Pre-Completion OPT Guide For F-1 Students
Pre-Completion OPT Overview
What Is Pre-Completion OPT?

Pre-Completion OPT is a form of temporary US work authorization. This work authorization is a way for F-1 students to gain practical training directly related to the student’s field of study.

**Pre-OPT Can Be**

- Part-time (PT)
  - (20 hours a week or less)
  
  OR

- Full-time (FT)
  - (20 hours a week or more)
  - ONLY allowed FT during official breaks and vacations

**Pre-OPT Must Be**

- Part-time (less than 20 hours per week) during the academic year and any semester when enrolled full-time
- Directly related to **YOUR** field and level of study

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Carnegie Mellon University
During your Pre-Completion OPT period:
• You remain in F-1 Status (OPT is not a status, it is a benefit of your F-1 Status)
• You must still be an active full-time student in your CMU program

What work can you do during Pre-completion OPT?
• Must be related to YOUR field and level of study
• Paid, unpaid, contract
• Job title doesn’t matter... BUT the nature of the work does
How Is OPT Time Used/Counted?

Immigration rules state that OPT:

• Is allowed for a period of 12 months, per higher degree level (for Pre and Post OPT combined)
  o i.e. Students cannot have 12 months of full-time Pre-Completion OPT, and then apply for Post-Completion OPT.
  o Once USCIS approves OPT, then the OPT benefit is considered used! Even if you do not use the full Pre-Completion OPT time requested.
  o Full-time Pre-OPT is allowed when school is NOT in session
  o Part-time Pre-OPT is allowed when school is in session (no more than 20 hours per week)
IMPORTANT! Choosing OPT Dates!

Choose OPT Dates CAREFULLY!
• **YOU CANNOT CHANGE OPT DATES** after you have submitted your OPT Application to USCIS.

OPT Pending?
• **NO WORK** without your approved EAD Card! You must have the physical EAD card before beginning work.

NOTE:
• Full-time Pre-Completion OPT is deducted from the 12 months of total OPT time at 100%, but you can only be full-time in the summer/official school breaks!
• Part-time Pre-Completion OPT deducted from the 12 months of total OPT time at ½ rate; part-time Pre-Completion can be used during the academic terms.
IMPORTANT!

If your Pre-Completion OPT takes place during your last semester, your Post-Completion OPT application may need to be filed while waiting for Pre-Completion OPT approval.

2 SEPARATE APPLICATIONS must be filed:
- 1 for Pre-Completion OPT
- 1 for Post-Completion OPT
  - Same time frame for approval
  - 2 fees!
  - If Pre-OPT is not approved yet, you must deduct requested Pre-OPT time when determining Post-OPT dates
Pre-OPT Application – Three Step Process

1. Complete and submit the “Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training Request e-Form” through your MyOIE Portal.
   - The e-form request must include the “Pre-Completion OPT Academic Advisor Recommendation Form”, which must be completed and signed by your program coordinator or academic advisor.

2. Wait for your new I-20; do not apply without it!
   - OIE will issue the I-20 with the recommendation within 10 business days.
   - The new I-20 will have your Pre-Completion OPT request listed on page 2.

3. Gather all the needed documents and submit your application to USCIS
   - After you have submitted your Pre-OPT application to USCIS, Pre-OPT dates you requested CANNOT be changed!
   - Check current Processing Times for applications and talk to your OIE advisor to understand how long government review of your application may take. Processing may take up to several months.
Timing of Your OPT Application

Be aware of USCIS processing times!
- Always check the USCIS website for processing times. Select "I-765...", and “Potomac Service Center” from the drop-down menus.
- Premium Processing option available

“What Dates Can I Choose For My Pre-OPT Application?”
- Start date: Start date of employment
- End date: End date of employment (can’t go past program end date listed on your I-20)
  - Summer: OPT can start after classes-finals end and must end before start of fall term

NO WORK until you have received your EAD Card and you are within start and end dates on the card!
THE GOAL?


NOTE: You can only legally work in the U.S. when:
• You have received your EAD Card, and
• You are within the dates listed on the card
IMPORTANT! The 30-Day OPT I-20 Rule!

• Your OPT application MUST be received by USCIS within 30 days of the date your OPT I-20 is issued.

• If I-20 is received by USCIS more than 30 days after its issuance date, your OPT application will be DENIED!
Request your Pre-Completion OPT I-20
MyOIE Portal – OPT e-Form Request

1. REMEMBER – YOU SHOULD READ THE PRE-COMPLETION OPT INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE YOU SUBMIT THIS E-FORM!*

2. Login to your MyOIE Portal account:
   - Click “F-1 Practical Training”
   - Click “Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training Request Form”

3. Next complete the Pre-Completion OPT e-form as required
   - Remember, it takes OIE up to 10 business days to process immigration documents.
## MyOIE Portal – OPT e-Form Request

### 4. Confirm your current residential address
- If the residential address listed is incorrect, then you must STOP filling in your e-form, login to SIO, and update your current residential address – **BEFORE** – submitting your OPT e-form request.

### 5. Next complete the Pre-OPT e-form as required
- US address, Passport Expiration (Passport **MUST** be valid), **Pre-OPT Start and End Dates you are requesting**, Department, Do you have multiple majors/degrees, Have you had OPT before, etc.

### 6. Finally, you must upload the required documents, and you must **CERTIFY** that all the information you submitted is accurate and correct.

*If needed, you can save this e-form as a DRAFT*
Pre OPT e-Form Request Documents To Upload

1. Copy of previously issued EAD Card(s) if applicable

2. Copy of most recent I-94 Record (NOT Travel History)
   - Confirm information on your I-94 Record is correct!
   - Contact OIE if there are any mistakes!
3. Finally, you must upload a completed & signed Academic Advisor Pre-OPT Recommendation Form.

Bachelors and Masters Students:
Term You Will Graduate

This is to certify that ___________________________ will receive the degree of ________________________ in ___________________________.

(Student’s Full Name)                           (Degree Level)

the field/major of ___________________________.

(Field of Study/Major)

Your academic advisor completes this section.

PhD Students:
Exact Completion Date, if different from end of term

degree at the end of ________________________ Term Or (PhD’s ONLY) on this specific date:

(Fall/Spring/Summer) (mm/dd/yyyy “actual completion”)

{Name of Academic Advisor/Authorized Department Personnel - Print}                  {Telephone Number and/or email address}

{Signature of Academic Advisor/Authorized Department Personnel}                    {Date}
Check Your New I-20 for Accuracy

✓ CHECK YOUR PRE-OPT I-20 FOR ACCURACY!

✓ You will find your Pre-OPT Requested Dates listed on page 2 of your new Pre-OPT I-20.

✓ Your Pre-Completion OPT I-20 will be signed for travel.
Choose How to File the I-765
Choosing How to File - Online or by Mail

F-1 students have the option of filing their Form I-765 electronically.

The benefits to filing your request online include:

- No paper mailing involved
- You can pay using a credit or debit card (no need to use a check or money order)
- A receipt number is generated immediately after submission

- No need to file Form G-1145
- Students will have less wait to receive their receipt number
- Access to application "case status" in your USCIS account
Choosing How to File - Online or by Mail

**Keep in Mind:**

- The processing time for the EAD card is the same whether you file electronically or via mail.
- Do not submit an online application AND a mail-in request. Duplicate applications may be denied.
- You MUST file Form I-765 from within the U.S. whether you choose the online filing option or mail your request.
- Regardless if you file online or by mail you cannot edit your request after submission.

Students may choose to file their application online or by mail. Students have reported success with the online application and it seems to minimize potential application errors, but the decision is up to the applicant.
Ready to File?

If you will file **online**, proceed to Slide 22 (The I-765 Application - Online).

If you will file by **mail**, proceed to Slide 29 (The I-765 Application - Mail).

- Remember, you should only submit **one** application! Duplicate applications (for instance, mailing one and submitting one online) can cause issues and result in denial.
The I-765 Application – Online
What Do I Include With My Online Application?

Prepare the Required Documents
We have found the documentation needed for the paper I-765 and the online I-765 is different. The necessary documentation for online filing is listed below, but not limited to the items below. Be certain to read the instructions in the online application and follow the prompts carefully.

Prepare by scanning all documents:
• One U.S. passport-sized photo (no glasses)
• Most Recent I-94 Record Copy
• Photocopy of signed pre-completion OPT I-20
• Copies of previous EADs (if applicable)
Create/Log In to Your USCIS Account and Begin the Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)

Create an account at [File Online: USCIS](http://uscis.gov).

Use an email address that will not expire. Please note, if you previously created an account using your Andrew email and it has expired, you may need to create a new USCIS account.

Begin the Application for Employment Authorization (I-765) and Fill Out All Required Sections

After you have created your account, log-in and select "File a form online" under "Select What You Want To Do." Then select "Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)." Follow the prompts in the online form to complete all the required sections and attach all the required documents.
Select your Eligibility Category and Reason for Applying

What is your eligibility category?

⚠️ You can file your request online only for certain eligibility categories.
If your eligibility category does not appear on the drop-down list, you must file a paper Form I-765. If you submit online and are not eligible for one of the listed categories, your application may be denied.

(c)(3)(C) STEM Extension

What is your reason for applying?

- Initial permission to accept employment
- Replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged employment authorization document or correction of my employment authorization document NOT DUE to US Citizenship and Immigration Services error
- Renewal of permission to accept employment
What I-20s Should I Upload?

Follow the steps outlined in the Online I-765 Application.

- You should upload exactly what the online application requests.
- If the application only requests your I-20 that reflects the pre-completion OPT recommendation, that is all you are required to upload for the online process.
- Remember that this could change – but if you follow the directions exactly, you will be providing what USCIS needs to process your application.
Online Application Tips

• The USCIS system will keep your application stored for up to 30 days. If you begin a draft, please be sure to log in so you don't lose your progress.

• Keep in mind USCIS must receive your pre-completion OPT application within 30 days of your I-20 issuance. USCIS will save your draft submission for up to 30 days as long as you continue to log in. If you wait longer than 30 days to log in again, USCIS will delete your draft to protect your data.
Review and Submit your Online Application

Before you submit your form, make sure to review all sections for accuracy. Make any needed corrections. We also highly recommend that you download a PDF copy of your responses to save for your records. You can do this by clicking on "View draft snapshot."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I-765, Application for Employment Authorization</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Getting Started</td>
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<td>About You</td>
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<td>Evidence</td>
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<td>Review and Submit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review your application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your application summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your statement</td>
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**IMPORTANT!** In addition to printing or saving a copy of your I-765 before you submit, you should also save copies of all other submission materials.
The I-765 Application – Mail
What Do I Include With My Mailed Application?

What To Include?:

✔ G-1145 Form
✔ *(Check (payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security) OR,
✔  Form G-1450 – to pay by Credit Card. The fee amount is found on the USCIS website. Click the ‘Filing Fee’ tab.
✔ Completed, signed I-765 Form
✔ Two U.S. passport-sized photos (No Glasses)
✔ Copies of all I-20s issued to you from your current degree level, including the pre-completion OPT I-20
✔ Copy of most recent I-94 Record (NOT Travel History Page)
✔ Copy of VALID passport
✔ Copy of F-1 visa sticker (even if expired)
✔ Copy of previous EAD (if you’ve applied for OPT before)
G-1145 Form

- G-1145 Form:
  - Should be the 1st page of your OPT application
  - Free to file
  - More like 2-4 weeks...
  - Disregard the form’s expiration date but be sure to download from uscis.gov website.

When Will I Be Notified?
We will send the e-Notification within 24 hours after we accept your application

USCIS
Form G-1145
Expires 9/26/14 Y
A Personal Check
Prepare Your Check Following the Format of the Image Below

- NOTE: There are different options for paying the I-765 Fee. You can find additional information about this on the USCIS website.
- Checks must be issued by a U.S. bank.
- Confirm the fee amount on the USCIS website. Scroll down and Click ‘Filing Fee’
A Personal Check
Prepare Your Check Like The Image Below

Leave the back of the check **BLANK**
G-1450 Form (for Credit Card Payments Only)

**Card Holders Information**
- Can be your information or a friend’s. Enter that information here.
- Make sure “Card Holder” signs the form!

If you wish to pay by credit card – please fill out the attached G-1450 Form to your application.

**US Banks ONLY!**
Type or Print in Black Ink
Photos

OIE Cannot Check Photos!

- Write your name **AND** I-94 # on the back of the photos!
  - Write lightly – don’t damage the photo!
- Make sure they are the correct size!
- **Photos taken within past 30 days**!
- NO glasses!
- White or off-white background with no shadows!
- You can include your check & photos in a white envelope, marked with your name and I-94 number!
- Attach envelope to application
- Do not staple photos!
Form I-765

For a detailed guide on how to complete the I-765, please refer to our sample I-765.

This sample guide will walk you through how to complete the paper form. Please note this guide is intended for the paper form only. If you are applying online, please refer to the earlier slides in this document as well as the instructions on the USCIS Website.
Additional Required Documents – *Photocopies*

- I-94 Record Printout, **OR**
- A photocopy of White I-94 Card (front & back)

- Photocopy of your **VALID** passport photo page **AND** a photocopy of your most recent F-1 Visa Sticker

- **ALL** I-20s from your current degree level, including your new pre-completion OPT I-20. Remember to **Sign** all I-20s before photocopy them!
Optional Cover Letter

Cover letter *NOT* required unless something is missing or further explanation is required:
- Missing I-20
- Missing EAD

Sample OPT Cover Letter

[DATE OF REQUEST]

[STUDENT NAME]:
[SEVIS ID NUMBER]:
[OPT REQUESTED: PRE or POST-COMPLETION or STEM]
[OPT DATES REQUESTED]:

Dear USCIS Officer:
Please accept this cover letter for my F-1 [PRE or POST-COMPLETION or STEM] Practical Training request. I am writing this letter because [REASON FOR LETTER].

Enclosed, please find my [PRE or POST-COMPLETION or STEM] application materials.

Please contact me if you require additional information or documentation to process this request.

Sincerely,

[SIGNATURE OF STUDENT]
[NAME OF STUDENT]
**BEFORE** You Mail Your Application…

**DOUBLE CHECK EVERYTHING!**

- Did you check that you are using the most recent/updated I-765 Form?
- Did you check the box at the top of the I-765 Form (page 1) indicating what you are applying for?
- Did you sign and date your I-765 Form on page 5?
- Did you include all 7 pages of the I-765 Form?
- Did you check the USCIS website to make sure that your application fee is correct?
- Did you check the F-1 I-765 mailing instructions on the USCIS website?
- **Make a copy of all application materials** before you package and ship it to USCIS.
Mailing OPT Application – FedEx/UPS

NOTE: OPT Applications **MUST** be mailed from within the United States!

- Make sure that you checked the F-1 (I-765) mailing instructions on the USCIS website?
  - Click on “Foreign Students” and see the row with
  - ‘F-1 Optional Practical Training’ for the most up to date mailing address.
  - Note the distinct mailing address for FedEx and UPS deliveries.

- OIE recommends using Express Mail (FedEx or UPS).
  - That you mail your application packet with **Tracking**!
  - That you save a copy of the Express Mail receipt that you receive from FedEx and UPS.
    - This can help you prove that your application arrived at USCIS.
After you Apply for Pre-Completion OPT
What Happens After You Submit your I-765 Application

You should receive from USCIS:
• (mailed applications only) Text message or email with your receipt number within 2 to 4 weeks
• Paper Receipt Notice - within 4 weeks
• Paper Approval Notice -within 2-5 months
• EAD Card -within 2-5 months

If you think you made a mistake on your Pre-Completion OPT Application, do not send a duplicate application.

Contact OIE for advice on the specific mistake. Make sure to specify whether you filed online or by mail.
What Happens After...

- Once you receive your Receipt Number from USCIS, you can check your OPT case status on the USCIS website.
  - *NOTE: This website is not 100% accurate.*
- Case status will stay/remain in “received status” until your OPT has been approved.
Social Security Number (SSN)

If you don’t have a Social Security Number (SSN), you will need to apply for it:

- Use Pre-completion OPT I-20 and EAD to apply for an SSN (Instructions on OIE website)
- Apply in person at SSN office
- Card mailed in 7-10 days – keep in safe place!
- Do not apply more than 30 days before the EAD start date
- SSN is NOT work authorization – you can start work without it as long as you have your EAD.
Additional Questions?

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