Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshop - Fall 2023

International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS)
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Overview

- As a student applying for OPT you are responsible for knowing and understanding all federal regulations and policies for OPT and F-1 students prior to applying for OPT. This includes all of the information in this presentation and on our website.

- As international student advisors we provide you this information and answer your questions.

- While on OPT you are still in F-1 student status. You are still responsible for reporting to UAlbany/ISSS for immigration purposes.
Regulatory Information for OPT

• What is OPT?
• Eligibility Requirements
• Filing Period & Requesting a Start Date
• Employment Requirements & Reporting Rules
• What to Know While on Post-Completion OPT
What Is OPT?

- OPT stands for “optional practical training.”
  - OPT authorized students for work/volunteer experience directly related to their major field of study
  - It authorizes “practical training” for the skills/knowledge learned from the program.
- OPT is 12 months of off-campus work authorization granted by the U.S. Government (USCIS). It is available to students who are maintaining active F-1 status.
- Students are eligible to do one year (12 months) of OPT for every successive/higher level of study
  - One year for bachelor’s, one for master's, and one for doctorate. Students are limited to 12 months OPT per degree level.
- Students in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) may under certain circumstances be eligible for a 24-month extension.
- If USCIS approves a student for OPT the student will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) as proof of work authorization.
Eligibility Requirements for OPT

- OPT is a benefit of F-1 status. It is available to F-1 students who meet all eligibility requirements.

The eligibility requirements for OPT include:

1. The student is maintaining an active F-1 status at the time of application.
2. The student is earning his/her degree at a US institution of higher education.
   - Exchange/study abroad or non-degree students are not eligible for OPT.
   - To be eligible for post-completion OPT the student be completing his/her degree program prior to starting the OPT.
3. The student has been enrolled as a full-time student for at least one full academic year.
4. The student will only seek employment directly related to his/her major field of study.
Post-Completion OPT

This presentation is primarily intended for students applying for post-completion OPT (i.e. work authorization following the completion of studies and/or graduation). If you are interested in pre-completion OPT or STEM OPT please consult an ISSS advisor during advisement hours.

Students do not need a job offer to apply for post-completion OPT.

The application is a two step process:

1. The student requests an I-20 from ISSS recommending him/her for post-completion OPT (average processing time is 5-7 business days).
2. The student files an OPT request, including a copy of the new I-20 from ISSS recommending them, to USCIS within the acceptable filing period (average processing time is 90 days or longer).

If a student does not apply and use the 12 months of OPT at the time he/she is eligible to apply the student forfeits their OPT. OPT cannot be “saved for later.”
“What if I’m not sure I’m graduating?”

The following information is for bachelor’s and master’s students ONLY. If you are a PhD student please speak to an ISSS advisor; we will need to assess your situation case-by-case.

Before applying for OPT you must be certain that you will meet all degree requirements (including any pre-requisites from your Admissions letter and the GPA requirement to graduate).

If you do not graduate as planned both your F-1 status and OPT authorization may be jeopardized.

It is the responsibility of the student to meet all degree requirements prior to applying. If you are uncertain of whether you will graduate you should wait until you are certain before you apply.
“What if I don’t graduate?”

If your OPT is still *pending* and you will not graduate as planned you must notify ISSS prior to your I-20 program end date and request an I-20 extension instead. (for most students, the program end date is the last day of final exams, which is December 12, 2023 for the Fall term)

Failure to request an extension from ISSS before the I-20 program end date could result in:

- A loss of your F-1 status, requiring the student to apply for reinstatement (in addition to withdrawing the OPT application).
- Reinstatement applications take 6-8 months or longer which means it may not be approved before you complete your degree, therefore making you ineligible to apply for OPT.

You will also need to withdraw your OPT application from USCIS and you cannot get the filing fee back.

*Reminder: This slide is for bachelor’s and master’s students *ONLY*. If you are a PhD student, please see an ISSS advisor, as we will need to address your situation case-by-case.
“What if I don’t graduate?”

- If your OPT has already been approved prior to the I-20 program end date but you do not graduate you must notify ISSS immediately. Students already approved for post-completion OPT who do not graduate as planned must:
  - complete their degree at the next available opportunity
  - are eligible to work no more than 20 hours per week while continuing to complete coursework
  - Maintain status according to the regulations for post-completion OPT,
    - If you do not work exactly 20 hours per week in work related to the degree earned, you are not “fully employed” and will accumulate unemployment time against the allowed 90 days cumulative employment while on post-completion OPT.
  - Earn their degree prior to applying for a STEM extension

*Reminder: This slide is for bachelor’s and master’s students ONLY. If you are a PhD student, please see an ISSS advisor to address your situation case-by-case.*
Filing Period & Requesting a Start Date
Filing Period for OPT

- The earliest a student may file with USCIS is 90 days before the I-20 program end date and the latest USCIS may accept an application is 60 days after the program end date.

- Additionally, a student must file within 30 days of when ISSS recommends the student for OPT.
  - You can determine this date by looking at the date of issue on page 1 of your new I-20 (next to the advisor’s signature).

- We recommend that you apply as soon as you are eligible to submit an OPT application.

- Please Note: Failure to file within the proper time frames is the most common reason for an F-1 OPT denial.
Filing Period for OPT

➢ To determine the end date of your program (not necessarily the end date on your current I-20):

➢ Master’s/Bachelor’s students: the program end date is the last day of final exams of the semester you are graduating. Ask ISSS for the exact date. (For Fall 2023 it is December 12, 2023)

➢ For thesis/dissertation students: upon consultation with your academic advisor and ISSS, your program end date may be:
  ➢ The date you defend successfully (as long as all other coursework is completed)
  ➢ The date you submit your thesis or dissertation (as long as all other coursework is completed)
  ➢ The last day of final exams during the semester you are graduating

➢ After the program end date the student cannot work on or off campus--paid or unpaid-- until he or she receives an EAD card and reaches the start date approved by USCIS.
Choosing an OPT Start Date

Students may request their OPT employment authorization period to start within 60 days of their program end date.

Example: Students whose program end date is December 12, 2023 may request an OPT start date between December 13, 2023 and February 9, 2024.

When requesting a start date please keep in mind that:

1. You cannot begin work until your OPT is officially approved by USCIS and you have received the EAD card in hand.

2. USCIS takes on average 90 days or more to approve an OPT application.

3. Your 12 months of authorized employment AND 90 days of allotted unemployment time will start counting from the start date on the EAD card.
Requesting an OPT Start Date

While the student “requests” a start date, the USCIS officer adjudicating your case has the authority to approve an actual employment start and end date.

In most cases the dates USCIS approves will match the dates requested by the student.

If USCIS is unable to approve your case by the requested start date you run the risk of losing employment time and possibly accumulating unemployment time.

USCIS may:
- Update your employment authorization start date to the date approved, but not change the end date.
- Not update your employment authorization start date (therefore you would have been accumulating unemployment).
- The very last employment authorization end date an officer can assign regardless of when the OPT is approved is 14 months after your program end date.
- If your application is approved before the requested employment authorization start date you cannot begin work until you reach the approved employment authorization start date (which will most likely be the requested start date)
Post-Completion OPT Timetable Based on Program End Date

- **Filing Period with USCIS for OPT**: 90 days before Program End Date
- **Program End Date**: 60 days later
- **60 days of eligible start dates to request for OPT**: 14 months later

The OPT will end within 14 months of your degree program completion date (at the latest).
Post-Completion OPT Timetable
Based on Fall 2023 Graduation

Filing Period with USCIS for OPT

- Filing period opens 90 days prior to program end date: Sept 14, 2023
- Program End Date: Dec 12, 2023
- Eligible Start Dates:
  - Dec 13, 2023
  - Feb 9, 2024
- Filing period closes 60 days after program end date: Feb 9, 2024
- 14 months later (last possible date of OPT authorization): Feb 8, 2025

End Date: Dec 12, 2023
Filing period opens 90 days prior to program end date: Sept 14, 2023
Program End Date: Dec 12, 2023
Eligible Start Dates:
  - Dec 13, 2023
  - Feb 9, 2024
Filing period closes 60 days after program end date: Feb 9, 2024
14 months later (last possible date of OPT authorization): Feb 8, 2025
Grace Periods

- F-1 students have a 60 day grace period to remain in the USA after the completion of their academic program.
- The requested OPT period must begin within these 60 days.
  - Remember to apply early – it takes 90+ days to be approved for OPT.
- If your OPT application is timely filed with USCIS you may remain in the United States while the OPT application is pending, even after your program end date.
  - You are no longer considered to be in a “grace period” while the application is pending. You are legally present and in active F-1 status while the application is pending with USCIS.
  - If the application is denied, revoked, or withdrawn and you are more than 60 days past your program end date you must leave the United States immediately in most cases.
- If your OPT is approved your 60 day grace period will take place at the end of your OPT period. This does not apply to students who do not maintain status while on OPT (such as students who exceed the unemployment time limitations).
  - Students who exceed the allotted unemployment time are considered to have violated status and therefore do not get a grace period.
OPT Denials

- If you receive a denial, RFE (request for evidence), or NTA please contact ISSS immediately so that you can be referred out to an immigration attorney as appropriate. Individual circumstances may determine how you should proceed.

- Generally, if your OPT is denied and you are past your 60 day grace period you should make plans to depart the United States immediately. Unlawful presence may begin accumulating.

- Unlawful presence can result in bars from entry to the U.S. Individuals who accrue more than 180 days but less than one year of unlawful presence and depart voluntarily may be barred for 3 years. Individuals who accumulate one year or more of unlawful presence may be barred for 10 years (whether they left voluntarily or were removed).

- Because the consequences for a denied OPT can be severe, it imperative that you apply as soon as you are eligible to submit an OPT application.

- If your OPT is denied and you are still within the filing window you may be able to file again (depending on the reason for the denial).
Employment Requirements & Reporting Rules
Acceptable Employment on Post-Completion OPT

- Students must work a *minimum* of 20 hours per week in work directly related to their field of study to be considered fully employed.
- Employment may be paid or unpaid, including volunteer work.
  - The key is that any and all employment must directly relate to your field of study.
- Students may have multiple employers.
  - But again, all employment must directly relate to your field of study.
- All employment and changes in employment details must be reported.
- Work- including unpaid work- should not begin until the OPT is approved and the student has physically received the EAD card.
Limited Periods of Unemployment Allowed Under OPT

- Students on OPT are allowed no more than 90 days of unemployment throughout their approved post-completion OPT period.
- This 90 days is cumulative over the entire post-completion OPT period.
- If you are currently employed you are allowed to take approved vacation/sick time/weekends like any other employee at the company can. That is not unemployment. However, if you are not currently unemployed then weekends and time spent outside the U.S. still counts as unemployment days.
- If a student exceeds 90 days of unemployment he/she has violated status.
- Before exceeding 90 days unemployment the student must either: leave the United States (there is no grace period); transfer to start a new full-time degree program within 5 months or the next available start date (whichever comes first); or apply for a change of status through USCIS.
- Students with OPT STEM extensions are allowed an additional 60 days of cumulative unemployment during the 24 month extension period (150 days total).
- It is very important that you report your employment. You are legally required to report within 10 days of any change to employment, personal and/or status information.
- SEVIS can automatically terminate any student who exceeds the allowed 90 days of unemployment.
Reporting Requirements While on OPT

Federal regulations require that F-1 students report any of the following changes within 10 days to their DSO (i.e. the ISSS office):

», Demographic/Contact Information Changes
   › Changes to your physical residence in the United States = update your SEVIS USA address in MyUAlbany
   › Changes to your email and/or phone number = update your demographic data in MyUAlbany
   › Changes to your legal name = provide documentation to ISSS

», Employment Changes
   › Including but not limited to: starting a new job; adding a second job; ending of employment; change in employer address/number of hours/payment/position titles and duties

», Status Changes
   › If you change status (i.e. approved for H1b, Permanent Residency, etc…)
   › If you leave the United States and do not plan to return for further employment under OPT
   › If you plan to enroll full-time at a new school

Provide ISSS a copy of your EAD card when you receive it

Please verify all of the above information with ISSS every 6 months, even if nothing changes.
How to Report Changes to ISSS

There are two ways to report employment while on post-completion OPT:

- Submit a Post Completion Employment Reporting EForm to ISSS (preferred)
- Submit employment updates through the SEVP Portal

All demographic updates (i.e. address, phone number, and email) must be made in MyUAlbany, not through the Portal.
How to Report Changes to ISSS

Submit a **Post Completion Employment Reporting EForm** to ISSS (preferred)

- This EForm can be found on the Forms tab of our website
- This form must be submitted to ISSS by the students within 10 days of the change.
- ISSS advisors are professionals with expertise in reporting and have the capability to report the information you provide them directly into SEVIS.
- When an advisor reports in SEVIS the information should be viewable by the student in the auxiliary SEVP Portal within 1-3 business days.
SEVP Portal

➢ SEVP allows students to view and report certain information through an auxiliary SEVP Portal, which then transfers that information to SEVIS.

➢ Students may still report through ISSS using our EForm and then use the Portal as a “read-only” platform to check the information. This way ISSS can still evaluate your information for any errors.

➢ The SEVP Portal system is a free (no charge) system, meaning at no point in using it will you be required to provide any payment information or Social Security Number. If you see anything suspicious or believe any emails you receive may be fraudulent, please contact ISSS for guidance.
Students are expected to receive an email from `do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov`. This is the only email address Portal information will be sent from. In order for a student to receive an email invitation to the portal, the student must:

- Have been approved for OPT by USCIS (and received the EAD card)
- Currently be on the OPT program (i.e. past the approved start date on the EAD)
- Have a current, up to date email address in MyUAlbany (this is the email address in SEVIS)

More information is available on our website under the “Forms” tab ([https://www.albany.edu/isss/assets/Instructions_for_Using_the_SEVP_OPT_Portal.pdf](https://www.albany.edu/isss/assets/Instructions_for_Using_the_SEVP_OPT_Portal.pdf))
SEVP Portal

› Please note: ISSS advisors do not have direct access to the SEVP Portal as we do reporting in SEVIS, so our ability to assist with Portal related issues is limited. It is the student’s responsibility when using the SEVP Portal.

› While it is a student’s choice to use either the ISSS EForm or the SEVP Portal, when a student uses the SEVP Portal they are assuming full responsibility for that reporting.

› In the event a student makes a mistake in the SEVP Portal (for example, deletes an employer) this may cause serious consequences for his/her status
  ‣ Ex: if an employer is deleted by the student he/she may appear to have exceeded the allowed unemployment time and therefore risk the SEVIS record being terminated.

› Do not delete an employer simply because you end employment; enter an end date for that employer instead.

› If changing employers, the Portal instructions are to enter the new employer first before entering the end date for a prior employer. If you are currently unemployed, you must still report the employer end date within 10 days as required by regulation, even if you don’t yet have new employment to report.
What to Know While on Post-Completion OPT

- Travel
- Insurance
- STEM OPT Extension
- H1B
Travel While on OPT

Traveling outside the USA is possible while on OPT if you follow these guidelines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Risk</th>
<th>Medium Risk</th>
<th>Lower Risk</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Traveling after your F-1 visa has expired. It is possible to renew the F-1 visa while on OPT but can be more challenging.</td>
<td>• Traveling before your program end date but while your OPT application is pending.</td>
<td>• Traveling after your OPT is approved and after you have reported employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Traveling after your I-20 program end date but before your OPT is approved (i.e. the OPT application is still pending).</td>
<td>• Traveling after your OPT is approved but before you’ve reported employment.</td>
<td>Carry the following documents with you: Passport (with 6 months validity remaining); valid F-1 visa; I-20 signed for travel within the past 6 months from the date of re-entry; EAD card; any COVID-19 required documents. Highly recommended: proof of employment.</td>
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If you do not have a job ISSS recommends that you don’t travel.
Health Insurance while on OPT

You should have health insurance while on OPT. If you are working full-time, employers are required (by law) to provide you with some form of health insurance.

What happens while you are looking for a job?

1. If you currently have the University International Student Insurance you can continue on with that coverage by re-enrolling within 30 days after graduation.

2. If you are covered under a university policy because you are a GA/TA/RA, you have two choices.
   - **COBRA** – *an extension of your current benefits (more expensive)*
   - **University Insurance (UnitedHealthcare)**– *less expensive, but you have to enroll BEFORE graduation.*

UnitedHealthcare insurance must be purchased for a minimum of 3 months

For insurance questions, please contact Henny Jong-Futerko, Health Insurance Coordinator, at IntlInsurance@albany.edu.
OPT STEM Extension- General Information

▷ Students majoring in a STEM eligible field may be eligible to extend their OPT for an additional 24 months of OPT (for a grand total of 36 months)

▷ Students in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) are identified by the CIP codes for their major.
  ▶ Consult ISSS if you have questions about your major being on this list.
  ▶ Eligible codes are determined by DHS and your code is set in coordination with the State and accrediting officials, so ISSS cannot change these codes.

▷ Students may apply for up to two STEM extensions per lifetime.

▷ The earliest students may apply for a STEM extension is 90 days before the post-completion OPT EAD expires and students must apply to USCIS before the EAD expires. Before applying with USCIS students must obtain a new I-20 from ISSS.
OPT STEM Extension- General Information

- Employment requirements for STEM extension:
  - the employer for a STEM extension must be e-Verified
    - Use the E-Verify Employers Search Tool
    - Some large employer are NOT e-Verified
  - the employment must be paid employment and you must work at least 20 hours per week
  - The employer and student must complete an I-983 Training Plan
  - The employer and student must have a bona-fide employer/employee relationships
    - Students cannot be self-employed on STEM.

- Students who are considering a STEM extension should be looking for this type of employment while on post-completion OPT because they must have an employment offer that meets these requirements BEFORE applying for a STEM extension.

- Need more information? Watch our STEM OPT Workshop.
H-1B CAP GAP Extension

- Most private employers fall under what is called the H1b “cap” meaning there are a set number of H1b visas USCIS approves each year.
  - Some institutions, most notably universities, are “cap-exempt.” If you work for a cap-exempt employer the cap-gap extension does not apply to you.
- H1b filing opens April 1st each fiscal year but H1bs (if approved) don’t take effect until October 1st.
  - The cap-gap is intended to fill the “gap” in work authorization for F-1 students on OPT who have been approved or have a pending H1b, but whose EAD will expire before October 1st.
- To be eligible, the F-1 student must be in status on the date of filing.
  - To be eligible for a work authorization extension under cap-gap, the student must also have a valid EAD card on the date of filing.
- Students whose employers have sponsored them for an H1b and believe they qualify for a cap-gap extension may contact ISSS for a new I-20 showing the cap-gap extension. Evidence of filing must be included (such as a receipt notice from USCIS).
- Cap-gap extensions immediately end if an H1b application is denied, revoked, or withdrawn.
- ISSS does not advise on H1b applications and cannot check the status of your H1b application.
- Helpful resource to see if employers sponsor: [https://www.myvisajobs.com/](https://www.myvisajobs.com/)
APPLICATION PROCESS

How to request a new I-20 and file with USCIS
OPT Application Process

There are two steps to the application process:

1) Request a new I-20 from ISSS recommending post-completion OPT by submitting all documentation through the **OPT Request Eform** (5-7 business days for processing):

2) Apply to USCIS for an EAD card using the I-20 recommending OPT (USCIS takes on average 90 days or longer to process)

*There are two ways to file your request for post-completion OPT with USCIS:*

- Filing online at uscis.gov (recommended)
- Filing by paper to a USCIS lockbox
Step 1: Request a New I-20
From ISSS recommending your for Post-Completion OPT
Step 1: I-20 Application

Application Materials

To apply for a new I-20, submit the following documents to ISSS using the EForm:

- Your current I-94, available online. If you have a paper I-94, please upload a scanned copy of that.
- Photocopy of identity pages in passport, including expiration date
- Photocopy of F-1 visa, including most recent entrance stamp
- Photocopy of previous EAD cards (if applicable)
- Copy of your paper I-765 form (if filing by mail to USCIS)
- Copy of your paper G-1145 form (if filing by mail to USCIS)

In addition to submitting the above to ISSS, please save a copy for filing with USCIS and save a copy for your personal records.

*Remember, it takes 5-7 business days to get a new I-20! Your application must be complete before processing can begin.*
Step 1: I-20 Application Tips
Completing the ISSS Application

› You must request a start date for your OPT. Remember your requested OPT start date must be within 60 days of your program end date.

› Your academic advisor will receive an email to approve your OPT request and verify your expected program completion date. Please talk to your advisor before you submit the Eform so that they know to expect the email.

› If you are not sure whether you will complete all of your degree requirements to graduate speak with an ISSS advisor before submitting your application.
I-765 Form

- The I-765 form is a USCIS form file for work authorization.

- USCIS provides instructions for how to complete the form. Please read all of these instructions carefully. Please access the I-765 and instructions directly from USCIS’s website to obtain the most current version.

- The student, as the applicant, is responsible for completing the form correctly. While ISSS offers resources to students ISSS does not complete the form or hold responsibility for whether the form is completed correctly. Please follow the USCIS instructions carefully to ensure you fill it in accurately.

- If you will file with USCIS online: You cannot complete the I-765 online until after you have received the I-20 recommending OPT. Please watch our informational video about online filing. You can download a copy of your electronic I-765 after submitting your application to USCIS and share that with ISSS for your University file if you would like to.

- If you will file with USCIS by paper: please provide ISSS a copy of your paper I-765 when requesting the I-20 recommending OPT.
Review of Application Procedures

- Submit your OPT Request EForm and notify your academic advisor that they will receive an email asking for their approval of the request.

- ISSS processing time is 5-7 business days from the time a complete request is received (including academic advisor approval), so please plan ahead. To be fair to all students we process applications in the order they are received.

- You will receive an email once the new I-20 with an OPT recommendation is complete. Further instructions will be included with your new I-20.
I-20 Delivery Options

You will be asked to select the delivery option when you submit the OPT Request EForm:

› In-person pick-up in Science Library G-40

› Electronic Delivery- Students may request that an electronic scan of the I-20 be emailed to them. The student is responsible for printing this I-20 out. If you do not have access to a printer, please consider one of the two options below to have a paper I-20 mailed to you:

› Standard USPS- this option has no fee, but also no tracking number and may take on average 3-10 business days to arrive. Email ISSS@albany.edu the address you want the document sent to. This option would not be appropriate if you need a paper copy quickly; if it is an EAD card; or for international mailing

› Order an E-Ship Label- use this option if you want the paper document quicker; want it tracked; it is an EAD card; or if you need the document sent internationally. Here are the instructions for ordering an E-Ship Label: https://www.albany.edu/isss/91191.php. Email ISSS@albany.edu to confirm once you have ordered the label.
Step 2: File with USCIS

To request an EAD card for Post-Completion OPT
Step 2: File with USCIS for an EAD card (approximately 90+ days processing time):

- There are two ways to file your request for post-completion OPT with USCIS:
  - Filing online at uscis.gov (recommended)
  - Filing by paper to a USCIS lockbox
- Regardless of how you file USCIS must receive your request within 30 days of the date the I-20 recommending OPT was issued by ISSS and/or within 60 days of your I-20 program end date (whichever date comes first).
- USCIS processing takes approximately 90 days and may take longer. You cannot begin working without the EAD card.
USCIS I-765 Filing Fee

- The filing fee is for the I-765 form is currently $410.
- If you are filing online you will pay the fee when you submit the application. You will pay through pay.gov by credit/debit card or bank account transfer. Your application is only submitted/receipted by USCIS after paying the fee through pay.gov.
- If you are filing by mail then checks or money orders preferred. USCIS does not accept cash.
  - If using a personal check, please be certain that you have sufficient funds in your account to cover the check at all times – the check could be deposited at ANY time.
  - The check must be payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- For additional instructions on how to complete the check, click here: https://www.uscis.gov/fees
Premium Processing

Students can request and pay for premium processing by filing a form I-907 online.

• The premium processing fee is *optional*.

• The premium processing fee is in addition to the required $410 filing fee for the I-765. The current premium processing fee for F-1 students filing an I-765 is $1500. This means students opting for premium processing of the I-765 would need to pay $1500 in addition to the baseline fee of $410.

• Premium processing means the case will be *adjudicated within 30 days*, but you still need to wait for the EAD card to be produced.
Documents Required if Filing Online to USCIS (Recommended)

➤ To file online, you must first create an account on https://www.uscis.gov/.

➤ In addition to completing the form fields on the electronic I-765 you will need to upload the following documents. Please be sure to follow the file requirements and be sure that your uploads are clear and easily readable:
  ➤ Passport photograph meeting all USCIS specifications
  ➤ Copy of your current I-94 (either the screengrab of the electronic form or a photocopy of both sides of the paper I-94).
  ➤ Photocopy of a prior EAD card- if applicable
  ➤ Photocopy of identity pages in passport, including expiration date (required if no EAD card)
  ➤ Photocopy of F-1 visa stamp (optional if upload passport and/or EAD card)
  ➤ Photocopy of the new Form I-20 issued for OPT— Remember to sign your I-20!
  ➤ Photocopies of all any previous I-20s authorizing CPT or OPT (including CPT/OPT authorizations for prior institutions, degree levels, or SEVIS IDs).

➤ Watch our Informational Video about online filing to help you— it’s only 15 minutes.
Documents Required if Filing by Mail to USCIS

If you are filing by mail, you can find full instructions for which documents to submit and how to mail the application on our website.
Application Tips

- Keep a copy of your application for your records.
- If filing by mail do not send your original passport/visa/I-20; only photocopies.
- If filing by mail all applications should be mailed so that they can be tracked. This could be through the postal service certified mail, return-receipt requested or expressed mailed (by the student). However, remember that this is a lockbox facility, so do not request a signature for receipt.
- Save the delivery receipt with a copy of your application.
Important Reminders

- USCIS must receive your request within 30 days of the date the I-20 recommending OPT was issued by ISSS and/or within 60 days of your I-20 program end date (whichever date comes first).

- The current end date listed on the I-20 form will be shortened to the program completion/graduation end date for the semester you apply for OPT (remember – no work on or off campus after this date!)

- If you are unsure whether you will graduate during a given semester, talk with an ISSS member before submitting your application.
After OPT Application Submission
Make sure your name is written in the mailbox of the address listed on your I-765

You should receive three documents in the mail from USCIS. Keep these documents since they are official documents:

- Receipt notice (arrives approximately 3-4 weeks after filing)
- Approval notice (arrives approximately 90 days after date of filing)
- EAD card (arrives approximately 1-2 weeks after OPT is approved)

If you file online you can view these documents in your online account, but you will still receive them by mail (the EAD card is only sent by mail).

You cannot start working until you receive your EAD card.

If you receive an RFE (Request for Evidence), NTA or denial notice from USCIS, please contact ISSS immediately for assistance.
Using the ISSS Office as your Mailing Address

➤ As a courtesy we allow students to use our office as a mailing address on their I-765
➤ When we receive mail for you we will send you a standard email.
➤ You may come in to ISSS during business hours to pick up the documents OR respond to the email to request that the documents be mailed to you standard USPS (no fee, no tracking number, slower delivery time) or to confirm that you have ordered express shipping.
➤ EAD cards will not be sent standard mail and must be picked up or sent via Eship.
➤ There is a delay between when the card is “delivered” to the mail center and when it arrives to our office.
Other Information

➢ Update ISSS of any changes that occur during OPT (employer information, visa status changes, etc.)

➢ Keep your address and e-mail up to date in MyUAldany. If you move while OPT is pending consult ISSS for advice.

➢ ISSS will also e-mail you periodically while you are on OPT. When you get these emails please read them.

➢ You can check the status of your OPT case at www.USCIS.gov by clicking “Check Your Cases Status” at the bottom and entering your receipt number or by logging into your online USCIS account.

➢ Be sure to use the services offered by the Career & Professional Development office to aid you in your job search.
Questions?
Contact our Office

E-mail: isss@albany.edu

Web: www.albany.edu/isss

Science Library, G-40

Please take our anonymous Workshop evaluation:
https://forms.gle/pWz5KYF6cyRmJM9c6