Preparing your Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application

Rutgers Global–International Student and Scholar Services

global.rutgers.edu
Please note that this tutorial provides guided recommendations. 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 – Submit the Post-Completion OPT e-form request on the RGlobal Portal. Meet with an international student adviser (ISA) to review your application and request your new I-20 with OPT recommendation (appointment is optional but highly recommended)

STEP 4 - Receive your new I-20 with OPT recommendation (when you receive an email saying it’s ready)

STEP 5 - Mail your completed application (including a signed copy of the new I-20 you just received) to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
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.

- You MUST use the most **updated I-765 form**, which you can find at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765. **Be sure the barcode appears on the bottom of each page after printing**.

- Your **post-completion OPT application** should NOT be mailed to the 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 the USCIS before the end of your grace period.

- Your **pre-completion OPT application** should NOT be sent to the USCIS more than 90 days prior to your requested OPT start date.

- Your OPT application MUST reach the 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 on the Form I-765 or AR-11. **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 taken effect.

- 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.

- You **must be inside the U.S. to apply for OPT**.

- **Understand the fees** for the I-765 filing 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. Personal check, money order, cashier’s check, or G-1450 (recommend to type) for fees
2. Form G-1145 (recommend to type)
3. Form I-765 (recommend to type)
4. Two passport-style color photographs of you taken recently and not used before
5. Copy of your passport picture page
6. Copy of your most recent F-1 visa (or I-797C approval notice if status was changed in US)
7. Copy of your electronic Form I-94 OR copy of your paper Form I-94 (front and back)
8. Unofficial full transcript that shows your name
9. Copies of all previous EAD cards (front and back) that have been issued to you, if applicable
10. Evidence of all previous CPT & OPT authorizations, if applicable (ex. copies of previous I-20s)
11. Copy of NEW I-20 with OPT Recommendation*

* You will receive (11) your new I-20 with OPT recommendation after your application is reviewed by an international student advisor. You need this to apply for OPT
You may choose to apply for Premium Processing of your application for an additional fee. If you wish to do this, please follow the additional steps outlined by USCIS on their website here: https://www.uscis.gov/forms/all-forms/how-do-i-request-premiumprocessing
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 CPT (if applicable); however, you may be paid following that date for work already completed

Last Update March 2023
POST-COMPLETION OPT
SCENARIO 1: APPLYING FOR OPT AFTERTHE 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.

*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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible OPT application date</th>
<th>Possible requested OPT start date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/02/2024</td>
<td>05/31/2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/29/2024</td>
<td>05/31/2024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Download OPT Dates Worksheet

Last Update September 2023
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Selecting OPT Start and End Dates – Coursework Requirement

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. 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.

Download OPT Dates Worksheet

Last Update March 2023
IMPORTANT NOTE 1: 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.
IMPORTANT NOTE 2: PREVIOUS DEGREES AND OPT

F-1 students may only be authorized for a maximum of 12 months of full time OPT during or following each advancing degree level. If you have already been authorized for OPT at the same degree level for which you are now applying for OPT, you are not be eligible for OPT at that same degree level again.

The highest level of OPT that can be used is PhD. If you have already been approved for PhD level OPT, you are not eligible for any other OPT at any degree level.

Example 1: You are currently pursuing a master’s degree at Rutgers. You also previously earned another master’s degree in the US. You already applied for and were approved for OPT based on that previous master’s degree. In this case, you will only be eligible for another period of OPT at the next advancing degree level (Doctorate), if applicable.

Example 2: You used OPT at the bachelor's level in the past. You now just finished a Master's. You can apply for OPT based on this Master's because it is a higher degree level than the bachelor's, and you have not already used OPT at the Master's or PhD level.

If this situation applies to you, contact our office before moving forward with your application: isss-students@global.rutgers.edu
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Selecting OPT Start and End Dates – Pre-completion

**PRE-COMPLETION OPT**

(only for students who have not yet completed degree 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.

The earliest possible requested OPT start date is the day after degree requirement completion date; the requested OPT end date must be before degree requirement completion date.

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.

Download OPT Dates Worksheet

Last Update March 2023
FEE USING A CHECK, G-1450 FORM, OR MONEY ORDER

CHECK
The check must be drawn from a bank or other financial institution located in the United States and must be payable in U.S. currency

Make the check payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security.** Spell this name out; DO NOT use USDHS or DHS or other abbreviations

Add your SEVIS ID number, phone number and the phrase “Fee for I-765” in the memo area

Include the date and be sure to sign your name with a pen

DO NOT write on the back of the check. If your check is a “starter check” and does not show any name/address in the top left corner, we instead suggest using a money order (see next slide)

NOTE: If you apply for Premium Processing, you will need to pay for that fee as well.
OR MONEY ORDER

Each money order is different. Follow the instructions provided at the time of purchase or ask the institution providing the money order to explain how to fill in the necessary information. Money orders are sold at United States Post Offices and sometimes drugstores, like Walgreens. They cost a small fee.

The money order must be drawn on a bank or other financial institution located in the United States and must be payable in U.S. currency.

Make the money order payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Spell this name out; DO NOT use USDHS or DHS or other abbreviations.

If a recipient address is needed, write the address where your application will be mailed - https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses

If your address is needed, write the mailing address you wrote for #5a-c on page 2 of the I-765.

Add your SEVIS ID number, phone number and the phrase “Fee for I-765” in the memo area.

DO NOT write on the back of the money order.

Keep the money order receipt for tracking purposes.
If you prefer to pay the filing fee by credit card, follow the instructions to complete form G-1450: [https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450](https://www.uscis.gov/g-1450)

Be sure to write out the full expiration date of your credit card i.e. “04/2024”, not just “4/24”

You MUST sign the G-1450 with black pen ink after printing, not digitally/on the computer

If your credit card becomes unusable before USCIS can charge it, you may experience delays or a rejection. This includes the card being stolen or lost

Please alert your credit card company that you are expecting this charge to be made to your card – USCIS will only try to process the credit card ONCE. If it does not work the first time, your application will be rejected

Check that all of your card information is typed correctly (i.e. numbers are in right order, the dates are correct)
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Prepare all application materials: Form G-1145

STEP 1 - Download fillable PDF Form G-1145 here:

STEP 2 - Complete form providing your name, email address and phone number

Use this form to request an email/text notification from USCIS when your application is accepted by the lockbox facility.

This notification does not replace the paper I-797C receipt you will receive in the mail.

You must have the paper receipt in order to travel.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Form I-765

**STEP 1** - Read official instructions for completing Form I-765: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765)

**STEP 2** - Download fillable PDF Form I-765 here: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765). Answers should be typed. When unable to type, please write answers very neatly with a black pen.

Do not fill out the top portion of page 1. Please leave this blank.

Note in the official instructions that you must write “N/A” or “None” for questions that do not apply to you for the entire I-765.
STEP 3 - Be sure to check off “I am applying for: 1.a. Initial permission to accept employment” in Part 1

STEP 4 – If you have used other names on other documents, either formally or informally, please write them on questions 2 – 4, as needed. This includes maiden names or nicknames. If not, write N/A for each box
STEP 5 – Complete the rest of Part 2 of the form, paying attention to these important reminders:

a. Write in a U.S. mailing address for questions 5.b-e. where you will be able to receive documents for the next three to four 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. You may want to purchase a P.O. box instead.

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 5.a., answer “No” to question 6, and provide your current address in questions 7. a-d

If you are unable to type in these boxes, please write neatly in black ink instead, or try a different browser/after downloading and saving to desktop.
b. If you have ever applied for an EAD card before, answer “Yes” to question 12 and attach a copy of the front and back of your previous EAD card(s) and/or Denial notices.

c. If you do not yet have a Social Security number (SSN), you may apply for one now by completing questions 13.a. - 17.b. Write “NONE” for question 13.b if you do not have a SSN. You must answer “Yes” to numbers 14 and 15, and provide your parents’ names for questions 16.a. - 17.b.

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.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Prepare all application materials: Form I-765

RUTGERS GLOBAL—International Student and Scholar Services

d. Obtain your I-94 number and write in question 21.a.; to view and print your I-94 go to: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/

e. Write in the airport code, city, and state for question 23

f. 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 type for question 24

g. Enter your current SEVIS ID number in question 26. Your SEVIS ID is located at the top left corner of your I-20. Use Part 6. Additional Information to provide any previously used SEVIS ID numbers, if applicable
h. Fill in (c)(3)(B) in question 27 for post-completion optional practical training (c is lower case, B is upper case)

Fill in (c)(3)(A) in question 27 for pre-completion optional practical training (c is lower case, A is upper case)

i. For questions 28.a.-28.b., write N/A

j. For questions 28.c.-29, and 31.a. write NONE

k. Do NOT check the boxes for questions 30. or 31.b.
STEP 6 - Complete Part 3 of the form, paying attention to these important reminders:

a. Check response 1.a. “I can read and understand English, and I have read and understand every question and instruction on this application and my answer to every question.”

b. Fill out the rest of the contact information on page 4
STEP 7 - Complete Part 3 of the form, paying attention to these important reminders:

a. Sign question 7.a. Signature MUST be in black pen ink and fit within box provided. USCIS will NOT accept a stamped or digital name in place of an ink signature.

b. For question 7.b., write the date out completely as mm/dd/yyyy, such as 03/07/2023.

c. You must be located inside of the U.S. to apply for an OPT EAD card.
STEP 8 - Complete Parts 4 and 5 of the form, paying attention to these important reminders:

a. If a question does not apply to you in Part 4 and Part 5, type “N/A”. If a question asks for a numerical response and does not apply to you, write “NONE”.

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Prepare all application materials: Form I-765
STEP 9 - Complete Part 6 of the form if:

a. You have been approved for CPT in the past
b. You have been approved for OPT in the past
c. You have used a different SEVIS ID in F-1 status in the US
   • For example, 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.
d. You have a matter that needs explanation (i.e. withdrew a previous OPT application, have multiple passports for dual citizenship)

For each of the items listed above, complete one box in Part 6. We suggest using the following to complete the Page number, Part Number, and Item number, as this information is required specific to Category (c)(3)(B) (per the I-765 instructions) Please see next page for an example

Write your name for questions 1.a.-1.b, and NONE for question 2.
Page 3, Part 2, Item 27

a. **CPT:** List all previous CPT authorizations, regardless of degree level
   - Employer’s name, start & end date, PT/FT, degree level
   - Attach copies of previous I-20(s) with your previous CPT authorization(s)

b. **OPT:** Please list your past OPT approvals, regardless of degree level
   - OPT Authorizations (as a title to the section)
   - Start date-End date; Degree Level (Bachelor, Master’s, or PhD)

Page 3, Part 2, Item 26

c. **Previous SEVIS ID’s:** Please list your other SEVIS ID’s you have used in the past.
   - Previous SEVIS ID’s (as a title to the section)
   - SEVIS ID: N00… Program start date - Program end date; Degree Level (Bachelor’s, Master’s, or PhD)

**STEP 10** - Remember to include all 7 pages of Form I-765 in your application to USCIS
2 COLOR PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATIONS

The color photographs 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

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Prepare all application materials: Two passport style photographs

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).

Using a pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and SEVIS ID number on the back of the photo.

Last Update: July 2021
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Copies of other immigration documents

Include the following in your packet:

1) **Image of your most recent passport.** You only need to show 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, include a copy of 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.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Copies of other immigration documents

Include the following in your application packet:

4) **I-94 number.** To view and print your digital I-94 go to: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/](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

*Make sure the images are clear and readable*
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Unofficial Full Transcript

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. Print your unofficial transcript
4. RBHS students can get their transcripts at my.rutgers.edu under the banner “self-service” tab
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: CPT/OPT authorizations

If you received CPT/OPT authorization at any degree level, you should include copies of pages 1 & 2 of the (previous) I-20s on which the authorization was shown.

Add these copies to your application before mailing to USCIS.
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. Recommended changes will be sent to you via email

STEP 3 - Make an optional, virtual appointment to review your application with an ISA 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

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 adviser.
STEP 1 - Look for an email confirming that your new I-20 with OPT recommendation is ready. 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. Print and sign this I-20 and make a copy to mail with the OPT application. Keep the original I-20.

STEP 3 – Carefully read the email for important guidelines and reminders.
STEP 1 – Review your application materials for correctness and completeness. Make a photocopy/take pictures of your entire application to keep for your own records. We suggest paperclipping your documents together instead of using any staples. Review USCIS’s optional application checklist here: https://www.uscis.gov/forms/optional-checklist-for-form-i-765-c3b-filings

STEP 2 - Select a carrier and request a tracking number so you know the application was received. Do NOT throw away your tracking information after delivery. USICS does not receipt packages on weekends. Please be sure your package arrives on a weekday BEFORE your grace period ends.

Please review the Direct Filing Addresses for Form I-765 page to see where you should file your application.

STEP 3 – After mailing you should receive the official receipt notice at your mailing address. If you do not get your receipt, please view this USCIS webpage: https://egov.uscis.gov/e-request/displayNDNForm.do
Please note that **USCIS announced** the ability to apply for OPT online.

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](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](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 you submit your RFE reply/new application, if time allows. You may need an updated I-20 from our staff.

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

Last Update September 2023