

WELCOME!

This presentation is mainly intended for currently enrolled F-1 students at USC. If you are an IAP, EPI, or exchange student, or not graduating, not all of this information will apply to you. You are welcome to stay, but keep in mind you have different advisors and procedures.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)



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sc.ed/iss

OPT = WORK* AFTER GRADUATION

*Related to your degree



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ISS OPT WEBSITE



Follow along!
Write down any
questions you
think of while we
present. We will
answer them at
the end.

OPT is...

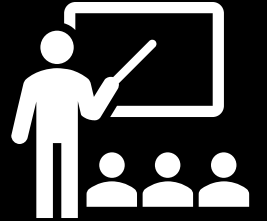
A work benefit of the F-1 **student** visa authorized by USC and USCIS. It is **optional**.

An off-campus educational job experience for a **limited (12 months)** amount of time authorized by USCIS, **related to your major**.

OPT is NOT...

A work visa, guaranteed job offer, long-term, future employment.

Off-campus employment while you are enrolled in classes (that's CPT!).



Section 8, Code of Federal Regulations

8CFR214.2(f)(10)(ii)(A)

“Practical training may be authorized to an F-1 student who has been lawfully enrolled on a full -time basis, in an approved SEVP-certified college, university, conservatory, or seminary for one full academic year...a student may apply to USCIS for authorization for temporary employment for optional practical training directly related to the student's major area of study. The student may not begin [OPT] until the date indicated on his or her employment authorization document, Form I-766. A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for optional practical training...after completion of the course of study...or after completion of all course requirements...”



USCIS POLICY
ISSS POLICY





PRE-COMPLETION OPT

- Before graduation
- Dissertation phase
- Less common
- Will have to apply again for post

POST-COMPLETION OPT

- After graduation
- Can apply for before end of term
- Most common

BOTH

- One year of full-time enrollment prior to start (total)
- You do not need a job offer prior to applying
- 90 days of unemployment allowed
- Can apply for STEM OPT extension
- Eligible again when higher degree obtained
- 1 year of full-time CPT makes you ineligible

APPLICATION

Vocabulary Clarification:

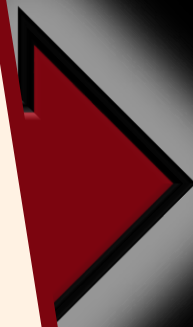
- End date = the last day listed on page 1 of your I-20 (program end date)
- Start date = the day you want your OPT 12-month authorization to begin (not the day your job actually starts, but the days to be listed on your EAD card)
- OPT start/end date = listed on page 2 under work authorization (the 12-month period you are allowed to work.

Your OPT start date cannot start before your I-20 end date. It can immediately follow your I-20 end date. Last day you could choose to start is 60 days after you I-20 end date.

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must be before
period ends.
could be exact or anticipated.

E



APPLICATION TIMELINE

After 1 year of enrollment!

90 days



60 days

February 9, 2025

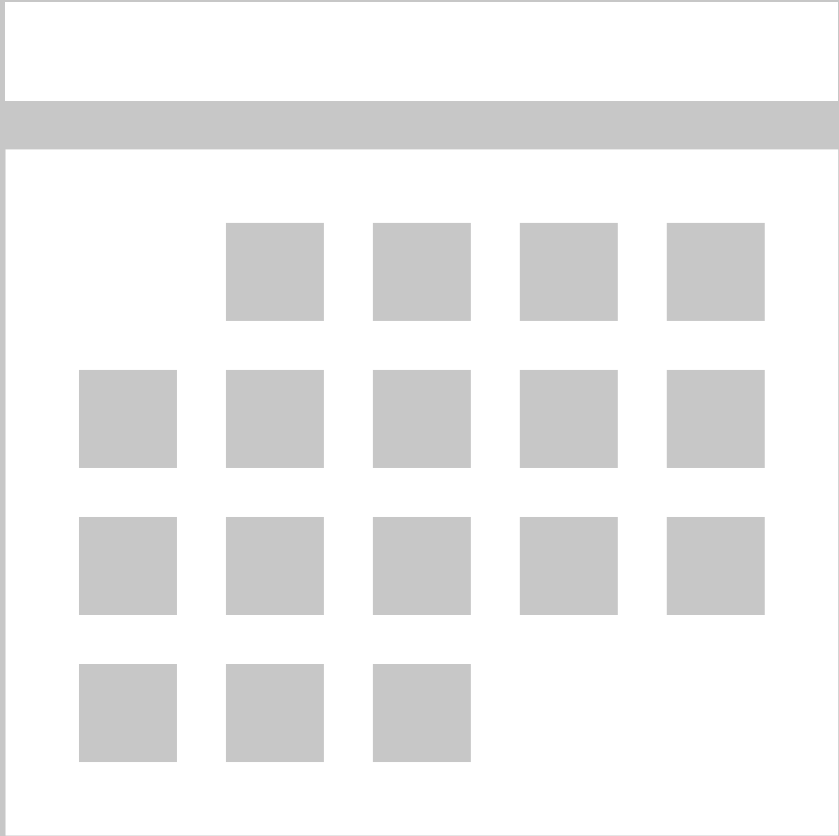
May 10, 2025

July 9, 2025

Can start applying up to 90 days before program completion. Any earlier and it will be denied! Can apply as late as 60 days after graduation.

Graduation Date
or Dissertation
(I-20 completion)

OPT Start Date: Must be before
your 60-day grace period ends.
Could be exact or anticipated.



So, anyone who graduates on May 10, 2025, can apply for OPT from February 9 to July 9. We recommend applying earlier rather than later. Wait to apply may (likely will) cause processing delays.

When applying, choose a start date anywhere from May 11 to July 9. If you're unsure, choose date in the middle.

Choose a start date based on your situation. Housing? Prospects? Funds? Job opportunities?

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Career Center



- Will I graduate on time?
- What is the job market like for my major? (Career Center)
- Start date is NOT flexible. Cannot be changed after you submit the application.
- Paperwork can take 3+ months to process.
- Expectation vs. reality 😞

Important considerations!

check it out!



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Look for
jobs!

Ask yourself: Are there a lot of jobs available? Is this job realistic for my situation? Do I qualify? Can I compromise?

USC Career Center

- Handshake
- Job interviews
- Resumes
- Website



Interstride

<https://interstride.com/>

APPLICATION PROCESS

A lot of the responsibility of OPT falls on you, the student! ISSS approves your initial application and monitors your status, but it is the F-1 visa holder's responsibility to submit materials to USCIS and obtain the EAD (employment authorization) card. It's your responsibility to make sure your job relates to your field of study. You can find these steps on our website. We don't expect you to memorize them!



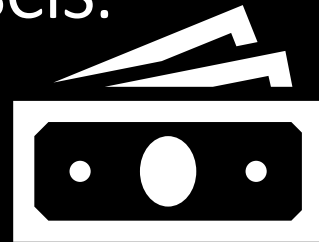
- Step 1: Attend the OPT workshop or watch the online presentation.
- Visit the [Study in the States OPT site](#) and read information.
- Familiarize yourself with the OPT process and decide if it is the right decision for your situation. Consider time and fees.
- OPT is a lot of responsibility on you, so make sure YOU understand it! [Ask an advisor](#) if you have questions.



PAY THE ISSS FEE



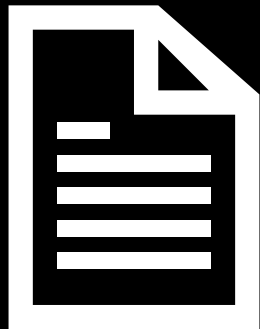
- Step 2: Pay the OPT SEVIS Maintenance fee on the [ISSS website](#).
- This fee allows ISSS to support your immigration compliance while you are working but still on student visa status. We will maintain your SEVIS record.
- We won't process paperwork without the fee.
- Second fee goes to USCIS.



COMPLETE FORMS



- Step 3: Complete and sign the OPT I-20 request form in the [ISSS Forms Library](#)
- Email the form to iss@sc.edu



OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING I-20 REQUEST FORM

Student Completes This Section:

Directions to student: You should complete Page 1 of this form. Your academic advisor in your academic department needs to complete the second page of this form. Note that your academic advisor is not the same as your international student advisor. This form need to be completed prior to submitting your OPT application. Digital signatures are acceptable.

Last Name: _____	First Name: _____
Post-graduation email address: _____	Telephone: _____
Have you been authorized for OPT in the past? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - From (mm/dd/yy): _____ To: _____	If you were previously authorized for OPT, which degree level? Bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> Master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
When do you expect to graduate? Semester: _____ Year: _____	Are you currently employed on campus? No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Until (mm/dd/yy): _____
I am requesting to begin OPT: After graduation <input type="radio"/> After completion of all coursework except dissertation <input type="radio"/> While registered as a full-time student (part-time) <input type="radio"/> While registered as a full-time student (full-time) <input type="radio"/>	Requested OPT Start Date (must be within the 60 days after your I-20 end date): _____

OPT Statement of Responsibility:

My signature below confirms that I understand the following and agree to the terms of the F-1 Optional Practical Training work authorization.

- 1) The accuracy and completion of my OPT and/or STEM OPT application is my responsibility. UofSC International Student Services Advisors review the OPT application documents I provide to them, but USC International Student Services is not liable for any errors or mistakes on the Form I-765, G-1145, copies of passport, visa, I-94, passport photos, or payment.
- 2) If I choose for UofSC International Student Services to receive my mail from USCIS, I understand that I am responsible for staying in touch with the office for the collection of USCIS documents, including any notices of action, requests for evidence, and employment authorization documents. The University of South Carolina cannot be held liable for any problems with mailing or delivery.
- 3) I understand that I am responsible for maintaining copies of all OPT related documents, including my OPT I-20, my OPT application materials, official correspondence from USCIS, I-797 notices of action, Employment Authorization Documents, and any other documents pertaining to my OPT application.
- 4) I understand that it is my responsibility to report employment and address changes within 10 days of the change once my OPT begins using the SEVP Portal. If I do not report changes within 10 days, it is my responsibility to reach out to ISS to correct my record accordingly.
- 5) I understand that if I exceed 90 days of unemployment, my F-1 record is at risk of automatic termination and that I should depart the U.S. or change to another status.
- 6) I understand that if I lose my EAD card, I have to file a new Form I-765 and pay the filing fee again.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Academic Advisor Completes This Section:

International students on F-1 visas are eligible for at least 12 months of off-campus employment authorization in their field of study. This work authorization, called Optional Practical Training, is granted through application to U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services. We need confirmation from the academic department that this student is meeting the academic components necessary to apply for OPT.

Advisor's Name: _____	Advisor's Department: _____
Advisor's Email: _____	Advisor's Phone: _____
Student's Major: _____	Level of Study: Bachelor's <input type="radio"/> Master's <input type="radio"/> Ph.D <input type="radio"/>
Second Major (if applicable): _____ *Minor is not applicable	Will the student have completed all coursework requirements for the degree by the requested start date? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Is student registered in current term? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	When is student expected to graduate? Semester: _____ Year: _____
<u>Graduate students only:</u> When is student expected to defend his/her thesis or dissertation? (mm/dd/yy): _____	I confirm that the information provided in this section about the student's academic progress is true and correct.
Signature of Advisor: _____	Date: _____
Optional Comments: _____	

Address: 1705 College Street, Close Hipp Building, Suite 470, Columbia, SC 29208
Phone: 803-777-7461
Email: iss@sc.edu Website: sc.edu/internationalservices

ISSS APPROVAL



- Step 4: Wait about 5 business days for ISSS to review and approve the form.
- You will receive an email with a new OPT I-20 and ISSS recommendation confirmation.
- ISSS “approval” does not guarantee USCIS approval!
- Once you receive your OPT I-20, you have **30 days** to apply to USCIS.
- If you apply after the 30 days, your application will be denied.

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Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status
OMB NO. 1653-0038

SEVIS ID: [REDACTED] (F-1)

NAME: [REDACTED]

EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS

TYPE	FULL/PART-TIME	STATUS	START DATE	END DATE
POST-COMPLETION OPT	FULL TIME	REQUESTED	01 OCTOBER 2020	30 SEPTEMBER 2021

application will be denied.

PREPARE MATERIALS FOR USCIS



- Step 5: After receiving OPT I-20, you have 30 days to submit, so gather materials ahead of time to prepare.
- We recommend online application
- Do not need to submit USC ISSS OPT form (internal use only)
- Create a USCIS account:
<https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>
- Prepare ahead of time:
 - New 2x2 passport photo (for EAD card)
 - Scan of passport photo page
 - Digital copy of OPT I-20
 - Most recent I-94
 - A credit card (USICS filing fee)

5



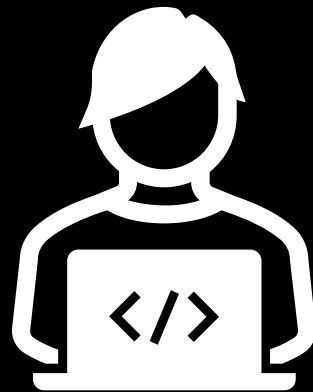
**SUBMIT
TO USCIS**



- DO NOT SUBMIT TO USCIS UNTIL YOU HAVE THE OPT I-20 FORM ISSS!
- Step 6: Submit [online](#) to USCIS on your own.
- If confused, use the [guide](#) on the ISSS website to help you through the online process.
- Consider a start date that works best for your situation. Can't change it!
- Carefully double check all your information, including start date, before submitting.

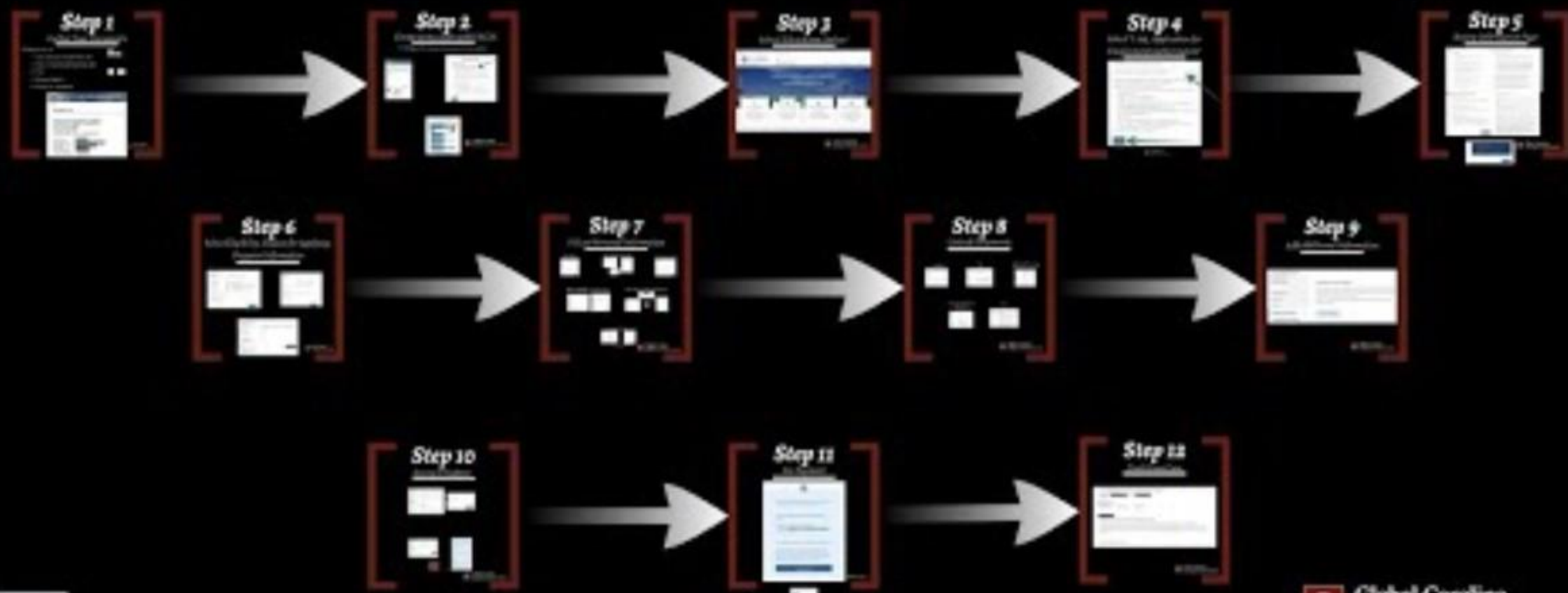


ISSS Tips Video



How to fill I-765 form for OPT and STEM OPT online

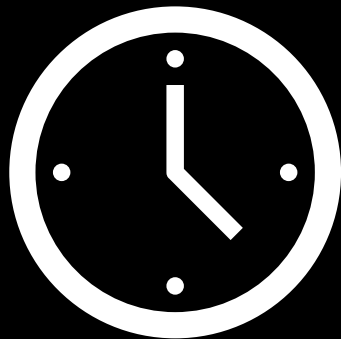
USC International Student and Scholar Support



**WAIT FOR
APPROVAL**



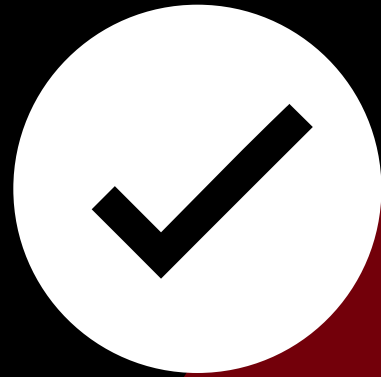
- Step 7: Wait for USCIS to approve your request.
- You cannot legally work until the request is approved.
- Approval takes about 90 days (could be more or less).
- Check your online account frequently for updates. Do not contact USCIS.
- While you wait...apply for jobs if you don't already have a job offer.



APPROVAL AND EAD



- Step 8: USCIS approves your request (email).
- By **mail**, you will receive an employment authorization card (EAD card) within 1-4 weeks.
- The EAD card reflects the OPT start/end time (1 year from listed start date).
- Check email for SEVP portal log in. This is where you will report employer information.
- Once you **physically** receive the card, you may begin employment.
- If you already have a job, start! Be sure to work at least 20 hours a week.
- If you do not have a job, have 90 days from **the start date on your EAD to find/start one.**
- Be sure to choose a job that relates to your field of study!



- Step 8: USCIS approves your request (email)
- By receiving the Employment Authorization Card (EAC), you are authorized to work in the United States for up to 12 months.
- The card is valid for 12 months from the date of issuance.
- Check the expiration date on the card to ensure it is still valid when you need to work in the United States.
- Once you receive the card, you can begin your work in the United States.
- If you are a student, you must be enrolled in a full-time program of study.
- If you are a non-student, you must be employed in a field of study.
- Be sure to keep the card safe and use it only for the purpose of working in the United States.



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RULES AND REGULATIONS

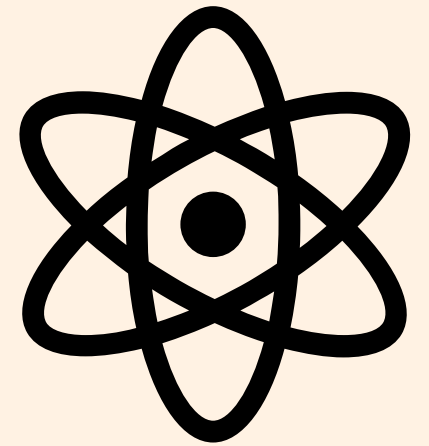
- **Must apply for OPT inside the USA.**
- **Enrolled and on F-1 status for at least 1 academic year before eligible.**
- **Application must reach USCIS within 30 days of I-20 creation.**
- **Job must be related to your field of study (your responsibility).**
- **Can use OPT for each higher degree level (can qualify multiple times).**
- **Ineligible if you have accrued 1 year or more of full-time CPT.**
- **Student's responsibility to set up SEVP Portal (online database) and report job, address changes, etc. (DSO can help if locked out)**
- **60-day grace period after finishing OPT**



- Allowed 90 days of unemployment (60 days added after OPT finishes and STEM extension is granted). Tracked on SEVP website. **Unemployment dates start when EAD card starts.**
- Must work at least 20 hours a week (should be full-time).
- Multiple jobs are acceptable, and you can switch jobs.
- Experiential work, contract hire, unpaid internship, and self-employment are all okay for post-completion OPT. Not for STEM!
- STEM OPT: Degree must qualify for STEM extension, and you must file updates every 6 months.
- STEMP OPT: Must have diploma, bona fide employer, and paid employment to qualify for STEM extension.



24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION



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WHAT:

- An additional 24 months of work authorization
- Applies after 1 year of regular OPT
- Must apply 90 days before original OPT expires
- Use the STEM OPT form



WHO:

- Students with degrees in qualifying STEM fields (list available online)
- Employer must be E-Verified
- Student, employer, USCIS, ISSS



REGULATIONS:

- Apply in a timely manner
- Can work while you wait for approval
- At least 20 hours per week
- Multiple jobs acceptable
- Additional unemployment
- Must submit a report after 6 months (training plan)
- Job must be paid



DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List

Last Updated: July 12, 2023

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) STEM Designated Degree Program List is a complete list of fields of study that DHS considers to be science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields of study for purposes of the 24-month STEM optional practical training extension described at 8 CFR 214.2(f). Under 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(2), a STEM field of study is one "included in the Department of Education's Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomy within the two-digit series containing engineering, biological sciences, mathematics, and physical sciences, or a related field. In general, related fields will include fields involving research, innovation, or development of new technologies using engineering, mathematics, computer science, or natural sciences (including physical, biological, and agricultural sciences)."

Accordingly, this list designates the following four primary CIP series at the 2-digit CIP code level: Engineering (14), Biological and Biomedical Sciences (26), Mathematics and Statistics (27) and Physical Sciences (40). Any new additions to those areas will automatically be included on this STEM Designated Degree Program List.

This list also includes CIPs from the following 18 related CIP series at the 6-digit CIP code level: Agricultural/Animal/Plant/Veterinary Science and Related Fields (01); Natural Resources and Conservation (03); Architecture and Related Services (04); Communication, Journalism and Related Programs (09); Communications Technologies/Technicians and Support Services (10); Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services (11); Education (13); Engineering/Engineering- Related Technologies/Technicians (15); Military Science, Leadership and Operational Art (28); Military Technologies and Applied Sciences (29); Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies (30); Science Technologies/Technicians (41); Psychology (42); Homeland Security, Law Enforcement, Firefighting and Related Protective Services (43); Social Sciences (45); Transportation and Materials Moving (49); Health Professions and Related Programs (51); and Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services (52).

CIP Code Two-Digit Series	2020 CIP Code	CIP Code Title
01	01.0308	Agroecology and Sustainable Agriculture.
01	01.0901	Animal Sciences, General.
01	01.0902	Agricultural Animal Breeding.
01	01.0903	Animal Health.
01	01.0904	Animal Nutrition.
01	01.0905	Animal Sciences.

SEVIS ID: N0004720633

SURNAME/PRIMARY NAME Sample	GIVEN NAME Student	Class of Admission F-1 ACADEMIC AND LANGUAGE
PREFERRED NAME Student Sample, II	PASSPORT NAME	
COUNTRY OF BIRTH LAOS	COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP LAOS	
DATE OF BIRTH 04 MAY 1995	ADMISSION NUMBER	
FORM ISSUE REASON CONTINUED ATTENDANCE	REGISTRATION	

SAMPLE

SCHOOL INFORMATION

SCHOOL NAME SEVP School for Advanced SEVIS Studies SEVP School for Advanced SEVIS Studies	SCHOOL ADDRESS 9002 Nancy Lane, Ft. Washington, MD 20744
SCHOOL OFFICIAL TO CONTACT UPON ARRIVAL Helene Robertson PDSO	SCHOOL CODE AND APPROVAL DATE BAL214F44444000 03 APRIL 2015

PROGRAM OF STUDY

EDUCATION LEVEL BACHELOR'S	MAJOR 1 History and Technology 54.0104	MAJOR 2 None 00.0000
PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Required	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Student is proficient	EARLIEST ADMISSION DATE 04 APRIL 2016
START OF CLASSES 01 JUNE 2016	PROGRAM START/END DATE 04 MAY 2016 - 30 MAY 2020	

FINANCIALS

ESTIMATED AVERAGE COSTS FOR: 9 MONTHS		STUDENT'S FUNDING FOR: 9 MONTHS	
Tuition and Fees	\$ 15,000	Personal Funds	\$ 19,000
Living Expenses	\$ 4,000	Funds From This School	\$
Expenses of Dependents (0)	\$ 0	Funds From Another Source	\$
Other	\$ 0	On-Campus Employment	\$
TOTAL	\$ 19,000	TOTAL	\$ 19,000

REMARKS

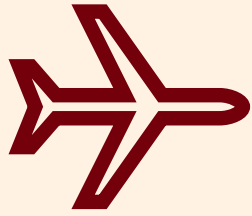
CIP CODE has ultimate authority. Ignore degree name.
CIP codes are universal, degree programs are not.

Multiple jobs acceptable



AFTER OPT ENDS

- End date listed on I-20
- You must cease employment
- Prepare to leave USA (60 days)
- May change visa status (may need an immigration lawyer)
- Begin a new degree on F-1 status



OPT & TRAVELLING

	Before graduation, Before USCIS OPT approval	After graduation, before USCIS OPT approval	After graduation, after USCIS OPT approval
CARRY THES DOCUMENTS WITH YOU:			
Valid passport	YES	YES	YES
Valid F-1 visa	YES	YES	YES
OPT I-20 with travel signature	YES	YES	YES
Evidence of continued enrollment	YES	N/A	N/A
I-797 Notice	Not needed	YES	N/A
Job offer/verification	Not needed	Strongly recommend carrying	YES
EAD card	Not needed	Not, but if on STEM, talk to ISSS	YES

You should report the following changes on the [SEVP Portal](#) within 10 days of the change occurring:

- Physical/home address or mailing address change
- Legal name change
- New employment, change in employment, or termination of employment

If you are on your STEM Extension OPT, you should report the following change on the SEVP Portal within 10 days of the change occurring:

- Physical/home address or mailing address change
- Legal name change

You should report any changes in employment within 10 days of the change occurring by using the **STEM OPT Update Form**, located in the [ISS Forms Library](#).

A new Form I-983 is required if there are any material changes to your STEM OPT employment. A list of material changes and a link to the Form I-983 can be found on the [Immigration and Customs Enforcement website](#).

If required by a material change in your employment, you can submit an updated Form I-983 to ISS using the **STEM OPT Update Form**.

OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY



STEM Student Due Date Announcement

Hello, **Your name here**

Your STEM OPT Reporting Deadlines

While on STEM OPT, you must give your designated school official (DSO):

1. Validation reports to confirm that your address and employer information in SEVIS is correct. These are due every six months.
2. Two Evaluations of Student Progress (page 5 of the Form I-983). These are due:
 - a. 12 months after your STEM OPT starts and
 - b. 24 months after your STEM OPT starts.
3. Evaluation of Student Progress (page 5 of the Form I-983) when you stop working for a STEM employer before your STEM OPT authorization ends. These are due within 10 days after you stop working for the employer.

Your reporting deadlines:

Date	What is Due?	Current Status
Oct 4 2023	Validation report for address and employer information	Due
Apr 4 2024	Validation report for address and employer information	
Apr 4 2024	Evaluation of Student Progress (page 5 of Form I-983)	
Oct 4 2024	Validation report for address and employer information	

Missing these deadlines may affect the state of your SEVIS record.

For more information, go to the STEM OPT Hub (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>) pages on the Study in the States website.

Frequently asked questions:

- What happens if I exceed 90 days of unemployment?
 - You should plan to leave the country.
- Can I start work before the date on my EAD card?
 - No! You can only work during those days (paid or unpaid). Employers must report all staff to the government. Be careful of shady employers.
- Do I need to report volunteer work if it's unpaid?
 - Yes. All work should be reported while on OPT.
- Can I travel while on OPT?
 - Yes, but it can be risky while the application is pending. After you have your EAD card it's no problem.
- Can I mark "self-employed" to avoid going over my unemployment allotment?
 - No! You should mark "self-employed" only if you have a business license and can prove true self-employment to USCIS. This includes reporting it on your taxes to the IRS.
- How can I avoid delays on my application?
 - Apply early. OPT applications are rarely denied, only delayed. See this [tip sheet](#) from DHS.

Frequently asked questions:

- How much does premium process cost?
 - Check with USCIS for current fees. It is about \$1,500. Shortens processing time to 30 days. Request it [here](#).
- Which start date should I choose?
 - It depends on what you want. A later start date will allow more time to job search and stay in the US. An earlier start date will allow you to begin employment sooner. You have to decide what best meets your needs.
- Can I work without my diploma?
 - Technically, yes. If you are a PhD student and working on your thesis. Need diploma for STEM extension.
- What if my mailing address changes while the OPT application is pending?
 - It is possible to update it while pending, however, this can cause delivery problems or delay the EAD card. Try and use an address you know you can access later.
- What is _____ on the online I-765 form?
 - Have you checked the [ISSS website](#)? We go through the online I-765 process step by step.

Questions?

iss@sc.edu



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