

Applying for Optional Practical Training (F-1 Students)

Attention: USCIS is currently taking over 90 days to process OPT applications; we suggest you plan accordingly. The International Center has no influence over how quickly your OPT application is processed.

Information on this page relates to standard Optional Practical Training (OPT). STEM extension OPT information can be found [here](#) [1].

- [Process for OPT Applications](#)
- [Different Kinds of OPT and Application Deadlines](#)
- [Documents Needed to Request a New I-20 with OPT Recommendation from the International Center](#)
- [Submitting Your Request for an OPT I-20](#)
- [Sending Your Completed OPT Application to USCIS](#)
- [Travel Outside the U.S. and Reentry](#)

Process for OPT Applications

1. Meet with your Academic Advisor or Graduate Program Coordinator to request an OPT recommendation letter.
2. Take the [OPT Online Workshop](#) [2] (this requires a U-M login). Print OPT Online Workshop Completion Email and prepare the required documentation as outlined in the workshop. You may submit your OPT I-20 Request at the IC front desk (if you have NO questions).
3. A U-M International Center advisor will review your documents, and then send your OPT recommendation to SEVIS electronically to generate a new I-20. The OPT recommendation will be printed on page 2 of the new I-20. The processing time required to produce your new I-20 will be 1 - 2 weeks. Please note that if you are completing your degree requirements earlier than indicated by the program end date on your current I-20 (page 1, item 5), then the program end date will be shortened. Remember that F-1 students are eligible to work on-campus as a benefit of status only up until the I-20 end date.
4. The U-M International Center will notify you when your new I-20 is available.
5. Bring your U-M ID to the U-M International Center front desk to pick up your I-20.
6. As soon as you pick up the I-20, sign your name (page 1, item 11).
7. Make a copy of your complete application.
8. Send your complete application and required documents to USCIS. Refer to [Sending Your Completed OPT Application to USCIS](#).
9. USCIS will send you a notice for the receipt of your I-765 EAD (OPT) application (2-3 weeks). Once you have received your receipt notice, you can track the status of your individual case using the [case](#)

[status search feature of the USCIS Web site](#) [3]. You may elect to receive email alerts about your case status from this Web site.

10. USCIS will approve or deny your OPT. If approved, they will mail your EAD to you. (3 to 5 months average processing time). Approximate processing times for the various applications and petitions that the immigration service centers adjudicate are published on the [case status section of the USCIS Web site](#) [4].

Different Kinds of OPT and Application Timelines

There are two kinds of OPT, Pre-completion and Post-completion. To understand which type to request, you need to figure out your completion date.

Definition of Completion Date

The completion date is generally established as the last day of the last month of the final term in which you will register to complete academic requirements (e.g. April 30 for winter, June 30 for spring, August 31 for spring/summer, or December 31 for fall. I-20s issued for students of U-M Law School may have end dates in early May).

Pre-completion OPT

Employment begins and ends before the completion of the academic program.

Earliest time to apply:

- If a student has not completed a full academic year: 90 days before completion of full academic year
- If student has completed a full academic year: 90 days before OPT start date

There are three types of Pre-completion OPT:

Type A: During the student's annual vacation

- Student must intend to register for the next term
- OPT may be part- or full-time

Type B: While school is in session

- Student must be registered full-time
- OPT may be part-time only

Type C: After completion of all course requirements (excluding thesis/dissertation)

- After completion of all course requirements excluding thesis/dissertation
- If Type C OPT is part-time, student must be registered full-time
- If Type C OPT is full-time, student need not be registered

Post-completion OPT

Employment begins after completion of academic program.

Earliest time to apply:

- Up to 90 days before program end date

Deadline for Application to be Received by USCIS:

- Up to 60 days after program end date
- Within 30 days of date DSO recommends in SEVIS. You can judge this by the date in Item #10 on page 1 of your OPT recommendation I-20
- If you plan to travel outside the U.S. after your completion date, you must submit the I-765 first (even if you plan to return within 60 days) and obtain the Receipt Notice in order to re-enter

PhD candidates who wish to request a post-completion OPT start date earlier than the standard completion date should contact an International Center advisor for guidance.

Documents Needed to Request a New I-20 with OPT Recommendation from the International Center

To apply for OPT, you must complete the [OPT Online Workshop](#) [2] and provide the following documents to the International Center:

- [OPT I-20 Request Form](#) [5]
- OPT Online Workshop Completion Email
- OPT recommendation letter from academic advisor or graduate program coordinator
- Legible copies of immigration documents
 - copies of all I-20's from your CURRENT degree level (all pages except instruction page) (not those of your dependents)
 - copies of paper or print-out of electronic [Form I-94](#) [6] (please click on the link for instructions)
- Copy of any previous OPT EAD cards (front and back) and corresponding OPT I-20
 - Write the degree level for which the previous OPT was granted on the copy of the EAD card (e.g. bachelor's, master's, or doctoral)
- Unofficial transcript from [Wolverine Access](#) [7]

Instructions for the Academic Advisor

The academic advisor letter must meet these criteria:

- On U-M departmental letterhead
- Indicate the degree level at which the student will be applying for OPT
- The final term in which student is registered for required credits

[Sample Letter for OPT Request](#) [8]

Submitting Your Request for an OPT I-20

Once you have your OPT Online Workshop Completion Email and compiled all of the required documentation for an OPT I-20, you may submit your request to the IC front desk on central campus.

Sending Your Completed OPT Application to USCIS

Once you've requested an OPT recommendation through the U-M International Center and received your new I-20, you will need to prepare and submit the following list of items to USCIS:

- [G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance](#) [9]
- [Base Fee for I-765](#) [10], payable to US Department of Homeland Security. Personal check, cashiers check or money order is acceptable. If you use a personal check, please be sure to wait for the check to be cashed before closing your bank account. Please only include the I-765 filing fee and do not include the biometrics fee with the application. You may also use the [USCIS Fee Calculator](#) [11] to help determine the filing fee. [Instructions for Utilizing the USCIS Fee Calculator for OPT](#) [12].
- Two full-face passport-style photos. The photos must be identical and in color with a plain background. They must be no more than 30 days old when the I-765 is filed at USCIS. Photos can be obtained at [U-M Photo Services](#) [13]. Put photos in an envelope. You should attach the fee and the photo envelope on top of the entire application (on the upper left-hand corner). Please do not staple the fee and the photos. Use a pencil to gently write your name and I-94 number on the back of your photo.
- Original [USCIS Form I-765](#) [14]. [Instructions for completing the I-765 for OPT](#) [10] and [U-M Suggestions for completing the I-765 for Post-Completion OPT](#) [15].
- Photocopy of the new I-20 with OPT recommendation.
- Photocopies of all your previous I-20s from your current degree level.
- Photocopy of paper or print-out of electronic [Form I-94](#) [6] (please click on the link for instructions).
- Photocopy of previous EAD, if applicable.
- Photocopy of most recent F-1 visa page (except Canadians) OR approval of change of status to F-1 (I-797) if applicable.
- Photocopy of your passport pages showing your biographical information and its expiration date. Keep in mind that if the photo in the passport is not clear or varies widely from your current appearance, a clear copy of another form of identification, such as a state-issued drivers license or identification card will also have to be sent.

Mailing to USCIS

- Refer to the [Department of Homeland Security's website](#) [10] for the correct mailing address. The address you wish your EAD card sent determines where the application should be mailed.
- Mail your application using a trackable method and keep record of your application's delivery.
- Ensure your application is received by USCIS less than 30 days after your OPT I-20's issuance date.
- We recommend you make a copy of the application for your own records before mailing to USCIS.

NOTE: *The International Center advises against using the "e-file" option because it makes you subject to additional requirements.*

If you change your mind

If after requesting an OPT I-20 from the International Center, you decide not to send your application to USCIS, you must notify us. Please send an email to icenter@umich.edu [16] telling us that you plan to not apply for OPT and indicating the date you intend to leave the U.S. (must be within 60 days of I-20 completion date). If you do not notify us, we will be unable to adjust your SEVIS record to accurately reflect your situation. You will also continue to be billed for health insurance.

Travel Outside the U.S. and Reentry

For important information on travel during OPT, refer to [Travel Advisory](#) [17].

Source URL: <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/apply-opt>

Links

- [1] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/stem-extend>
- [2] <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/294193>
- [3] <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/caseStatusSearchDisplay.do>
- [4] <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>
- [5] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/sites/default/files/forms/OPT-Request.pdf>
- [6] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/i-94>
- [7] <http://wolverineaccess.umich.edu/>
- [8] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/sites/default/files/f_optletter.pdf
- [9] <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf>
- [10] <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
- [11] <https://www.uscis.gov/feecalculator>
- [12] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/sites/default/files/Utilizing_the_USCIS_Fee_Calculator_for_OPT.pdf
- [13] <https://photography.umich.edu/services-pricing/passport-photos/>
- [14] https://www.uscis.gov/system/files_force/files/form/i-765.pdf
- [15] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/sites/default/files/I-765_Suggestions_Post-Completion_OPT.pdf
- [16] <mailto:icenter@umich.edu>
- [17] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/travel-advisory>