OPT FAQs

1. When should I mail documents to USCIS?
USCIS must receive your request within 30 days of the date the I-20 recommending you for OPT was issued by USCIS and/or within 60 days of your I-20 program end date (whichever date comes first).

2. What documents are required to file with USCIS?
Please refer to the ISSS website for further instructions; required documents can vary depending on whether you are filing by mail or online.

3. How long does it take to process?
USCIS takes on average 90+ days to process the OPT application from the date they receive the application. You should receive three pieces of mail from USCIS, which will be delivered to the address you wrote on the I-765. If you file online you should also have access to electronic versions of these documents on your online account. Keep all mail from USCIS for your official records:

1.) Receipt Notice (I-797): this will arrive, on average, 2-4 weeks from the date USCIS received the application. If you do not get this receipt notice, contact ISSS immediately.
2.) Approval Notice (I-797c): this will arrive, on average, 90 days from the receipted date of the application.
3.) EAD Card: this will arrive, on average, within 2 weeks of the approval notice.

If you get any other mail from USCIS, such as an RFE (Request for Evidence), please contact ISSS immediately for advisement on how to proceed.

Check your Case Status Online: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

4. Can I work during the application process?
No, you cannot work without the EAD card. You must physically have the EAD card in-hand and reach the approved start date on the EAD card before beginning any work. Please note: after the program end date on your I-20 you are no longer authorized for on-campus employment (until you receive an EAD, and only then if the on-campus employment is directly related to your major and meets all the requirements for OPT employment).

5. Can I volunteer during the application process?
Employment on OPT can be paid or unpaid. Therefore, unpaid “volunteering” could be considered employment and you would need to wait for your EAD to begin. Consult an ISSS adviser first before beginning work in any capacity-- paid or unpaid.

6. Can I take any position under OPT?
No, OPT must be related directly to your major and commensurate with your level of education.

7. Can I take multiple positions while on OPT?
Yes, as long as all positions are directly related to your major and commensurate with your level of education.

8. How many hours per week do I need to work?
To be considered fully employed on OPT you must work at least 20 hours per week.
9. What do I need to report to ISSS while I am on OPT?
You must report the following within 10 days of the change:
- **Personal information** (changes of local address, email, and phone number) by updating your demographics in MyUAlbany
- **Employment information** (employer name, address, supervisor contact information, position, and how the employment relates to your major) by submitting a Post Completion Employment Reporting EForm or through the SEVP Portal
- Any **interruptions of employment** (new employment, employer changes, end of employment, etc.) by submitting a Post Completion Employment Reporting EForm or through the SEVP Portal
- **Changes in status** (H1b, Permanent Residency, etc…) by submitting a copy of your I-797 Change of Status approval receipt to ISSS@albany.edu.

10. How can I travel outside of the United States with OPT?
Traveling while an application is pending with USCIS is strongly discouraged. Traveling after OPT is approved is allowed, but it is highly recommend that you have a job offer before traveling. Students must have the following to re-enter the United States: **I-20 signed for travel within the past 6 months, valid passport, valid F-1 visa, valid EAD card.** Proof of employment and/or a job offer is also highly recommended.

11. What is the grace period following the completion of OPT?
You have 60 days to depart the United States, enroll in a new academic program, or change to another non-immigrant status, if you have been employed and maintained status throughout the OPT authorization period.

12. What if I’m unemployed?
Students are allowed a cumulative (total) 90 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT. This includes weekends. Students who exceed 90 days of cumulative unemployment are in violation of status and may be terminated by DHS, auto-terminated by SEVIS, or have future applications for benefits affected (or denied).

13. What do I need to do if I depart the United States?
You must complete a **Departure form** before you leave the United States. This form is on the ISSS Forms page of the website.

14. When do I apply for STEM?
The earliest you can apply for a STEM extension is 90 days before your post-completion EAD expires, and you must apply with USCIS before the EAD expires. Apply through ISSS for an I-20 requesting a STEM extension first.