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: 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: global.rutgers.edu/OPT-Extensions
STEP 1 - Attend the appropriate workshop on Canvas: 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:

• 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.

• USCIS announced that the OPT application fee will remain $410 for now.

• You cannot begin working until you have received your new EAD card and the start date has taken effect.
If you have completed your coursework or will soon be graduating, you must attend the Post-Completion OPT Workshop on Canvas 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

You can gain access to this workshop by request through the RGlobal Portal. You must fill out the “Online Workshop Access” e-form.

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 Canvas.

Go to: https://canvas.rutgers.edu/
Select: Rutgers Global – ISSS
Navigate to the appropriate workshop

Last Update April 2021
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials

1. $410 check, money order, or G-1450 (recommend to type)
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. Photocopy of your passport(s) picture page
6. Photocopy of your most recent F-1 visa and most recent visa stamp
7. Hardcopy of your electronic Form I-94 OR photocopy of your paper Form I-94 (front and back)
8. Unofficial full transcript that shows your name
9. Photocopies of all previous EAD cards (front and back) that have been issued to you, if applicable
10. Evidence of all previous CPT authorizations, if applicable (ex. copies of previous I-20s)
11. Photocopy 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.
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**
- **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.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS
STEP 2
Selecting OPT Start and End Dates – Degree Requirement

POST-COMPLETION OPT
SCENARIO 1: APPLYING FOR OPT AFTER COMPLETING ALL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

We recommend starting to prepare your OPT application a few weeks before your 90 day application window would begin.

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**

- Possible OPT application date
- Possible requested OPT start date

**Download OPT Dates Worksheet**

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OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Selecting OPT Start and End Dates – Coursework Requirement

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

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)

We recommend starting to prepare your OPT application a few weeks before your 90 day application window would begin

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 April 2021
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)

We recommend starting to prepare your OPT application a few weeks before your 90 day application window would begin.

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

Download OPT Dates Worksheet

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OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: $410 check, money order or G-1450

$410 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)
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. “04/2021”, not just “4/21”

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.

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

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Form G-1145

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

STEP 2 - Download fillable PDF Form I-765 here: 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 the instructions printed on page 1, explaining to 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.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2
Prepare all application materials: Form I-765

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.

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.

If you answered “Yes” to question 6, please write “N/A” for questions 7.a., 7.c., and 7.d.; write “NONE” for 7.b. and 7.e.
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.
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, write NONE

k. Do NOT check the boxes for questions 30.a.-30.c.
I. Write NONE for question 30.d., and N/A for questions 30.e. - 30.g. Write NONE for question 31.a.

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 a signature

b. For question 7.b., write the date out completely as mm/dd/yyyy, such as 03/07/2021

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”
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.

**OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2**

Prepare all application materials: Two passport style photographs

- Photographs must be taken recently and not been used before.
- Using a pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and SEVIS ID number on the back of the photo.
OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 2

Prepare all application materials: Photocopies of other immigration documents

Photocopy of your passport(s), most recent F-1 visa, and most recent U.S. entry stamp

Copy of your most recent I-94
https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/

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

RUTGERS GLOBAL—International Student and Scholar Services

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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 authorizations

If you received CPT authorization, you should include copies of page 2 of the (previous) I-20 on which this CPT authorization was shown.

Add this copy to your application before mailing to USCIS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>FULL/PART-TIME</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>START DATE</th>
<th>END DATE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>PART TIME</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
<td>07 SEPTEMBER 2018</td>
<td>20 DECEMBER 2018</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>AUTHORIZATION DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>07 SEPTEMBER 2018 - 20 DECEMBER 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER NAME</th>
<th>START DATE</th>
<th>END DATE</th>
<th>CITY &amp; STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07 SEPTEMBER 2018</td>
<td>20 DECEMBER 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RUTGERS GLOBAL—International Student and Scholar Services

OPT APPLICATION PROCESS STEP 3
Meet with an International Student Adviser

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 3 – 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.

Last Update April 2021
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 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.

On Jan. 8, USCIS adjusted the filing location for certain foreign students filing Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. 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

*USCIS may be experiencing delays in issuing receipt notices for some applications and petitions filed at a USCIS lockbox facility.
ISSS is aware that on April 12, 2021 USCIS announced the ability to apply for OPT online. However, as this process is very new, our office is not yet able to advise on how to file your application online. Students can continue to file in the traditional method of mailing materials to USCIS, as they state on their website this is still acceptable. Applying online would be your choice and without advising.

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 OR DENIED APPLICATIONS

If your application is rejected or denied by USCIS for any reason, 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.

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
In a positive update from USCIS on February 26, 2021, the agency announced flexibilities for some international students in F-1 status who are affected by delayed receipt notices for their OPT or STEM OPT applications. We hope these flexibilities will ease the hardships we know many of our international students have been facing due to these delays. These accommodations apply only to applications received on or after October 1, 2020, through May 1, 2021, inclusive. The main points of the announcement include:

• USCIS will approve applications for post-completion OPT with validity dates reflecting the same amount of time originally recommended by the designated school official (DSO) from their school on the Form I-20.

• F-1 students requesting post-completion OPT who receive an approval of Form I-765 for less than the full amount of OPT time requested (not to exceed 12 months) due to the requirement that the OPT be completed within 14 months of the program end date may request a correction of the EAD due to USCIS error.

• If a student’s OPT or STEM OPT application was rejected by the USCIS and they are past their eligible window of time to reapply for OPT due to the lockbox delays, they will now be able to refile their application as long as it was timely filed. Refiled applications must be received by May 31, 2021, for USCIS to treat the application as though filed on the original received date.

• Students refiling a Form I-765 for OPT or STEM OPT do not need to obtain a new Form I-20 with an updated OPT recommendation from the DSO, as long as they originally submitted an application for post-completion OPT within 30 days of the DSO’s recommendation or an application for STEM OPT within 60 days of the DSO’s recommendation as required by the regulations.

• Although lockboxes will continue to reject OPT applications with a missing or deficient signature, if such an application is accepted by the lockbox and makes its way to a USCIS adjudicator, USCIS will issue an RFE for the proper signature instead of denying the application.

Full text of the February 26, 2021 USCIS News Alert
Reminders about these USCIS Flexibilities

- If any of these accommodations apply to your OPT or STEM OPT application, please review the information on the USCIS announcement carefully and follow the instructions as appropriate to your situation. If you have any questions, please contact an ISSS advisor.

- If your OPT/STEM OPT application was rejected and you intend to refile your application based on these new flexibilities, we strongly recommend that you contact an ISSS advisor prior to mailing out your new application, so we can assist you in the process.

- If you have already applied for OPT/STEM OPT and your application is pending, there is no need to reapply.

- Learn more about OPT/STEM OPT on the Rutgers Global - ISSS website.

Background Information

- Previous Memo from USCIS Regarding Lockbox Delays - January 8, 2021 - USCIS Lockbox Updates

- Advocacy on behalf of students affected by the delays

- January 26, ACE (American Council Education) sent a letter to USCIS on behalf of 37 associations of higher education requesting immediate action.

- February 24, NAFSA sent recommendations to USCIS

- Article on Lawsuit filed in Ohio seeks "timely" OPT processing in the US

- Updates from the Association of International Educators (NAFSA)