT I-20**:  
- Valid Passport, Valid F-1 Visa, Endorsed OPT I-20 (each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.)  
- EAD Card  
- Proof of Employment or Offer Letter (Verification document from an employer verifying your job title, job duties, duration and start date of employment written on company letterhead)
Visa Status During OPT

- F-1 students engaging in OPT will still hold F-1 status in the U.S.

- DCISS will still maintain and update an F-1 student’s SEVIS record during their approved OPT period.

- F-1 students may continue to request services from DCISS such as advising appointments, support letters and travel authorization during their approved OPT period.

- F-1 students engaging in OPT are still required to obtain a travel signature from DCISS on their I-20 to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 status after traveling abroad. Each travel authorization signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of entry to the U.S.
How early can I apply for OPT?
You may submit your OPT application to DCISS as early as the submission date indicated for the graduation term in the OPT Workshop (see Slide 11). F-1 students may submit applications to USCIS as early as 90 days before their degree completion date. It is highly recommended that students submit their OPT application to DCISS 4 months before a student’s requested OPT start date to accommodate USCIS processing times.

How long will it take USCIS to approve my OPT application?
USCIS requires approximately 3 - 5 months to approve an OPT application. Click here to see current USCIS processing times (see ‘Form I-765’ for ‘Potomac Service Center’).

How do I choose my OPT start date?
Your OPT start date can be as early as the day after your degree completion date, or as late as 60 days after your degree completion date (see Slide 5).

What if I submitted my OPT application, but will not be completing my degree as expected?
Contact the DCISS front desk to schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor for more details.
**What if I move before receiving the EAD card?**

You may risk losing your EAD card in the mail if you file a change of address with USCIS after submitting your OPT application to USCIS for processing. Please note that the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) does not forward federal mail, even if you request mail forwarding services from USPS. We recommend that you provide an address for your OPT application that will be valid for at least 4 months from your application submission date.

**Can I travel abroad while my OPT application is pending?**

It depends:

- **Yes**, if you have received your OPT application I-797 Notice of Action Receipt Notice from USCIS, your re-entry date to the U.S. is before the degree completion date stated on your OPT I-20 and you have all of the required re-entry documents.

- **No**, if your re-entry date to the U.S. is after the degree completion date stated on your OPT I-20.

DCISS does not recommend that you travel while your OPT application is pending, as it may result in a Request for Evidence from USCIS, which will delay the processing of your application, or a denial.
FAQ

Which documents do I need if I want travel overseas and re-enter the U.S. after my OPT I-20 End Date?

Valid Passport
Valid F-1 Visa
OPT I-20 Endorsed for travel by DCISS
  (each travel signature is valid for 6 months from the date it was last signed and must be valid at the time of re-entry to the U.S.)
Employment Verification or Offer Letter

My F-1 visa expired. Can I travel abroad during OPT?

Yes, you may travel abroad, but you must apply for a new F-1 visa from an overseas U.S. Embassy or Consulate, as you will require a valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. in valid F-1 OPT status.

Please note that it may be more difficult to obtain a new F-1 visa while on OPT, especially if you have not secured OPT employment. Please expect extended wait times for F-1 visa application processing.
FAQ

Who determines if my OPT employment is related to my degree?
U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leaves this discretion to students to determine. Should DHS audit your OPT employment and find that your employment is not related to your degree, you will be in violation of your F-1 status.

What if my employment is not related to my degree?
Working in a field that is not related to your degree (e.g., major) is considered unauthorized employment and is a serious violation of your F-1 status, which may result in the accrual of Unlawful Presence and/or being denied future immigration benefits in the U.S.

Can I begin employment before receiving my EAD card?
No, you may not engage in any employment in the U.S. until you have received your EAD card and your OPT start date has been reached.

What do I do if I lost my EAD card?
You must apply for a replacement EAD card from USCIS, which will require a new I-765 form, $410.00 filing fee, and supporting documents. Contact DCISS to schedule an appointment to apply for a replacement EAD Card.
When does my 90-day unemployment period start?
Your 90-day unemployment period begins on the first day of unemployment after your OPT start date (as stated on your EAD).

What should I do if I am approaching my 90th day of unemployment?
We recommend the following options: transfer to another school, depart the U.S., or change your visa status. For other options, please consult with an immigration attorney.

Q15: Where do I report my OPT employment information?
Answer: Report your OPT employment status through the SEVP Portal.

Q16: Where do I report my change of address or phone number during OPT?
Answer: Please report any changes in address or phone number within 10 days of the change through the SEVP Portal.

Q17: What happens after my OPT ends?
Answer: After your OPT ends, you have an additional 60-day grace period to: transfer to another school, depart the U.S. or change your visa status. For other options, please consult with an immigration attorney.
Important Reminder

Questions?
Schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor by contacting our Virtual Dashew Center Front Desk
M – F | 9AM – 11:30AM, 1:30PM -4:00PM