
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) INSTRUCTION GUIDE

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)? Optional Practical Training (OPT) as defined by federal regulations permits F-1 students to receive temporary employment to gain work experience directly related to their major field of study for up to 12 months per educational level. There are two types of OPT options: *Pre-completion* (OPT taken during studies/before graduation) and *Post-completion* (OPT taken after graduation). Post-completion OPT falls into 3 subcategories - *Standard Post-completion* (OPT taken immediately after graduation), *STEM OPT Extension* (24 additional months to work for students with degrees in science, technology, engineering and math and are listed on the DHS STEM degree program list). As well, there is *H-1B cap-gap extension OPT* (for students whose employer has filed an H-1B petition on their behalf).

What is an H-1B Cap Gap Extension and how do I obtain one? Duration of status (D/S) and any post-completion OPT or STEM OPT work authorization are automatically extended for any F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 (the first day of the following fiscal year).

What are the requirements to be eligible for Pre-completion OPT and Post-completion OPT? Students must have been enrolled as an F-1 student and in good academic standing for one academic year before applying for OPT. Students must also attend an OPT information session before they can apply for OPT at NCCU.

What are the job requirements for OPT? An offer of employment is not necessary to apply for OPT, however students may not be unemployed for more than 90 days under post-completion OPT and no more than 150 days for 24-month STEM OPT once work authorization has been approved. Work must be related to your field of study. There is no limit of unemployment for pre-completion OPT, but again, work must be related to your field of study. Students may work for any employer, many different employers, or anywhere in the U.S. as long as it relates to their degree under the pre-completion and standard post-completion option. There are additional conditions for STEM OPT. See the next section below for additional requirements on STEM OPT.

What are the consequences of exceeding unemployment? If students exceed the period of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, they have violated their status unless they have applied to continue their education by changing levels or transferring to another certified school, departed the United States, or have taken action to otherwise maintain legal status.

What are the differences between Pre-completion OPT, Post-completion OPT and STEM OPT Extension?

Pre-completion OPT - The duration lasts for 12 months (12 months total for both pre-completion and post-completion OPT combined) and occurs before completion of the degree. Students can only work part-time when classes are in session; no more than 20 hours per week. Students may work full-time or up to 40 hours per week during university breaks. Students who have completed all course work except for thesis or dissertation may work part-time or full-time. There is no limit of unemployment for pre-completion OPT. All work must be completed before completing the degree.

Post-completion OPT - The duration lasts for 12 months (12 months total for both pre-completion and post-completion OPT combined) and occurs after completion of the degree. Students have a 14-month window to use post-completion OPT. An offer of employment is not necessary to apply for post-completion OPT; *however*, students are expected to work during work authorization period and have a 90-day limit for unemployment accrued.

STEM OPT Extension – The duration lasts for 24 months, but students must already be engaged in post-completion OPT. Students may accumulate no more than 150 days of unemployment during the total 36-month OPT period. If properly and timely filed, students may work up to 180 days past the work authorization end date while STEM extension application is pending with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (UCSIS). The employer must be registered in the E-verify program and have an Employment Identification Number (EIN). There must be a bona fide employer-employee relationship between the student and the employer. It requires completion and submission of a Form I-983 Training Plan by the student and employer to the student's DSO or international student advisor. As with other OPT options, employment must be related to the major area of study. Unlike other OPT options, *STEM OPT must be paid employment*. Students applying for this option must have a degree CIP code in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math that is listed on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List. The CIP code for a student's major can be found under the major on page one of the I-20. The complete list of approved STEM fields can be found at [STEM OPT Degree List](#). The STEM extension must be based on a major field of study and not a minor and may be based on the most recent STEM degree or a STEM degree earned earlier at a university or college in the U.S. The degree earned must be from a U.S. college or university that is SEVP-certified and accredited at the time of application for the extension and received within 10 years preceding the time of application. Students are eligible for two extensions of this option during their study in the U.S., but they must be done at different education levels.

What is the Form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students? The Form I-983 is the key component of the 24-month STEM OPT Extension. It is used by the employer and student to outline the student's training plan and for self-evaluations. Specifically, it is used to identify goals for the practical training, including "specific knowledge, skills or techniques that will be imparted to the student, and explain how those goals will be achieved through the work-based learning opportunity with the employer; describe a performance evaluation process; and describe methods of oversight and supervision." Students engaging in this option must fill out this form with their employer and submit it to an OIA student advisor/DSO for review and approval before applying for the extension. See [Study in the States](#) for more information.

What kind of work can students do while on OPT? Students on pre-completion and post completion OPT may have regular paid employment, self-employment, volunteer work, internships, work for hire, employment through an agency, or multiple short-term employment. Work should be at least for 20 hours per week to be considered employment.

With STEM OPT, there must be a bona fide employer-employee relationship between the student and the employer, work may not be on a volunteer basis and must be at least 20 hours per week. In all cases, students should keep evidence (employment letters, contract agreements) and lists of all work, as well as, length of employment.

How long may students work on OPT? All students who have completed their degree or for graduate students who have completed their coursework and are only working on their thesis are granted a maximum of 12 months per education level. Some students with degrees in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields are allowed two extensions of 24 months at different education levels.

When can students apply for OPT? Students may apply for pre-completion OPT up to 90 days before the employment start date provided that the 1 academic year enrollment requirement has been met. Students may apply for post-completion OPT up to 90 days prior to graduation (completion of program or program end date), but no later than 60 days after the program end date on the I-20. For example, a student who will graduate May 12th, may apply as early as February 11th (90 days before graduation) with a date to begin work as early as May 13th or no later than July 12th (60 days after graduation). Students applying for STEM OPT must apply before the expiration of their current post-completion OPT, but no sooner than 90 days before that date; and no later than 60 days from the date an OIA student advisor or designated school official (DSO) recommended the STEM OPT extension in SEVIS.

When can students begin working? A student must first receive approval from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Employment Authorization Document or card (EAD) from USCIS before beginning employment. Students may begin working according to the start date on the EAD – not before.

What if a STEM OPT student changes employers?

The student must obtain a completed and signed Form I-983 Training Plan from the new employer, provide that plan to an OIA student advisor within 10 days of beginning the new training opportunity, and obtain a new recommendation from the DSO.

**GUIDANCE TO APPLY FOR PRE-COMPLETION OR POST-COMPLETION OPT –
PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION CAREFULLY**

- 1. Attend an OPT Information Session.** Students must have attended one OPT information session by OIA to be eligible to apply for OPT.
- 2. OPT Work Authorization Start Date:** Determine a date that you want your OPT work authorization to start. For post-completion OPT, the start date must be on or after the "Program End Date" listed on your current I-20. It cannot be more than 60 days after the Program End Date. USCIS processing times for I-765 OPT applications vary but may take up to 3 months. You should consider a start date that will allow USCIS enough time to process your application and allow you to use the full 12 months of OPT – at least 3 months is recommended.
- 3. Collect the documents from the checklist below for uploading in the online application or to mail to USCIS.**

You must be physically present in the U.S. when your OPT application is filed with USCIS.

You may file your application with USCIS online or by mail, but do NOT file both paper and online applications. Doing so will cause your application to be denied.

Do not submit your online application before calling OIA (530-7912) to schedule an appointment or emailing a draft copy of your complete I-765 application and evidence for review to OIA and until you have received a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation.

If you prefer to come in person for an appointment, bring all application documents for review. OIA staff will not make copies of documents needed for your application. If eligible, the international student adviser will make the OPT recommendation in SEVIS and print your new I-20 for application to USCIS.

Evidence Document Checklist

- 2 x 2 Digital color U.S. style passport photo of yourself taken within the last 6 months.

- Most recent Form I-94
- Scan of passport identification page (plus extension page, if applicable). See Employment Authorization Document section below.
- Scan of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards (front and back), if applicable
- Scan of all previously issued CPT and/or OPT I-20s
- Scan of OPT I-20 with OPT recommendation on page 2 from the Office of International Affairs issued within 30 days of filing the OPT application with USCIS .

See further information under “Evidence.”

4. If applying online, create a [USCIS online account](#).

5. Start your application by clicking on “File a Form Online” under “Select What You Want To Do” (if you do not have cases in progress) or through the “My Account” tab. Select “I-765, Application for Employment Authorization” from the list of options -> Click “Start form.” Carefully really through all provided information before proceeding to form questions.

***For any fields that are not applicable on the electronic application, please leave blank.**

• ***File a Form.***

Select I-765, Application form Employment Authorization from the list of USCIS online forms.

• ***What is your eligibility category?***

Select c(3)(B) for post-completion OPT or c(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT. The category of OPT can be verified by reviewing page 2 of your I-20 which contains the details of your OPT recommendation.

• ***Reason for applying***

Select initial permission to accept employment

• ***Have you previously filed I-765?***

Select the appropriate answer and upload evidence of your previous employment authorization document (EAD), if applicable. Please note that Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is not an I-765 filing.

• ***Is someone assisting you with completing this application?***

Select the appropriate answer. Most students should select “no,” unless you have an immigration attorney or employer representative helping you prepare the application. Most students handle the OPT application filing on their own.

• ***What is your current legal name?***

Record your name as shown in your passport

• ***Have you used any other names since birth?***

Please be sure to include any other names used with the university or listed on any formal documents. This includes other naming formats, aliases, maiden names and nicknames.

• ***How may we contact you?***

- Daytime telephone number
- Mobile telephone number (if any)
- Email address

• ***What is your current U.S. mailing address?***

Record the address you want your OPT documents and EAD card mailed to. If it is a friend or family member’s address, list their name in the “In care of name” box, if applicable. We strongly recommend that this mailing address is valid for at least 6 months into the future since changing addresses during a pending OPT application may lead to mail delivery issues.

• ***Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?***

Select the appropriate answer and if you answered “No,” list your physical address.

- ***What is your gender?***
- ***What is your marital status?***
- ***What is your city, town, or village of birth?***
- ***What is your state or province of birth?***
- ***What is your country of birth?***
- ***What is your date of birth?***

Be sure to use the U.S. date format (MM/DD/YYYY)

- ***What is your country of citizenship or nationality?***

List all countries where you are currently a citizen or national.

- ***What is your Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)?***

See “Evidence Details” below for how to obtain your most recent I-94.

- ***Date of arrival***

- Record the date you last entered the U.S

- ***Place of arrival***

- Select your port of entry of arrival from the drop down menu. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) preclearance is available in some foreign airports which is why your port of entry may also be a location outside of the U.S.

- ***Status at last arrival***

Select F-1 – F1 – Student, Academic or Language Program unless you obtained an in- country change of status through USCIS after your most recent date of entry to the U.S.

- ***What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?***

- ***What is your travel document number (if any)?***

Most students should leave this question blank. If you do not have a valid passport, but your country has issued a valid travel document for you instead, please enter the travel document number here. If you have a valid passport, be sure to list the passport number in the previous question.

- ***What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?***

Be sure to list the expiration date of your most recently issued passport, even if your F-1 visa is in a prior passport.

- ***What country issued your passport or travel document?***

List the information from your most recently issued passport, even if your F-1 visa is in a prior passport.

- ***What is your current immigration status or category?***

Select F-1 – F1 – Student, Academic or Language Program

- ***What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)?***

Record the information directly from current your I-20. The SEVIS ID is listed on the top left corner of your I-20 and starts with "N00..."

- **What is your A-Number?**

Most students should check "I do not have or know my A-number." However, if you have been issued an A-number from a previous EAD such as OPT or as part of the green card process, please list your A-number. The A-number is the USCIS # listed on your previous OPT EAD card, if applicable.

- **What is your USCIS Online Account Number?**

Most students should check "I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number." You may already have a USCIS Online Account Number if you previously filed certain paper forms and received an Account Access Notice in the mail. You can find the OAN at the top of the notice; it is not the same as an A-Number.

- **Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?**

- **Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?**

If you would like a social security card issued, you must select "Yes" to the consent of disclosure and provide your parents' name information.

Evidence

Passport Photo – 2 x 2 recent (within 30 days, not ones used for passport or visa), color passport-style photo, see specifications on [US Department of State requirements for passport photos](#). Use either JPEG or PNG format

I-94 – Upload copy of electronic I-94 Arrival/Departure Record. If your most recent entry to the U.S. was through a land port of entry, you may have a paper I-94 instead of an electronic I-94. (Visit, [Get Most Recent I-94](#), select I acknowledge and agree, and enter your information to retrieve this information).

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) – Upload previously-issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards, if applicable.

Also upload your current, valid passport ID page here (and biographical pages showing renewal page if original has expired or changes in name or corrections, etc.) even if you do have a previously issued EAD.

Previously Issued CPT and/or OPT I-20s – Upload any I-20s with previously authorized CPT and/or OPT on page 2.

New OPT I-20 - Upload copy of **ONLY** the new I-20 issued to you from OIA with the OPT recommendation on page 2 here. Check that your Program of Study information on page 1 of the I-20 and OPT recommendation dates on page 2 are correct.

Make sure that it has been hand signed and dated in the Student Attestation section on page 1 of the I-20. **(You cannot file your I-765 without this I-20. Doing so will cause your application to be denied.)**

Submit the I-765 **within 30 days** of OIA recommending OPT in your SEVIS record. You can confirm this by the "date issued" section on page 1 of your I-20 in the "School Attestation" box.

Additional Information

Use this section of the I-765 application to provide additional information about any responses to questions in previous sections of the application. You should include the questions you are referencing. Examples would be previous SEVIS ID number different from your current SEVIS ID number or any previous CPT or OPT authorizations. See below for how you can enter this information.

1. Previously used SEVIS numbers (each SEVIS record, degree level, if applicable, and corresponding immigration status, i.e. F-1, J-1) See examples below:
 - N0089999999, Bachelor's, F-1
 - N0097777777, J-1 Research Scholar
2. Previously authorized CPT or OPT I-20s and the academic level at which it was authorized. See examples below:
 - CPT Authorizations:

Part-time, 8/15/2022 – 12/09/2022, PhD
Full-time, 1/11/2021 – 05/07/2021, Master's
Part-time, 01/08/2018 – 05/12/2018, Bachelor's

- OPT Authorizations:
Post-completion OPT Authorization:
5/13/2018 – 05/12/2018, Bachelor's

Additional internal documentation you must submit just to the Office of International Affairs. This should not be submitted to USCIS:

1. Letter from academic advisor indicating current academic status (major, degree level, date of completion of studies and recommendation of Optional Practical Training (use department letterhead, see sample on page 8)
2. Completed Acknowledgment of Responsibilities While Engaging in Optional Practical Training form (see page 9)

Applying by Mail - If you choose to mail your application, complete and print Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization from the USCIS website here, www.uscis.gov. Scroll down to Form Number I-765.

Number 27, Eligibility Category should be (c)(3)(A) for pre-completion OPT or (c)(3)(B) for post-completion OPT. Only list 1 option.

Note: Make sure to enter a valid mailing address that you do not plan to move from over the next 6 months. This is where your EAD will be mailed. It can be very challenging and time consuming to request another card if it gets lost in the mail.

Include the documents Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Optional). Use this form to request a text message and/or email when USCIS accepts your form. From the www.uscis.gov, scroll down to Form Number G-1145.

Include all pages of the Form I-765, Form G-1145, USCIS fee of \$410 by check, money order, cashier's check or pay by credit card using [Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transactions](#) and documentation from the above document checklist. If paying by check, money order or cashier's check, you must make it payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (do not abbreviate).

6. **DO NOT submit your application online or by mail before calling OIA (530-7912) to schedule an appointment or emailing a draft copy of your complete I-765 application and evidence for review to OIA and until you have received a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation. When you have finished filling out the online I-765 form, you can save a draft of the I-765 form completed with your responses and a summary of uploaded evidence by clicking View Draft Snapshot. Please send your draft copy to OIA with the other documents requested in this STEM OPT guide in one complete file to OIA via FileLocker or by email to oiasss@nccu.edu.**

FileLocker Instructions:

- Go to MyEOL
- Then open FileLocker
- Upload file(s)
- Once file is loaded, click on file
- Then, "Share This File"
- Receiver will receive an email
- Will have receiver paste the link in URL bar to access
- It will ask the user to log in or create an account.

If you prefer to come in person for an appointment, bring all application documents for review. OIA staff will not make copies of documents needed for your application. If eligible, the international student adviser will make the OPT recommendation in SEVIS and print your new I-20 for application to USCIS.

7. After you receive your I-20 from OIA with the recommendation for OPT,

- Complete and submit your I-765 application online or by mail **within 30 days of OIA recommending OPT in your SEVIS record.** If not, the I-20 with the OPT recommendation will become invalid. If completing it online, review your application carefully before submitting as changes cannot be made after it is submitted. It is highly recommended that you save a copy of your completed form. If you are submitting your application by mail, make a copy for your records.

IMPORTANT: Contact OIA immediately if you will not graduate by the date indicated on your I-20 so that the appropriate action can be taken.

If mailing your application to USCIS:

- Confirm the correct USCIS address to send your paper-based application by visiting the USCIS Where to File section of the I-765 forms page. Search by clicking the drop arrow tab to find "Foreign Students," and locate the address options associated with Pre-Completion or Post-Completion OPT.

- Mail your OPT application using a trackable method and keep evidence of delivery. If you send your application with a method that requires a signature upon delivery, use the appropriate "Express Mail & Courier Service Deliveries" address location.

Per USCIS, the benefits to filing your application online vs by mail:

- Ability to enter your information using a phone, tablet, or computer;
- Avoid common mistakes (for example, you won't be able to submit without signing);
- Save your draft application and finish it at your own pace;
- Easily and securely pay your filing fee; and
- Receive immediate confirmation that USCIS has received your application instead of waiting for the mail.

After you file, you can use your account to:

- Get your current case status and the history of your case;
- Respond to Requests for Evidence (RFEs);
- Access every notice USCIS sends to you; and
- Send USCIS secure messages and get answers.

With use of the G-1145 form, email or text notifications on the receipt of your application may take two weeks to receive. Paper receipt notices may take 3-4 weeks to arrive after filing an application by mail.

After Applying for OPT and Maintaining Status

1. After your application has been submitted online you will receive a receipt confirmation. If you send your application by mail, you will be sent a paper receipt notice with a case number. Please keep this notice for your records. Once your OPT application is approved, you will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS giving you permission to work off campus. You may NOT begin working until the employment start date on your EAD.
2. **Provide a copy of your EAD to the Office of International Affairs once approved via FileLocker or by email at oiasss@nccu.edu.**
 - Go to MyEOL
 - Then open FileLocker
 - Upload file(s)
 - Once file is loaded, click on file
 - Then, "Share This File"
 - Receiver will receive an email
 - Will have receiver paste the link in URL bar to access
 - It will ask the user to log in or create an account.
3. **Make the following reports to OIA and to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) during your entire Post-Completion OPT authorization period in order to maintain your F-1 status:**
 - **Report your employer information as soon as you receive employment to avoid going past the 90-day limit of unemployment.** Once the employment start date on your EAD has been reached, SEVIS begins to count each day there is no employment information entered in your SEVIS record.

Two ways to report your employment status while on Post-Completion OPT – via the SEVP portal and via the OPT report form:

- Once your authorization has been approved by USCIS or by the date your work authorization begins, you will receive an email to your email account listed in SEVIS from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov from SEVP to set up your SEVP portal. Make sure that you have provided OIA with the email address you will use while on OPT. If you continue to use your NCCU email account, you must keep your password registration up-to-date. The portal allows students on OPT to update the government on their work status, address and contact information. It will be important to set up your account right away so that you can make updates. The link will become invalid after 14 days. See the link below for specific details on setting it up. <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help>
- You should also report your employment status by completing the OPT report form from the OIA website for our office records. Go to <https://www.nccu.edu/office-international-affairs>, then Additional Forms, then select OPT Employment and Address Report Form.
- **Report any changes of the following as soon as possible and no later than within 10 days of the change to OIA and to your SEVP portal as noted in the instructions above:**
 - change of name

- change of your mailing address (where you receive mail), physical address (where you live), and contact information (email, telephone number)
- new employment or changes in employment
- termination, interruption of employment (details should include the date the employment ended)
- changes in your immigration status
- you end your OPT and return to your home country or depart from the U.S. with no intention of returning
- you start a new program

Note that you will receive important reporting reminders and notifications from SEVP to the email account recorded in your SEVIS records.

- 4. If you are on Pre-Completion OPT, report any changes of your name and/or address as usual within 10 days.** Changes should be made using the [F-1 Student Update Sheet](#).

Travel and Reentry Outside of the U.S.

You may travel outside of the U.S. temporarily (less than 5 months) and reenter provided you carry an unexpired EAD, I-20 signed by an OIA advisor for travel within the last 6 months, valid passport and F-1 visa and letter of employment, if you have one. Take caution if traveling out of the country before your OPT application has been approved, as USCIS may ask for a request for evidence (RFE) while you are away. You should make sure that the mailing address provided to USCIS is up-to-date to prevent any mail from USCIS getting lost.

Students should complete a [Request for a Travel Signature](#) form to have your I-20 signed at least two weeks before travel. Please note that you will not be eligible to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status if you have exceeded the limits on unemployment.

After Post-Completion OPT

After OPT students may transfer to another degree program, change their status, or return home. This must be done before the end of your 60-day grace period.

GUIDANCE TO APPLY FOR 24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION
PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION CAREFULLY

1. **Determine your eligibility for a STEM OPT extension:** Eligibility for a STEM OPT extension requires a student with a STEM-qualifying bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree from an accredited, SEVIS-certified U.S. educational institution, to be in a bona-fide employer employee relationship (not self-employed), currently be on post-completion OPT that has not expired, have an offer of paid employment for at least 20 hours per week from an employer enrolled in E-Verify and has an EIN number. **Check to see if your degree is listed here** [DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List](#).
2. Complete [Form I-983](#) with appropriate individuals from your place of employment. See [Study in the States](#) page, I-983 Overview & Instructions for instructions and tutorial on completing the form.
3. Complete the OIA OPT Employment and Address Report Form with your current contact, address (where you physically live, which may be different from where you receive your mail) and employer information. Go to <https://www.nccu.edu/office-international-affairs>, then Additional Forms, then select OPT Employment and Address Report Form.
4. Collect the documents from the checklist below for uploading in the online application or to mail to USCIS.

You must be physically present in the U.S. when your OPT application is filed with USCIS.

You may file your application with USCIS online or by mail, but do NOT file both paper and online applications. Doing so will cause your application to be denied.

Do not submit your online application before calling OIA (530-7912) to schedule an appointment or emailing a draft copy of your complete I-765 application and evidence for review to OIA and until you have received a new I-20 with the STEM OPT recommendation.

If you prefer to come in person, schedule an appointment by emailing oiaiss@nccu.edu and bring all application documents with you to your appointment for review. OIA staff will not make copies of documents needed for your application. If eligible, the international student adviser will make the OPT recommendation in SEVIS and print your new I-20 for application to USCIS.

Evidence Document Checklist

- 2 x 2 Digital color U.S. style passport photo of yourself taken within the last 6 months. (Provide two 2 x 2 physical color photos if applying by mail.)
- Most recent Form I-94
- Scan of passport identification page (plus extension page, if applicable). See Employment Authorization Document section below.
- Scan of your current and any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards (front and back)
- Scan of OPT I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation on page 2 from the Office of International Affairs issued within 60 days of filing the OPT application with USCIS.
- Scan of your diploma or official transcript showing the educational level and STEM-eligible field of study
- Institution Accreditation ONLY for students applying based on a prior degree.

See further information under "Evidence."

5. If applying online, create a [USCIS online account](#) if you do not already have one.
6. Start your application by clicking on "File a Form Online" under "Select What You Want To Do" (if you do not have cases in progress) or through the "My Account" tab. Select "I-765, Application for Employment Authorization" from the list of options -> Click "Start form." Carefully really through all provided information before proceeding to form questions.

***For any fields that are not applicable on the electronic application, please leave blank.**

- ***File a Form.***

Select I-765, Application form Employment Authorization from the list of USCIS online forms.

- ***What is your eligibility category?***

Select c(3)(C) for STEM OPT as the appropriate category.

- ***What is your degree?***

Indicate the STEM OPT qualifying degree you have received (use the CIP code listed on page 1 of your I-20).

- ***What is your employer's name as listed in E-Verify?***

You will need to get this information from your employer's Human Resources office.

- ***What is your employer's E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number?***

You will need to get this information from your employer's Human Resources office. Note that the E-verify number and the EIN (Employer Identification Number) are different numbers. Do not list the employer's EIN here.

- ***Reason for applying***

Select "initial permission to accept employment." Do not select the renewal option. This option is only appropriate if you are filing an application to renew an EAD in the same category as the previous EAD.

- ***Have you previously filed I-765?***

Select yes and make sure to upload a front/back scan of your previous employment authorization document (EAD) and a copy of your previous I-765 filings in the "Evidence" section of the form.

- ***Is someone assisting you with completing this application?***

Select the appropriate answer. Most students should select "no," unless you have an immigration attorney or employer representative helping you prepare the application. Most students handle the OPT application filing on their own.

- ***What is your current legal name?***

Record your name as shown in your passport

- ***Have you used any other names since birth?***

Please be sure to include any other names used with the university or listed on any formal documents. This includes other naming formats, aliases, maiden names and nicknames.

- ***How may we contact you?***

- Daytime telephone number
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- Email address

- ***What is your current U.S. mailing address?***

Record the address you want your OPT documents and EAD card mailed to. If it is a friend or family member's address, list their name in the "In care of name" box, if applicable. We strongly recommend that this mailing address is valid for at least 6 months into the future since changing addresses during a pending OPT application may lead to mail delivery issues.

- ***Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?***

Select the appropriate answer and if you answered "No," list your physical address.

- ***What is your gender?***

- ***What is your marital status?***

- ***What is your city, town, or village of birth?***

- ***What is your state or province of birth?***

- ***What is your country of birth?***

- ***What is your date of birth?***

Be sure to use the U.S. date format (MM/DD/YYYY)

- ***What is your country of citizenship or nationality?***

List all countries where you are currently a citizen or national.

- ***What is your Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)?***

See “Evidence Details” below for how to obtain your most recent I-94.

- ***Date of arrival***

- Record the date you last entered the U.S

- ***Place of arrival***

- Select your port of entry of arrival from the drop down menu. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) preclearance is available in some foreign airports which is why your port of entry may also be a location outside of the U.S.

- ***Status at last arrival***

Select F-1 – F1 – Student, Academic or Language Program unless you obtained an in- country change of status through USCIS after your most recent date of entry to the U.S.

- ***What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?***

- ***What is your travel document number (if any)?***

Most students should leave this question blank. If you do not have a valid passport, but your country has issued a valid travel document for you instead, please enter the travel document number here. If you have a valid passport, be sure to list the passport number in the previous question.

- ***What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?***

Be sure to list the expiration date of your most recently issued passport, even if your F-1 visa is in a prior passport.

- ***What country issued your passport or travel document?***

List the information from your most recently issued passport, even if your F-1 visa is in a prior passport.

- ***What is your current immigration status or category?***

Select F-1 – F1 – Student, Academic or Language Program

- ***What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)?***

Record the information directly from current your I-20. The SEVIS ID is listed on the top left corner of your I-20 and starts with “N00...”

- ***What is your A-Number?***

List your A-number. Your A-number is the USCIS # listed on your post-completion OPT EAD card.

- ***What is your USCIS Online Account Number?***

Enter your USCIS Online Account number if you know it or have created one.

- ***Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?***

- **Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?**

You should already have a social security card from when you were on Post-Completion OPT.

Evidence

Passport Photo – 2 x 2 recent (within 30 days, not ones used for passport or visa), color passport-style photo, see specifications on [US Department of State requirements for passport photos](#). Use either JPEG or PNG format

I-94 – Upload copy of most recent electronic I-94 Arrival/Departure Record. If your most recent entry to the U.S. was through a land port of entry, you may have a paper I-94 instead of an electronic I-94. (Visit, [Get Most Recent I-94](#), select I acknowledge and agree, and enter your information to retrieve this information).

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) – Upload current and previously-issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD) cards, front and back.

Also upload your current, valid passport ID page here (and biographical pages showing renewal page if original has expired or changes in name or corrections, etc.) even if you do have a previously issued EAD.

Diploma or Official Transcript – Upload a scan of your diploma or official transcript showing the educational level and STEM-eligible field of study.

Institution Accreditation - ONLY for students applying based on a prior degree – it is suggested that you also provide:

- o A copy of I-20 from prior degree showing STEM CIP code,
- o School accreditation approval letter from your school or alternate documentation of current accreditation,
- o SEVP certification documentation from your school or information for your school from this link [SEVP-Certified Schools](#)

New OPT I-20 - Upload copy of **ONLY** the new I-20 issued to you from OIA with the STEM OPT recommendation on page 2 here. Check that your Program of Study information on page 1 of the I-20 and OPT recommendation dates on page 2 are correct.

Make sure that it has been hand signed and dated in the Student Attestation section on page 1 of the I-20. **(You cannot file your I-765 without this I-20. Doing so will cause your application to be denied.)**

Submit the I-765 **within 60 days** of OIA recommending OPT in your SEVIS record. You can confirm this by the “date issued” section on page 1 of your I-20 in the “School Attestation” box.

Additional Information

If you need to provide additional information for any of your answers to the questions in this form, enter it into the space below. You should include the questions that you are referencing.

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

*STEM extension does not require listing previously issued CPT/OPT or SEVIS numbers.

Applying by Mail - If you choose to mail your application, complete and print Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization from the USCIS website here, www.uscis.gov. Scroll down to Form Number I-765.

Number 27, Eligibility Category should be (c)(3)(C) for STEM OPT. Only list 1 option.

Note: Make sure to enter a valid mailing address that you do not plan to move from over the next 6 months. This is where your EAD will be mailed. It can be very challenging and time consuming to request another card if it gets lost in the mail.

Include the document, Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (Optional). Use this form to request a text message and/or email when USCIS accepts your form.

Include all pages of the Form I-765, Form G-1145, USCIS fee of \$410 by check, money order, cashier’s check or pay by credit card using Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transactions and documentation from the above document checklist. If paying by check, money order or cashier’s check, you must make it payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (do not abbreviate).

7. **DO NOT submit your application online or by mail before calling OIA (530-7912) to schedule an appointment or emailing a draft copy of your complete I-765 application and evidence for review to OIA and until you have received a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation. When you have finished filling out the online I-765 form, you can save a draft of the I-765 form completed with your responses and a summary of uploaded evidence by clicking View Draft Snapshot. Please send your draft copy to OIA with the other documents requested in this STEM OPT guide in one complete file to OIA via FileLocker or by email to oiaiss@nccu.edu.**

FileLocker Instructions:

- Go to MyEOL
- Then open FileLocker
- Upload file(s)
- Once file is loaded, click on file
- Then, "Share This File" and search by name with whom you wish to share your file
- Receiver will receive an email
- Will have receiver paste the link in URL bar to access
- It will ask the user to log in or create an account.

If you prefer to come in person for an appointment, bring all application documents for review. OIA staff will not make copies of documents needed for your application. If eligible, the international student adviser will make the OPT recommendation in SEVIS and print your new I-20 for application to USCIS.

8. After you receive your I-20 from OIA with the recommendation for STEM OPT:

- Complete your application online or by mail. If completing it online, review your application carefully before submitting as changes cannot be made after it is submitted. **It is highly recommended that you save a copy of your completed form.**
- Submit the I-765 application **within 60 days** of OIA recommending OPT in your SEVIS record and pay the USCIS application fee by bank account (ACH), debit or credit card (if applying online) or check, money order, cashier's check or credit card using Form G-1450 (if applying by mail). If not, the I-20 with the OPT recommendation will become invalid.

If mailing your application to USCIS:

- Confirm the correct USCIS address to send your paper-based application by visiting the USCIS Where to File section of the I-765 forms page, [website](#). Search by clicking the drop arrow tab to find "Foreign Students," and locate the address options associated with STEM OPT.
- Mail your STEM OPT application using a trackable method and keep evidence of delivery. If you send your application with a method that requires a signature upon delivery, use the appropriate "Express Mail & Courier Service Deliveries" address location.

Per USCIS, the benefits to filing your application online vs by mail:

- Ability to enter your information using a phone, tablet, or computer;
- Avoid common mistakes (for example, you won't be able to submit without signing);
- Save your draft application and finish it at your own pace;
- Easily and securely pay your filing fee; and
- Receive immediate confirmation that USCIS has received your application instead of waiting for the mail.

After you file, you can use your account to:

- Get your current case status and the history of your case;
- Respond to Requests for Evidence (RFEs);
- Access every notice USCIS sends to you; and
- Send USCIS secure messages and get answers.

With use of the G-1145 form, email or text notifications on the receipt of your application may take two weeks to receive. Paper receipt notices may take 3-4 weeks to arrive after filing an application by mail.

After Applying for STEM OPT and Maintaining Status

1. After your application has been submitted online you will receive a receipt confirmation. If you send your application by mail, you will be sent a paper receipt notice with a case number. Please keep this notice for your records. Once your STEM OPT application is approved, you will receive a new Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS and you may continue your permission to work.

IMPORTANT: The 24-month OPT extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization and ends 24 months thereafter, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.

If you change employers, you must obtain a completed and signed Form I-983 Training Plan from the new employer, provide that plan to an OIA student advisor within 10 days of beginning the new training opportunity, and obtain a new recommendation from the DSO. The employment must meet all conditions for STEM OPT Extension. See Frequently Asked Questions for the conditions for STEM OPT Extension.

2. Provide a copy of your new EAD to the Office of International Affairs once approved via FileLocker or by email at oiasss@nccu.edu.
 - Go to MyEOL
 - Then open FileLocker
 - Upload file(s)
 - Once file is loaded, click on file
 - Then, "Share This File"
 - Receiver will receive an email
 - Will have receiver paste the link in URL bar to access
 - It will ask the user to log in or create an account.
3. Make the following reports throughout your time on STEM OPT via your SEVP portal and by completing the 24-Month STEM OPT Validation Reports & Evaluations Form from the OIA website for our office records. Go to <https://www.nccu.edu/office-international-affairs>, Additional Forms. Please see the DHS Study in the States website for all SEVP reporting requirements [Study in the States SEVP Portal Information](#). Note that you will receive important reporting reminders and notifications from SEVP to the email account recorded in your SEVIS records.

Students

- You are required to report regularly within 10 days if any of the information below changes:

- Full legal name
- Current mailing and physical/residential addresses
- When you stop working for an employer
- When you start working for a new qualifying employer
- Changes in your immigration status
- Return to your home country or leaving the U.S.
- Move to another program level

- You are required to submit a Validation Report every 6 months (4 total reports - 6, 12, 18 and 24 months) after STEM OPT Extension starts and within 10 business days that includes:

- Full legal name
- SEVIS identification number (if requested by the school)
- Current mailing and physical/residential address
- Name and address of the current employer
- Date the student began working for the current employer (Even if no there are no changes, students must still report to OIA that there are no changes.)

Students and employers are expected to comply with all attestations made in completion of the I-983, including the following:

Complete two I-983 Self-evaluations of your progress with your employer. The Self-evaluation forms are found within the Form I-983.

- The first evaluation is due 12 months after STEM OPT start date (midway).
- The second evaluation is due 24 months after your STEM OPT start date and no later than 10 days after the end of the reporting period.
- If you complete your employment at any point before the end of 24-month period, then submit your final evaluation at the end of your employment.

Complete a new I-983 for any Material Changes to I-983.

- When there has been a material change to the training plan described on the Form I-983 on file with OIA [i.e. new employer, change in supervisor or supervisor contact information, employer street address (company/headquarter address), employer site address (physical work location), change to employer's EIN, any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked, any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity, changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983, company acquisition/merger], you and your employer must submit a modified Form I-983 to OIA "at the earliest available opportunity."

Reports on any changes should be made by completing the 24-Month STEM OPT Validation Reports & Evaluations Form online.

Employers

Employers are required to report to the DSO listed on the I-983 when your STEM OPT Extension employment is terminated by the employer or the you quit or leave your employment before the end of the 24-month period. This must be reported within 5 business days.

DHS Site Visits

DHS, at its discretion, may initiate and conduct site visits of the STEM OPT employer. A 48-hour notice will be given unless fraud, complaints or non-compliance of the regulations is suspected.

Travel and Reentry Outside of the U.S.

You may travel outside of the U.S. temporarily (less than 5 months) and reenter while on STEM OPT extension provided you carry an I-20 with the recommendation for the extension and it is signed by an OIA advisor for travel within the last 6 months, valid passport and F-1 visa which allows multiple entries. This applies also if you have a pending STEM OPT extension application with USCIS.

Students should complete a Request for a Travel Signature form to have your I-20 signed at least two weeks before travel. You can find this form here <https://www.nccu.edu/office-international-affairs> under "Additional Forms." Please note that you will not be eligible to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status if you have exceeded the limits on unemployment.

After STEM OPT Extension

After OPT students may transfer to another degree program, change their status, or return home. This must be done before the end of your 60-day grace period.

SAMPLE POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
RECOMMENDATION LETTER FROM ACADEMIC ADVISOR

This letter **must** be printed on academic departmental letterhead

Month Day Year

Office of International Affairs
102-A Lee Biology Bldg.

Reference: Optional Practical Training
Student: (Student's Name)

Jane/John Doe is applying for F-1 "Optional Practical Training" work authorization through the Office of International Affairs. As (Student's Name) academic advisor, I can verify that (Student's Name) is enrolled and has been enrolled in a full course of study for one academic year before requesting Optional Practical Training and is expected to complete their studies in (insert type of degree/program) on (month/day/year). (Student's Name) field of study is (major/program). I understand that U S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) permits F-1 students to gain work experience during 12 months of full-time temporary employment directly related to the student's field of study.

Optional Practical Training will allow (Student's Name) the opportunity to gain work experience in their field of study and enable them to improve employment prospects after returning home. I recommend (Student's Name) for this experience.

Sincerely,

(Sign here)

Dr. (Your name)
Title

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES WHILE ENGAGING IN OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Instructions to Students Applying for Optional Practical Training: Please read and sign this page in acknowledgment that you have read the *Optional Practical Training (OPT) Instruction Guide* in its entirety and understand your responsibilities below while engaging in OPT. Please print this page and attach it to your OPT application for OIA's review.

As a student engaged in OPT, you are still considered an F-1 student and have the following responsibilities:

- To not exceed the limit for unemployment, which is 90 days for standard OPT and 150 days for 24-month STEM Extension OPT (applied to the whole 36 months)
- To report the following to the Office of International Affairs for the duration of your time in OPT:
 - any change of your name
 - change of address (physical and mailing addresses) within 10 days of moving and contact information (email, telephone number)
 - new employment or change in employment (employment details should include: name of employer, start date, location/address of employer, and how your employment relates to your field of study)
 - termination, interruption of employment (details should include the end date of your employment)
 - changes in your immigration status
 - return to your home country or departure from the U.S.
 - move to another program level
- Report any of the above changes during Pre or Post-Completion OPT by using the OPT Employment and Address Report Form.

6-month Validation Reporting Requirement for Students on the 24-month STEM OPT Extension:

- In addition to the requirements above, you must also report your mailing and physical address, name of your OPT employer and employer's address to OIA **every 6 months** (6, 12, 18, and 24 months) from the date your 24-month extension begins until your F-1 status ends, you change educational levels at NCCU, transfer to another school, or the 24-month extension ends, whichever is first.
- Validation reports during 24-Month must be made using the following form, STEM OPT Validation Reports & Evaluations Form.

As a student engaged in the 24-month STEM OPT Extension, you are expected to comply with all attestations made in completion of the I-983, including the following:

- I-983 Self-evaluations
 - An initial evaluation due within 12 months of the STEM OPT extension start date recorded on Form I-983
 - A final evaluation due no later than 10 days after the end of the 24-month reporting period or the end of any employment – whichever comes first
- Material Changes to I-983
 - When there has been a material change to the training plan described on the Form I-983 on file with OIA, you and your employer must submit a modified Form I-983 to OIA "at the earliest available opportunity."

I have read and understand the above requirements for F-1 students engaged in OPT and that these requirements are federal regulations. By signing below, I indicate my agreement and understanding of all the above.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Email Address