



Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Checklist

This checklist is to be used for F-1 students applying for the initial 12 months of post-completion OPT. The application process is two sequential steps: the first step is to submit materials to the Office of International Affairs (OIA); the second step is submitting a complete OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Step 1: Office of International Affairs (OIA) materials

- [Verification of Completion Form](#) signed by your academic department (for post-completion OPT applicants only)
- [Form I-765](#) Application for Employment Authorization (refer to the [OIA OPT website](#) for specific instructions)
An OIA International Adviser will review this application and let you know if edits need to be made.
- Submit the [Online Request Form for F-1 OPT Work Authorization](#) (attach the above; processing could take up to 5 business days).

After submitting, you will receive an email from OIA once your new I-20 with an OPT recommendation has been processed and is ready for pick-up. Along with the I-20, you will also receive a print-out of your Curricular Practical Training (CPT) history.

Step 2: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) materials

- \$410 Application Fee Payment; personal check, money order, or cashier's check completed as follows:
Payable To: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two (2) new passport photos. Photos must meet [U.S. photograph requirements](#)
Write your name on the back of photos.
- Reviewed and updated [Form I-765](#) Application for Employment Authorization (all 7 pages printed single-sided)
Supporting Documents - **Photocopies** of the following documents (Note: Do NOT send the originals):
 - New I-20 (with OPT recommendation on the second page) that has been:
Signed and dated in the "Student Attestation" section (bottom of first page)
Issued no more than 30 days before USCIS will receive the entire OPT application
 - 1st /Oldest UChicago I-20 you have for current program
 - CPT Employment printout (received with new I-20)
 - Passport: photograph and biographical information (color photocopy recommended)
 - Most recent I-94 Arrival record (print online from: www.cbp.gov/i94)
 - Previously-issued EAD cards (if applicable)
- Recommended:* [Form G-1145](#) for E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
In order to receive electronic notification when your application is received by USCIS and other application related updates.

Step 3: OPT Application Packet Review

Once your OPT packet has been assembled, you can feel free to attend one of our [OPT packet review sessions](#) to walk through each part of the application before mailing it to USCIS. A recording will be posted to our website. Or you may contact your OIA adviser to review it via email or during their QQA (Quick Question Advising) hours.

Step 4: OPT Application Packet Mailing Instructions

1. Make a copy of the of the entire application for your records.
2. Mail application packet to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox Facility (listed below).
3. We recommend mailing in a way that allows tracking/confirmation of delivery (e.g. FedEx, UPS, USPS, etc.).

Mail your application to:

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| If mailing via the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) : (requesting certified mail highly recommended) | If shipping via Courier Service: (FedEx, UPS, DHL , etc...) (tracking information highly recommended) |
| USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680 | USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517 |

TIMING

We recommend that you mail the complete OPT application to USCIS as soon as possible (within 2 weeks from the DSO signature date on the I-20 with OPT recommendation). This is because your application will be denied if USCIS does not receive it within 30 days of the DSO signature date.

Also note that USCIS will not accept the application earlier than 90 days before your I-20 program end date, nor later than 60 days after your I-20 program end date. Please plan accordingly.

TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS AFTER APPLYING FOR OPT

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| Traveling before program end date listed on I-20: | You can travel as a regular F-1 student before your I-20 end date. |
| Traveling after program end date listed on I-20: | After the program end date listed on your I-20, you will need your EAD to re-enter the country. If you leave the U.S. before you receive the card, and your OPT is approved, you would need to arrange to obtain the card for re-entry. |
| Traveling while on OPT: | OPT is a continuation of your F-1 Student status. As an F-1 Student, you can enter and exit the country as long as you have all required travel documents ; you must have a valid passport, valid F1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the OPT EAD card. |
| My F-1 student visa has expired. Can I still renew it? | To re-enter the U.S. from abroad, you will need a valid visa. Review the OIA Travel page for specific information regarding visa renewal. |

Contact the Office of International Affairs (OIA) if:

- You need to cancel your OPT application
- You do not complete your program as planned
- Your application has been pending beyond the normal processing time of up to 5 months

Estimated processing time range:

The estimated time range for USCIS to process OPT applications is 3-5 months from the day the application was received.

USCIS will mail an official [Form I-797 Notice of Action: Receipt Notice](#) approximately 2-4 weeks after receiving the application. This notice will confirm official receipt of the application by USCIS and indicate a case number which can be used to track the application using the [USCIS Case Status](#) website.



After Applying for 12-Months of OPT: Next Steps

Next Steps After Your OPT Application Has Been Mailed to USCIS

- After 2-4 weeks, USCIS will mail an official Form I-797 Notice of Action: Receipt Notice after receiving the application. This notice will confirm official receipt of the application by USCIS and indicate a case number which can be used to track the application using the [USCIS Case Status](#) website. Enter the 13-digit receipt number (found on the receipt notice (I-797) or email from USCIS) to track your application status.
- OPT processing time is 3-5 months but may be longer if additional information is requested by USCIS via an RFE (Request for Evidence).
- After OPT is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card in the mail. You will also receive an email from SEVP to create a [Student Portal Account](#). OIA highly recommends you use this student portal to update your address and employer information. If you encounter issues with the portal, you can submit the [OPT update form](#) on our website instead.
- To ensure you receive important emails, forward your UChicago email account to a different email address (i.e. gmail, Hotmail, etc). To learn how to forward your email, visit the IT Services website ([Service Portal - IT Service Portal \(service-now.com\)](#)), email alumni-support@uchicago.edu or call IT Services at 773.702.5800.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card- Example



Card Validity Dates

(Note: you may not begin working until this start date has been reached)

Simply means this card alone cannot be used as a passport/visa stamp. Refer to Travel Considerations.

Reminders to keep in mind

- Once OPT is approved, it may take a few weeks for your OPT EAD Card to be printed, mailed and received at the address you listed on the [Form I-765](#). Once you receive the EAD Card, make a copy or take photos of it (front and back). If you lose your EAD card, you will have to submit a new application to USCIS.
- You **cannot** start working until you have the physical EAD card and the “Valid From/Start Date” has arrived.
- OPT-eligible employment must be directly related to your area of study and total at least 20 hours per week (you can have one full-time position or several part-time positions adding up to a minimum of 20 hours per week).
- You may accrue up to 90 days of unemployment throughout the entire 12-month period of OPT. Unemployment starts to accrue from the “Valid From/Start Date” on the OPT EAD Card. You can use the 90 days of unemployment at any time during your approved OPT period (i.e. in the beginning or between jobs).

Reporting requirements while on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

In order to maintain F-1 immigration status while on OPT, you must meet the following reporting requirements through the [SEVP student portal](#) or by completing the OIA [OPT Update Form](#) (all must be reported within 10 DAYS of when the change takes place):

- Maintain up-to-date U.S. address and telephone number.
- OPT Employer Name, Address, Dates and Part-time or Full-time employment must be recorded.
- Keep track of active employment vs. unemployment. Update the start and end date for each OPT employer.
- If you are starting a new academic program, changing your status during your approved OPT period, cancelling your OPT contact your [OIA International Student Adviser](#).

Post-Completion OPT Issues

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| I did not receive my receipt notice by mail. How do I get it? | Please follow up with USCIS directly and confirm they have your correct mailing address in their system. To do this, reach out to the USCIS Contact Center or call 1-800-375-5283 (National Customer line). |
| I received a notice from USCIS that I need to send them more information. What do I do? | Contact your OIA International Student Adviser. We will review the request for the additional information and can help you prepare. |
| I received e-mail notification that OPT has been approved, but it has been more than 30 days and I did not receive my OPT card by mail. What do I do? | Please inquire with USCIS directly. To do this, fill out the USCIS Inquiry form or call 1-800-375-5283 (National Customer line). If the card is lost and USCIS cannot simply resend it to you, then you will have to apply for a replacement card. Contact your OIA International Student Adviser for an updated I-20. |
| There is incorrect information on my EAD card. Do I have to get this information fixed? | Incorrect information on your OPT EAD card needs to be fixed. After finding a mistake, try to determine who caused the error. If it was USCIS, then they will correct the EAD card for you without you having to pay a new fee or file a new I-765 application form. Contact USCIS immediately. If you made the mistake (review your OPT application copy), you should plan on filling out a new I-765 form and sending the filing fee once again. Contact your OIA International Adviser. |
| My OPT has been approved and I have my EAD card, however, I did not receive the student email which contains a link and instructions for creating a SEVP student portal account. | Contact your OIA International Adviser. |
| I have been approved for OPT, but I would like to end OPT early. | Please fill out the OIA OPT Update Form , selecting the option "I am ending my OPT and leaving the country. I do not plan to return in F-1 status." |
| I am changing to a new status. What do I need to do? | Please fill out the OIA OPT Update Form , selecting the option "I have changed my immigration status from F-1." |

STEM-OPT Extension

If you have a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in a STEM-eligible field that is currently on the [STEM-Designated Degree Program List](#), you could be eligible to apply for a 24-month STEM extension of your OPT. You must apply for the STEM extension before your current OPT end date (no sooner than 90 days before).

According to [USCIS FAQs](#), a university enrolled in E-Verify under Federal Contractor exceptions may not employ STEM OPT students. The University of Chicago is enrolled in E-Verify under the Federal Contractor exception and is not an eligible employer for students on STEM OPT.