OPT FAQs

1. **When should I mail documents to USCIS?**
   Your application must be *received* by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date on your new OPT I-20 (this date is printed next to where the advisor signed on page 1).

2. **What documents are required for OPT part 2 (applying for EAD card)?**
   1. Payment of $410.00 in one of the following methods for the I-765 application. Be sure your name and I-94 number are on the payment.
      i. A money order, certified check or personal check made payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**, or
      ii. Complete form G-1450 to pay via credit card. For more information, click here: [https://www.uscis.gov/forms/fingerprints/pay-credit-card](https://www.uscis.gov/forms/fingerprints/pay-credit-card) and consult ISSS before using this method.
      iii. Instructions on writing the check are available here: [https://www.uscis.gov/fees](https://www.uscis.gov/fees)
   2. Cover letter addressed to the Dallas Lockbox USCIS processing center
   3. Original completed Form I-765 with your original signature in ink
   4. Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
   5. Photocopy of the new Form I-20 issued for OPT (do not send the original)
   6. Photocopies of all previous I-20s (including those from previous schools or programs)
   7. Photocopy of current I-94 Form (both sides of card version) or print-out of the electronic I-94 - [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/)
   8. Photocopy of identity pages in passport, including expiration date
   9. Photocopy of F-1 visa stamp, including most recent entrance stamp
   10. Two identical passport photographs with your name and I-94 number written on the back – see next page and go to: [https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photos.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/photos/photos.html)
   11. Photocopy of previous EAD cards (if applicable)
   12. Job offer (not required)

3. **How should I mail my application to USCIS?**
   You can use US Postal Service or an express service such as FedEx or UPS. We strongly recommend ensuring that you use tracking and proof of delivery services. Save the receipt of delivery for your records.

4. **What address do I use if I am mailing through the US Postal Service?**
   USCIS
   PO Box 660867
   Dallas, TX 75266

5. **What address do I use if I send it through FedEx, UPS, or DHL?**
   USCIS
   Attn: AOS
   2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business
   Suite 400
   Lewisville, TX 75067

6. **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.
   **Keep all mail from USCIS for your official records:**
   1.) Receipt Notice (I-797): this will arrive 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](https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)
7. Can I work during the application process?
   No, you cannot work under OPT 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 on OPT. 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).

8. Can I volunteer during the application process?
   For purposes of immigration, employment is considered as services rendered. 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.

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

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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 an OPT data form or through the SEVP Portal
    - Any interruptions of employment (new employment, employer changes, end of employment, etc.) by submitting an OPT data form 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.

13. 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, though travel without a job offer is highly discouraged. You 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, and proof of employment for reentry.

14. 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 OPT.

15. What if I’m unemployed?
    Students are allowed a cumulative (total) 90 days unemployment on the first 12 months of OPT. This includes weekends. Students who exceed 90 days 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).

16. What do I need to do when 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.

17. When do I apply for STEM?
    The earliest you can apply for a STEM extension is 90 days before your 12-month EAD expires, and you must apply with USCIS before the EAD expires. Apply through ISSS first.