Applying for OPT using the Online USCIS Portal

Rutgers Global–International Student and Scholar Services
global.rutgers.edu
Please note that this tutorial provides guided recommendations. All images used are samples. Information contained within should not be considered legal advice. Please remember that it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure the application materials you submit to USCIS are completed correctly.

This tutorial may change over time; please do not download this document, and instead access it newly each time at our website here with a cleared cache: global.rutgers.edu/OPT

If you are currently on an approved post-completion OPT period and applying for a STEM OPT Extension, instead follow the directions on our website here with a cleared cache: global.rutgers.edu/OPT-Extensions
**STEP 1** - Attend the appropriate workshop on the RGlobal Portal: Post-Completion OPT Workshop, or Off-Campus Employment Workshop (for pre-completion OPT)

**STEP 2** - Prepare all application materials (using this step-by-step tutorial)

**STEP 3** – Create your **USCIS Online Account** (click link) following the instructions on their website

**STEP 4** - Begin to fill out the online application through your USCIS account. Choose the Optional Practical Training category that applies to you. Fill out the questions until you can download the printable/electronic draft I-765. You will need to upload this draft I-765 to the “Review OPT Application Materials” e-form on the RGlobal Portal

**DO NOT SUBMIT THE ONLINE APPLICATION OR PAY THE FEE ON THE USCIS WEBSITE YET! AS SOON AS YOU DIGITALLY SIGN THE USCIS ONLINE APPLICATION AND PAY THE FEE, YOUR APPLICATION IS CONSIDERED OFFICIALLY SUBMITTED. THIS IS INCORRECT!!! YOUR APPLICATION WILL BE INCOMPLETE IF YOU DO NOT UPLOAD AN OPT RECOMMENDED I-20 TO THE APPLICATION BEFORE SUBMITTING AND PAYING THE FEE. THIS WILL RESULT IN A DENIAL!**

Continued on next slide →
STEP 5 - Submit the Post-Completion OPT e-form request on the RGlobal Portal. Meet with an international student advisor (ISA) to review your application and request your new I-20 with OPT recommendation (appointment is optional but highly recommended).

STEP 6 - Receive your new I-20 with OPT recommendation (you will get an email saying it’s ready).

STEP 7 - Upload New OPT I-20 and Review Application. If you are within the correct time frame to apply for OPT, login to your USCIS Online Account and upload the *NEW* OPT I-20 (signed by you), along with any needed supporting documents to the online application.

STEP 8 - Submit the application and pay the filing fee.
BEFORE YOU APPLY, PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING:

- Pick ONE method to apply for OPT. Either apply online OR through mail - **DO NOT** apply both ways.
- Your **post-completion OPT application** should NOT be submitted to USCIS more than 90 days prior to the program end date on your new I-20 with OPT recommendation.
- Your **post-completion OPT application** MUST reach USCIS before the end of your grace period.
- Your **pre-completion OPT application** should NOT be submitted to USCIS more than 90 days prior to your requested OPT start date.
- Your OPT application MUST reach USCIS within 30 days of the date your new I-20 with OPT recommendation was **issued**.
- If approved, the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card will be sent directly to you at the address you provided to USCIS. **USPS will not forward the EAD to another address once shipped.** Once you receive the EAD card, you are authorized to work on OPT between the start and end dates listed on the card.
- You **cannot begin working** until you have received your new EAD card and the start date has arrived.
- You **must be inside the U.S.** to apply for OPT.
- If you are applying for post-completion OPT based on coursework completion, you must obtain your degree **BEFORE** your OPT period ends. Otherwise you are considered out of status.
- Be sure you **understand the fees** for the I-765 and premium processing, if needed.
If you have completed your coursework or will soon be graduating, you must attend the Post-Completion OPT Workshop on the RGlobal Portal to receive important information to complete your OPT application and learn:

- What is Employment? Am I eligible for OPT? How can I apply for OPT?
- Defining Optional Practical Training
- OPT timeline scenarios
- Maintaining your status while on OPT and reporting requirements
- OPT Extensions

If you are looking for off-campus practical training work experience while you are still completing your degree requirements (CPT), you must instead attend the Off-Campus Employment Workshop on the RGlobal portal.

Go to: https://sunapsis.rutgers.edu/istart/controllers/start/StartEngine.cfm

Select: “Workshops” menu on the left

Navigate to the appropriate workshop
1. Form I-765 electronic copy/draft (this is obtained from the online application BEFORE you submit it)
2. One passport-style color photograph of you taken recently and not used before
3. Digital copy of your passport picture page
4. Digital copy of your most recent F-1 visa (or I-797C approval notice if status was changed in US)
5. Digital copy of your electronic Form I-94 OR digital copy of your paper Form I-94 (front and back)
6. Digital copy of unofficial full transcript that shows your name
7. Digital copy of all previous EAD cards (front and back) that have been issued to you, if applicable
8. Evidence of all previous CPT & OPT authorizations, if applicable (ex. digital copies of previous I-20s)
9. Digital copy of NEW I-20 with OPT Recommendation*
10. Credit card or ACH payment for I-765 fee

* You will receive (9) your new I-20 with OPT recommendation after your application is reviewed by an international student advisor. You need this to apply for OPT.
Confirm your academic plans with your Academic Official

- Undergraduate students: this is your Academic Dean/Advisor
- Graduate students: this is your Graduate Program Director
- RBHS students: this is your Registrar

You and your academic official need to confirm the following academic dates, as they will impact your OPT eligibility dates. Your academic official will provide confirmation of this to our office via the OPT I-20 Request e-form in the RGlobal portal.

- Date 1: Completion of all coursework (regular classes not including research/thesis work)

- Date 2: Completion of all degree requirements (including non-coursework requirements such as thesis/defense)
  - If you are applying for post-completion OPT, this date will likely be the new program end date on your I-20.
  - That is also the last day you can work on-campus and on CPT (if applicable); however, you may be paid following that date for work already completed.
POST-COMPLETION OPT
SCENARIO 1: APPLYING FOR OPT AFTER COMPLETING ALL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The OPT application can be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before your degree completion date. You can start preparing your application materials before this, but cannot submit it to USCIS before the 90 days.

The earliest possible requested OPT start date is the day after degree requirement completion date; the requested OPT start date must fall within 60 days of degree requirement completion date. On-campus work and CPT must end by the degree completion date.

*degree requirement completion date is determined by your academic official; generally this date is earlier than your current I-20 Program End Date.

Applying for post-completion OPT on the basis of having completed all DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Possible OPT application date

Possible requested OPT start date

Download OPT Dates Worksheet

Last Update September 2023
POST-COMPLETION OPT
SCENARIO 2: APPLYING FOR OPT AFTER COMPLETING ALL COURSEWORK (only for students who have a non-coursework degree requirement and plan to start OPT before completing degree requirements)

The OPT application can be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before your expected completion date. You can start preparing your application materials before this, but cannot submit it to USCIS before the 90 days.

The earliest possible requested OPT start date is the day after coursework completed (if one-year requirement is met). The day before the requested OPT start date will be the new program end date on your I-20; that is the last day you can work on-campus and on CPT. F-1 status ends at the end of OPT employment authorization; students who choose this option MUST complete all degree requirements and graduate within the period of authorized employment.
A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT APPLYING BASED ON COURSEWORK COMPLETION

Graduate students that have finished their coursework and are working on a thesis or dissertation may want to start OPT before completing their degree requirements, based on the eligibility of finishing their coursework.

However, there are some risks with this option.

Students who choose this option MUST complete all degree requirements and graduate within the period of authorized employment. In other words, you are expected to complete all of your degree requirements (defense, revisions, paperwork, etc) prior to your OPT expiring. This is especially important for students eligible for STEM OPT, as USCIS expects you to be able to show your current diploma in your STEM OPT applications.

Failing to finish all degree requirements prior to the end of your OPT authorized employment period could result in your losing future benefits.

Please make an appointment with an adviser if you have any questions about this option.
PRE-COMPLETION OPT
(only for students who have not yet completed degree or coursework requirements)

The OPT application can be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before your desired start date. You can start preparing your application materials before this, but cannot submit it to USCIS before the 90 days.

This option is rare. Most students use CPT instead. See more on CPT here.

The earliest possible requested OPT start date is the day after completing one full academic year (2 semesters) in full time student status; the requested OPT end date must be before degree requirement completion date.
ONLINE I-765 APPLICATION PROCESS

Step 2 - Prepare Application Materials - Acceptable file formats and upload requirements

File Formats
Photos: JPG, JPEG, or PNG
Documents: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF
Maximum size per file: 6MB

You can upload 5 documents at once, and there is no limit to the number of files you can upload in total.

Foreign language documents must have official English Translation

Allowable Characters in file names
English letters
Numbers
Spaces
Periods .
Hyphens -
Underscores _
Parentheses ( )

****Do not use special characters

Last Update June 2021
1 COLOR PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATIONS

You can either obtain a digital copy or image of a printed photo

The color photograph must have a white to off-white background and be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish—do not mount or retouch

The photograph must be sized at 2 inches by 2 inches and must be in full color with a frontal view of your full face

The head height in the photograph should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches from top of hair to bottom of chin

Eye height in the photograph should be between 1 1/8 inch to 1 3/8 inches from top of eyes to bottom of photo

Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious denomination of which you are a member

Resources:
Dept of State Photo Requirements
https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html

Dept of State Photo Cropping Tool:
https://tsg.phototool.state.gov/photo

Photographs must be taken recently (within 6 months of the application date) and not been used before on another application (i.e. your visa or passport)
ONLINE I-765 APPLICATION PROCESS

Step 2 - Prepare Application Materials - Copies of other immigration documents

Image of your passport, most recent F-1 visa

Digital copy or image of your most recent I-94 https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/

Image of your Employment Authorization/EAD Card from previous degrees (if any), front and back

Make sure the images are clear and readable
1. Visit my.rutgers.edu and click “Get My Grades” under the Academics tab

2. Use your NetID to log in and receive your unofficial transcript

3. Download your unofficial transcript

4. RBHS students can get their transcripts at my.rutgers.edu under the banner “Self-Service” tab
If you received CPT authorization, you should include images of page 1 and 2 of the previous I-20 on which this CPT authorization was shown.

Upload the files of all CPT authorization I-20s to the online application when asked.

Last Update June 2021
Create USCIS Online Account

If you have an existing account, sign in. Otherwise create a new account. Please do NOT use any Rutgers email address for this account.

2 step authentication is used, and you will choose which way you prefer this to be verified (text vs email).

Each account is unique to 1 person - you cannot have 2 people using 1 account.

Resources:
https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/how-to-create-a-uscis-online-account

www.uscis.gov/file-online
STEP 1 - Read official instructions for completing Form I-765: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

STEP 2 - Once logged in to your USCIS account, click “File a form online” on the home screen
The online application has multiple sessions to complete. These sections are:

1) Getting Started section
2) About You section
3) Evidence section
4) Additional Information section
5) Review and Submit section
   a) Form Filing Fee section
STEP 3 - Select the “Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)” as the form you want to file online

Carefully review all of the information provided on the screen about the Form I-765
STEP 4 - Review the form overview and privacy notices information

STEP 5 - Select the correct employment eligibility category

- MOST STUDENTS WILL BE APPLYING FOR POST-COMPLETION OPT c(3)(B). IF YOU ARE UNSURE, ASK AN INTERNATIONAL ADVISOR BEFORE MOVING FORWARD. THIS MUST BE CORRECT.
STEP 6 - Select Premium Processing Option

USCIS provides the option for you to have your OPT application adjudicated within 30 calendar days from the date of request. Adjudication could be an approval, request for evidence, rejection, or denial - it does NOT guarantee you an approval.

Premium processing is NOT mandatory. This is a personal decision you need to make based on your situation. You should carefully review all information the USCIS Premium Processing webpage and the normal USCIS Processing Times page before making your decision.

IF YOU CHOOSE YES, NOTE THE IMPORTANT MESSAGE ABOUT THE PAYMENT AFTER APPLICATION SUBMISSION!
STEP 7 - Select the reason you are applying

- If this is your first OPT application for your current degree, you will select “Initial Permission”

- If your EAD was already approved by USCIS but then LOST or STOLEN, you will select “Replacement”. Please contact an advisor before refiling your application for important guidance

STEP 8 - If you were ever approved for OPT in the past, regardless of degree level, select “Yes” for “Have you previously filed Form I-765?”. Upload files of the front and back of your previous EAD card(s) and/or Denial notices in the “Additional Information” section
STEP 9 - Answer “No” to “Is someone assisting you with completing this application?” unless an attorney, preparer, or interpreter is helping you file this application. Rutgers Global - ISSS advisors are not considered an attorney, preparer, or interpreter.
STEP 10 - Enter your name as shown on your most recent passport.

If you have a middle name, we suggest writing both your first and middle name in the “Given Name” box.

If you have used other names, either formally or informally, please say “Yes” and enter them on the application. This includes maiden names or nicknames.
STEP 11 - Write a U.S. mailing address where you will be able to receive documents for the next 3 to 4 months. This should NOT be the ISSS office address or department address. This may also be true for your Rutgers on-campus address, if you are moving after graduating.

This does not necessarily need to be your current address; if it is not your current address, you can write the full name of person whose address you are using in “In care of name” box. Some students purchase a P.O. box instead.

If your mailing address and physical address are different, please answer “No” to the next question and enter your physical address.
STEP 12 - Fill out your biographical information throughout the next section of the application
STEP 13 - Continue to fill out your immigration information, using your I-94 and passport(s)

To view and print your I-94 go to: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/

If you entered the U.S. on another status other than F-1 and completed a change of status with USCIS, write your last entered status for “Status at last arrival”

Your current immigration status should be “F-1 student”

Enter your current SEVIS ID number. Your SEVIS ID is located at the top left corner of your I-20. Use the “Additional Information” section of the application to provide any previously used SEVIS ID numbers, if applicable
STEP 14 - Check “I do not have or know my A-Number”

Check “I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number”. You will only have a USCIS Online Account Number if you previously filed an online application with USCIS.
STEP 15 - If you never had a Social Security number (SSN), you may apply for one now by answering “No” and “Yes” to the following related questions:

Read more about getting a SSN through your I-765 application here: https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/flyers/EBE_Flyer_Apply_for_your_Social_Security_Number_While_Applying_for_Your.pdf

Once your OPT application is approved, the necessary information will be provided to the Social Security Administration. You should receive your Social Security Card by mail approximately two weeks after you receive your OPT approval and Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

If you have a SSN, select “Yes” and enter the number.
STEP 16 - Follow the instructions to upload your photo, using the file format requirements. See slide 14 for more details.
STEP 17 - Obtain your I-94 number. To view and print your digital I-94 go to: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/

If you have a paper I-94, you must obtain a clear image of it and upload to the application.

NOTE - if you changed your status to F-1 while inside the United States (through a USCIS I-539 form), then your I-94 will be located on the bottom of your I-797 F-1 approval notice.
STEP 18 - Upload the following:

1) **Image of your most recent passport.** You only need to upload the 1 page showing your biographical information and picture of yourself. The bottom numbers *(Machine Readable Zone)* must be visible.

2) **Image of your F-1 visa.** If you do not have a F-1 visa, upload your I-797 F-1 approval notice. Canadian and Bermudian students will not have F-1 visas.

3) **ALL previous EAD cards, front and back, if applicable.** If you ever worked on OPT (pre or post), H-4 EAD, and/or J-1 Academic Training at any degree level.
STEP 19 - Upload the following:

1) **If you previously had CPT:** Page 1 & 2 of I-20s that show your previous CPT approvals, for ALL degree levels.

2) **If you previously had OPT:** Page 1 & 2 of I-20s that show your previous OPT recommendations, for ALL degree levels.

3) **For all students:** Unofficial transcript for your current degree.
   a) See slide 16 for information on how to obtain transcripts
STOP!

● Save the draft application - DO NOT SUBMIT YET

● You cannot progress until you have received your NEW OPT recommended I-20 from Rutgers Global

● See next slides for information on how to get your new OPT I-20
ONLINE I-765 APPLICATION PROCESS

Step 5 - Submit e-form on RGlobal Portal and Meet with Advisor

STEP 1 - Submit Post-Completion OPT e-form request e-form via the RGlobal Portal

STEP 2 - Submit your complete OPT Application for ISA review via the OPT e-form. Any recommended changes will be sent to you via email

- You will need to save the “electronic draft” of the Form I-765 from the Online Application, and upload it to the OPT application e-form for Rutgers Global review. This is explained on the next slide.

STEP 3 - Schedule an optional appointment to review your application with an International Student Advisor. This is recommended but not required to progress: https://global.rutgers.edu/international-scholars-students/advising-services

STEP 4 – Move forward with the rest of the e-form sections on the RGlobal Portal

Important!

Missing or incomplete documents can delay the creation of your new I-20. Please make sure you’ve prepared all required documents outlined in STEP 2 of this tutorial before meeting an international student advisor.
Review the draft I-765 form information for correctness before uploading it to the RGlobal Portal e-form. Click “View draft snapshot” (shown below) to download a copy of the electronic draft form I-765 and save it to your computer.

This is correct.
ONLINE I-765 APPLICATION PROCESS

Step 6 - Receiving your OPT recommended I-20

STEP 1 - Look for an email confirming that your new I-20 with OPT recommendation is ready, signed by an ISA. The I-20 will be attached to the email.

STEP 2 - Review the OPT I-20 and make sure all information on it is accurate. The OPT recommendation and requested start and end dates are listed on page 2. Please make sure these dates are correct.

STEP 3 - Print and sign this I-20 with a blue pen. YOU MUST SIGN THIS WITH INK. Your adviser will sign it digitally - you cannot!

STEP 4 - Take a picture or scan the I-20 to upload to the online application.

STEP 5 - Carefully read the email for important guidelines and reminders.

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IMPORTANT!

- You should not continue to Step 8 of this tutorial (Submission and Fee Payment) until you have uploaded your new OPT recommended I-20 to the online USCIS OPT application. This new OPT I-20 is given to you by your Rutgers advisor when you complete all the necessary e-form steps on the RGlobal Portal.

- The I-20 you upload should also be signed by you, IN INK. This means it must be printed from your email, signed in blue pen, and scanned into an uploadable file that meets the USCIS file format requirements that are found on slide 13 of this tutorial.

- Submitting your online application without uploading your OPT I-20 first will lead to a denial.
Upload images of page 1 & 2 of your new, signed OPT recommended I-20
If you need to provide any additional information for any of your answers to the questions on the application, enter it into the “Additional Information” section. You should include the questions that you are referencing (Section, Page, Question, etc).

If you do not need to provide any additional information, you may leave this section blank.

Examples shown on the next slides
Example #1: You have a different, previous SEVIS ID #

If you attended school for a while, left the US to take a break from school, and returned with a new I-20, you would have a SEVIS ID # from your first period of attendance that is different than your current SEVIS ID #

In the “Additional Information” box, enter your specific information:

SEVIS ID: N00############

Program start date - Program end date

Degree Level (Bachelor’s, Master’s, or PhD)
Example #2: You have used CPT and/or OPT in the past, at any school or any degree level. You should upload 1 evidence section for all CPTs and 1 evidence section for all OPTs. List out the information separately for each individual authorization period, using the example information below.

In the “Additional Information” box, type your specific information:

- Employer’s name (for CPT only, not OPT)
- Start & end date
- Part-time or Full-time
- Degree Level (Bachelor’s, Master’s, or PhD)
ONLINE I-765 APPLICATION PROCESS
Step 7 - Uploading New OPT I-20 and Review Application

- Check your application for accuracy and completeness before submitting
- Check for any alerts that may be showing, and correct them as needed
- **WARNING** - alerts are not always shown! It is your responsibility to ensure your application is correct
After receiving ISA feedback from Rutgers Global, consider making changes to your application where needed. Then, review the I-765 form information once again on your own for correctness and save it to your computer for future reference.
To submit your application, confirm that you can read and understand English on the “Applicant’s statement” box.

Carefully read the confirmation language on the “Applicant’s Declaration and Certification” page. You must understand this information, as this is your application to USCIS.

If confirmed, type your full legal name in the “Applicant’s signature” box.
WARNING: Do not submit an OPT application online from outside of the US and/or without a SIGNED OPT recommendation I-20

Once you pay the online application fee, the I-765 is considered filed immediately and can result in a denial if you applied from outside the US and without the OPT I-20

USCIS uses UTC time zone. Your application has to be submitted before 11:59pm UTC of the due date. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO SUBMIT.

After typing your name, you will be prompted to pay for your application submission. Read the instructions carefully and follow the link to pay.gov (click “Pay and submit”)
Paying the I-765 Fee WITHOUT Premium Processing:

After you agree to the applicant statement, you will be directed to pay.gov, a secure government portal

Check the fee amount: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

Pay by ACH withdrawal, or debit/credit card
- ACH withdrawals require bank and routing information, and must be from a US financial institution
- Call your credit card company to alert them of this upcoming charge, to prevent blocked payment processing

Enter payment information

When you hit continue, the payment for your application will be submitted and the “I-765 Application for Employment Authorization” is considered filed immediately

Premium Processing is addressed on the next slide
Paying the I-765 WITH Premium Processing (I-907):

IF YOU SELECTED “YES” TO PREMIUM PROCESSING, REVIEW THE MESSAGE ABOUT YOUR APPLICATION AND ADDITIONAL I-907 FEE.

YOU CANNOT MAKE EDITS AFTER SUBMITTING THIS SO PLEASE BE CAREFUL.

Finish the I-765 and continue to the I-907

By finishing this form, your Form I-765 will be locked and no further changes can be made. Please make sure that the information on your Form I-765 is complete and accurate before continuing. If you need to make any edits after finishing, you will need to create a new Form I-765.

Next, you will continue to Form I-907. Once you complete Form I-907, you can pay for and submit both forms at the same time.
A PDF receipt notice will become available for download in the “Documents” tab of your account. It will also be mailed to your mailing address from your application.

Your application gets receipted up to 48 hours after payment.

Your receipt notice shows the date you submitted the application, and your case #.

You can use this case number to track your status/progress (see next slide).

All notices are posted to your account:
- Receipt notice
- Biometrics notice
- Request for Evidence (RFE)
- PDF of completed form
- Decision letter

* Notices are also mailed to the mailing address on file.
You can **EITHER** mail your application to USCIS **OR** apply online

Do NOT submit an application both ways! You can only submit your OPT application through 1 method

Please decide if you will mail your application, **OR** if you will submit it online
You can track the status of your application through the Case Status Tracker: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/mycasestatus.do


The United States Postal Service (USPS) offers a free service to help you digitally track your daily mail called Informed Delivery. This may be helpful in tracking your receipt notices and EAD card.

You can sign up for this service on their website here: https://tem-informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action
REJECTED, DENIED, or RFE APPLICATIONS

If your application is rejected or denied by USCIS for any reason, or if you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please contact our office BEFORE responding to the RFE, if time allows. You may need an updated I-20 from our staff.

USCIS will communicate with you via your online account as well as mail. Please see the image below for your communication options in your USCIS account.

Please let us know if you wish to have a second review of your new application materials.

IF YOU DO NOT GRADUATE AS EXPECTED:

This will impact your OPT application! Please contact our office right away if you have already applied for OPT but then find out you did not meet the degree completion deadline as originally planned. You may be directed to withdraw your application. Our advisers will help you review your options.
Your USCIS account offers resources to help you manage your application on the online application portal. Please become familiar with these tools.
Email us:

- New Brunswick - isss-students@global.rutgers.edu
- RBHS - isss-rbhs@global.rutgers.edu

Call us:

- New Brunswick – 848-932-7015
- RBHS - 973-972-6138

Join our QQA or make an appointment:

- https://global.rutgers.edu/advising

Join us for an OPT Chat Session:

- https://global.rutgers.edu/opt