

# Carnegie Mellon University

## Office of International Education

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### F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training Information

#### FIRST:

- Register for and attend a Post-Completion OPT session on [Handshake](#).
- READ this application packet **thoroughly!** Including the “Frequently Asked Questions” (page 3).
- Have your academic advisor/program coordinator complete the [Post-Completion OPT Academic Advisor Recommendation Form](#).

#### SECOND

- Submit your completed Post-Completion OPT Request Form through your [MyOIE Portal](#) account (instructions [here](#)).
  - **DON'T FORGET** to update your address and personal email/phone number in your [SIO account!](#)
  - Complete e-form request. **ANY ERRORS** on your Post-Completion OPT e-form request will be cause for a denial from OIE and will require you to resubmit all materials to OIE through your MyOIE Portal.
- OIE will issue a new Post-OPT I-20 for you in 10 business days recommending Post-Completion OPT.
- You will send a photocopy of this new I-20 with your entire Post-Completion OPT application to USCIS.

#### THIRD:

- **Keep copies of everything you mail to USCIS for your own records!**
- Prepare all application materials listed below and send by UPS or FedEx.
  - You should also insure your package to USCIS for the amount of the OPT application [fee](#).
- Mail the OPT application to USCIS. Check the [filing locations for Form I-765](#) (Click on Foreign students and use address for F-1 OPT)
  - You will receive a Receipt Notice (form I-797) from USCIS – SAVE THIS FOR YOUR RECORDS. The Receipt Notice will have a tracking number (located in the ‘Receipt Number’ box on the I-797). This can be used to follow the progress of your case at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).
  - Your case will stay in “Initial Review” status until it is approved.
- USCIS must receive your application no more than 90 days before AND no more than 60 days beyond your program end date listed on your I-20. Your OPT application MUST be received by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20.

#### Application Process:

##### APPLICATION MATERIALS (submitted in this order):

- Fee information can be found on the USCIS [website](#). You can pay by:
  - A US Check or Money Order - payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security.” **NO CASH!**
  - A credit card – to pay by credit card you must fill out [G-1450 Form](#) and attach it to your application.
- [G-1145 Form](#). Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application.
- [Two “passport” photos](#). Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo.
  - **NO GLASSES** can be worn in the passport photos. Use powder to prevent glaring and be sure there are no shadows in your photos! You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).
  - **Passport photos can be obtained at:**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Tartans Ink (412-268-4828)<br>University Center, Lower Level | Rite Aid (412-521-3900)<br>1700 Murray Avenue | US Post Office (412-421-1388)<br>1800 Murray Ave., Sq. Hill |
|--|---|---|

- [I-765 Form](#) (follow instructions on how to complete form on page 2).
- Sign the new OPT I-20 bottom of page 1.**
- A copy (**NOT** original) of page 1 and 2 of the new Post-Completion I-20 from OIE with the request for OPT listed on page 2.
- I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!
- A copy of **ALL** previously issued I-20 documents from your current degree level (**signed!**). If missing I-20(s), write a cover letter.
- A copy of your [I-94 Record](#).
  - Printout of the electronic [I-94 Record](#) – **Do Not send a copy of your “Travel History Page”**
- A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
- A copy of the most recent F-1 visa sticker in your passport (even if expired).
- A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card(s), if applicable.

## Instructions For Completing Form I-765:

Download the [Form I-765](#) from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and complete it as a form-fillable pdf **OR** if the form does not allow for certain characters – you can hand write the information in black ink. **Remember to write clearly!**

### >Part 1

**Check the 1.a box: "Permission to Accept Employment."**

### >Part 2

**#1 Name:** Type or write your name as it is listed on your passport.

**#2, #3, #4 Other Names Used:** Leave this blank unless you have had a legal name change with an updated passport.

**#5 U.S. Mailing Address:** This must be an address where you can receive mail for at least the next 5 months into the future. **Governmental Mail is NOT FORWARDED.** If the EAD is sent to an address with a "forwarding order", or if you cannot receive mail at the address you used on the I-765, then your EAD will be returned to USCIS. Put both your name on inside and outside of the mailing address mailbox. You should also put a notice on the inside of the mailbox saying, "do not return the priority mail."

**#6 If your mailing address is the same as your physical address,** then check **YES** and skip to question #8.

**#7 Physical Address:** Enter the address where you currently live in the US –**ONLY**– if it is different from the information entered in #5.

**#8 "Alien #:** If you have an A-Number, enter that information. If not, or if you lost this information, then you can leave this blank.

**#9 USCIS Account:** Leave BLANK.

**#10: Gender:** List Gender as shown in your passport.

**#11 Marital Status:** Enter current marital status.

**#12 Have you ever before filed an I-765 before:**

- Check YES -> if you have filed an I-765 Form with USCIS in the past.
- If that does not apply to you -> then check NO.

**#13.a Has the SSA ever issued you an SSN:** Check yes or no.

**#13.b If you answered YES to 9a:** Then enter your social security number.

**#14, 15 (If you do not have an SSN) Do you want the SSA to issue you an SSN:**

- If you check NO -> Skip to #18.
- If you check YES -> Answer questions 15, 16.a to 17.b.

**#18.a Country of Citizenship or Nationality:** Enter your passport's country – if more than one – use the one listed on your I-20.

**#19.a, 19.b, 19c, Place of Birth:** Enter your place of city/state/country of birth (if you do not have a state/province, then leave it blank).

**#20 Date of Birth:** **REMEMBER** to write this in the US date style format (mm/dd/yyyy)!

**#21.a I-94 Number:** You can find this I-94 [website](#).

**#21.b Passport Number:** Enter most recent passport number.

**#21.c Travel Document:** Leave Blank.

**#21.d Country that issued your passport/travel document:** Enter your passport's country (the one listed on your I-20).

**#21.e Passport Expiration Date:** Enter most recent passport expiration date (mm/dd/yyyy).

**#22 Date of the last arrival into the US:** Check the POE (Point of Entry) Stamp in your passport. **DO NOT check I-94 "Travel History Page".**

**#23 Place of your last arrival into the US:** Check the POE (Point of Entry) Stamp in your passport. **DO NOT check I-94 "Travel History Page".**

**\*#24 Status of last entry:** For most, it will be "F-1 Student" (This could be different if you changed your status inside the US\*).

**#25 Current Immigration Status:** Input "F-1 Student".

**#26 Current SEVIS Number:** Find this on your immigration document.

**#27 Eligibility Categories: Fill out as follows.**

For summer or part-time OPT PRIOR to graduating: ( c ) ( 3 ) ( A )

**For POST-COMPLETION (after graduating) OPT:** ( c ) ( 3 ) ( B )

For the 24-month extension of OPT (see FAQ #10 below): ( c ) ( 3 ) ( C )

**SKIP Questions #28 through #31.b.**

### >Part 3

**#1.a to 2 Applicant's Statement:** Check as it applies to you.

**#3, #4, #5 Contact Information:** Enter in US phone numbers and a **PERSONAL** email address.

**#7.a, 7.b Certification: Sign and date the I-765 in dark blue ink. Sign WITHIN the box – do not go outside the box.**

### >Part 4-5

If this applies to your situation, fill in as applicable – **OR** – if this doesn't apply to you, draw a diagonal line across each full-page you are not completing, and write "NA" next to your line. **(NOTE: Page 5 requires your signature – so DO NOT draw a diagonal line across that page)**

**>Part 6:** Complete this section only if you have been approved for **CPT and/or OPT**, and/or you have used a different **SEVIS ID in F-1 status** in the US in the past. If you need to complete this section because one or more of these apply to you, please complete item 1. For **each** of the items listed above, complete one box in Part 6. We suggest using the following to complete the Page number, Part Number, and Item number, as this information is required specific to Category (c)(3)(C) (per the I-765 [instructions](#), page 4):

#### • Page 3, Part 2, Item 27

- We suggest this format – see an example in the OIE Post-Completion OPT [PowerPoint](#):

##### ○ CPT Authorizations:

- Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), **Full-Time or Part-Time, CPT**, with Employer Name: Start date to End date (You can find your CPT details on the I-20 that was approved for each period of CPT).

##### ○ OPT Authorizations:

- Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), Post-Completion OPT, Start date to End date (You can find your OPT details on the I-20).

#### • Page 3, Part 2, Item 26

##### ○ Previous SEVIS ID Number(s):

- Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), Program Start Date – Program End Date, SEVIS ID: N00.... (You can find your SEVIS Number in the top right-hand corner of your I-20)

## REMINDERS: MAINTAINING STATUS WHILE YOU ARE ON Post-Completion OPT

- ❑ REQUIRED UPDATES. You are required to within 10 days of the change, you are required to report any updates to your address, name, employer, and any interruption in employment to immigration directly. Submit reports to: <https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt>.

### TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (also on page 6):

- ❑ In order to have a smooth re-entry into the U.S. while on Post-Completion OPT, you must have:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Valid passport   | EAD (Post-Completion OPT work card)  |
| Valid F-1 visa sticker in your passport                  | Offer letter of employment from your employer**  |
| Post-Completion OPT I-20 signed within the last 6 months | Employer/address reported to <a href="https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt">https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt</a> |

- ❑ F regulations allow for travel and reentry in order to “resume employment.” While a job offer letter is not required to obtain OPT, it is recommended that students who travel have a job offer letter with them when they are entering the U.S. Note that the EAD says “Not Valid for Travel” on the face of the EAD card - meaning it cannot be used alone to re-enter the U.S.
- ❑ **Dependent Travel:** An F-2 dependent must carry COPIES of the F-1 student’s Post-Completion OPT I-20, EAD card, and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 OPT I-20 (endorsed within 6 months of re-entry to the U.S. (page 2).
- ❑ **NEVER enter the U.S. in any VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1 while on Post-Completion OPT (it will invalidate OPT).**

## CHOOSING YOUR START DATE

You are eligible to pick a Post-Completion OPT start date any time within the 60 days following your program end date as noted on the Post-Completion OPT Request Form. Please refer to the Post-Completion OPT [PowerPoint](#) for additional information. If you are a PhD student or a master’s student with a thesis option, you may have more flexibility as to when your Post-Completion OPT can start. Factors to consider when choosing your start date are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you CANNOT begin to work BEFORE the start date on the EAD).** If you choose a start date farther into the future and then receive an earlier offer, you will not be able to change the date. If you are and plan to continue working at CMU after your program is complete, your Post-Completion OPT must start the day after your program ends. All of your work authorization ends (even on-campus work) on your program end date. Be sure to take this into account!
2. **If you want the latest possible day to start your work authorization,** the latest day you may choose as your start date for the EAD is 60 calendar days after your program end date. Remember that some months have 31 days and USCIS counts each day!

***You may not change your Post-Completion OPT dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!***

## Post-Completion OPT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What is F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Practical training is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your degree program. The training must be directly related to your level and field of study. OPT is recommended by OIE and authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This authorization can take 3 to 5 months to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work on F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level and/or 12 months plus 24-month STEM extension for those who qualify (see info on page 4). You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full 12 months to use after you complete your program. You may apply for Post-Completion OPT up to 90 days before the end date listed on I-20 and **USCIS MUST RECEIVE** your application **PRIOR TO 60 days beyond your end date**. Your OPT application **MUST** be received by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new OPT I-20 to avoid denial.

### 2. What are the eligibility requirements to apply for F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

To be eligible to apply for OPT, you must: (1) have been in full-time student status for at least one academic year by the requested start date of your OPT, and (2) be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application.

**3. If I complete one-degree program, use 12 months of Post-Completion OPT, and then begin a second degree of study at another degree level, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of Post-Completion OPT?**

Yes, you are eligible to apply for another 12-month period of Post-Completion Optional Practical Training after changing to a **higher degree level**. This does not apply to a second degree at the same level (i.e., a second master's degree).

**4. What If I don't use Post-Completion OPT at the bachelor's level can I get two 12-month periods of Post-Completion OPT?**

No. Post-Completion OPT for each level cannot be combined and must be used during/immediately after each level. Authorized OPT cannot be "saved" for use in the future. What is F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

**5. I received 12-months of Post-Completion OPT, but my employer changed my status to H-1B after 4 months. So, I have 8 months of Post-Completion OPT remaining, right?**

No. Immigration does not "refund" time after a change to a different immigration status. The amount of time you applied for (as appears on the EAD card) is the amount of time USCIS considers you to have used at that educational level.

**6. How can I use OPT while I am still in my program?**

You may use Pre-Completion OPT while you are still in your degree program as follows: (1) part-time during an academic term, (2) full-time during annual vacation periods. The periods of Pre-OPT (used before you graduate) will be deducted from the total allowable period of 12 months Post-Completion OPT. For example; if you use 4 months of part-time Pre-OPT, then you still have 10 months of full time Post-Completion OPT left to apply for with USCIS after you graduate. Part-time Pre-OPT is always deducted at one-half the full-time rate.

**7. How long does it take to get authorization for Post-Completion OPT and when should I apply?**

It takes OIE 5 to 10 business days to process, your new Post-Completion OPT I-20. After you mail your Post-Completion OPT application to USCIS, it takes USCIS approximately 3 to 5 months to approve your Post-Completion OPT. Therefore, it is important that you apply for the authorization well in advance of the date you wish to start working. You may apply up to 90 days before your program end date and **NO LATER THAN** 60 days after your end date. **\*NOTE: The Post-Completion OPT I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!\***

**8. My Post-Completion OPT I-20 was issued almost 30 days ago, and I haven't filed yet. What do I do?**

Your Post-Completion OPT application **MUST** be received by USCIS within 30 days of the issue date as noted on the new Post-Completion OPT I-20 to avoid denial. If you delay filing the application, you must come to OIE's front desk to request a new I-20 with a new Post-Completion OPT issue date. The new I-20 will take **at least 10 business days** to re-issue. To be safe, file at least 2 weeks before the 30-day timeout of the OPT I-20.

**9. Do I need to have a job to apply for Post-Completion OPT?**

**NO.** You **DO NOT** need to have a job offer before applying for Pre or Post-Completion Optional Practical Training application.

**10. Do I need to have a job/job offer while I am on Post-Completion OPT?**

**Yes.** F-1 regulations require that you have employment in your field of study during Post-Completion OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12-month period of Post-Completion OPT or 150 days if you apply for and are approved for the 24-month STEM extension. You are required to report address, name changes, employer and any interruption in employment, within **10 days** to immigration. Submit reports to <https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt>. If you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment, your SEVIS record will be terminated. denial.

**11. Does the job I have while on Post-Completion OPT must be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?**

For the 12-month period of Post-Completion OPT, the employment does NOT have to be paid employment. Therefore, a student who is self-employed (including performance majors with regular "gigs"), interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered "employed" for the purposes of OPT employment. Employer may not be able to write letter for unpaid work - check before starting job. Unpaid work is acceptable by USCIS, but unless it's truly "volunteer" work, there could be problems with U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) [laws](#). For the 24-month STEM extension, employment **MUST** be paid and at least 20 hours a week.

**12. Can I begin working before I receive the Employment Authorization Document?**

**NO. You may NOT begin employment before you receive your EAD card from USCIS;** working before practical training has been authorized by the USCIS, and you have physically received the EAD card, constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. – **Also, Students MAY NOT continue on-campus employment after the end date on the I-20 until they have an approved EAD card from USCIS.**

**13. May I ask USCIS to expedite processing of my OPT?**

**NO.** USCIS allows students to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the program end date. USCIS does not honor expedite requests for OPT. Should you make a request anyway, it might result in longer processing times. You should apply as early as you are able.

**14. Do I have to do anything with OIE or SEVP while I am on OPT?**

**YES!** Immigration regulations **REQUIRE** that while you are on OPT, you **MUST** report address, name changes, employer and any interruption in employment, within **10 days** to immigration. Submit reports to your [SEVP Portal Account](#).

**15. Can I extend my OPT after the 12 months?**

There are two types of extensions available: 1) a 24-month extension for those in certain fields (see below) and 2) an “H-1B Cap Gap Extension.” The cap gap extends your work authorization through to the start of your “cap-subject” H-1B visa if your OPT ends after your “cap subject” company has applied for an H-1B for you but before the H-1B starts on the following October 1st. This cap gap extension is available to all F-1 students using OPT in any field, as long as you have a pending or approved “cap subject” H-1B application and the employer applied for the H-1B with a request for change of status as part of the application. The extension is automatic - you do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. “Cap Subject” refers to any H-1B application that must be counted against the quota on H-1B applications. Find more information on the OIE [website](#).

**16. I will live in Pennsylvania while on OPT. Can I get a new/extended PA driver’s license/state ID?**

Yes. You may need your EAD before you can apply for a PA driver’s license or state ID. Check with a local [DMV office](#). Further information on applying for a PA driver’s license or state ID can be found on the OIE [website](#).

**17. I went to PA DMV to get a new/renewed license and they told me my information wasn’t in SEVIS or there was an error with my information. What should I do?**

The PA DMV must confirm information from various databases that link to SEVIS. Students on OPT should present the required documentation and make sure to show the EAD and point out the A# located on the card. This gives DMV the number they need to find your data in their system.

**18. What is the 24- month STEM extension of OPT?**

You can find formation on STEM OPT on the OIE [website](#). The 24-month extension allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in the fields listed below, referred to as “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), to apply for a 24-month extension of their regular 12-month OPT period. **You WILL NOT apply for the 36 months up front. To find out if your major is eligible, check Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [website](#).**

**TRAVEL & OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

**19. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the EAD will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD then start work with the card once I get it?**

**NO!!!** If you intend to continue working on your OPT, **NEVER** enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter in B status - you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be **invalid!**

**20. Now that I’ve turned in my application, can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for the EAD to arrive?**

After you complete your program, anytime you travel outside the U.S. on OPT, you need the following in order to have a smooth re-entry into the U.S:

- Valid passport, Valid F-1 visa sticker, I-20 signed for travel, EAD Card, Job offer letter or proof of employment.
- Employer/address reported to immigration via the SEVP Portal.

**Before your I-20 program end date, you should be able to [return](#) to the U.S, normally, as an F-1 student.**

**21. What if I applied for the 24-month extension but I have not yet received the EAD, can I travel out of the U.S.?**

I.C.E Guidance [states](#): “Yes but traveling during this time should be undertaken with **caution**. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away, so you would want to make sure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to your DSO and on the application and would be able to send in the requested documents (from inside the US). Also, if USCIS approves your STEM OPT application, you will be expected to have your STEM EAD in hand to re-enter the United States.”

**22. The visa sticker in my passport has expired, but I need to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa sticker at an embassy?**

**Yes.** You must have a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status during the OPT period. **\*NOTE:** while on F-1 OPT, you can still be subject to a 4 to 6-week security clearance delay. **EXCPTION – Automatic Visa Revalidation (AVR).** If you are going to Canada, Mexico or one of the adjacent islands, and staying for fewer than 30 days, you could re-enter the U.S. on your expired F-1 visa sticker. Review Automatic Visa Revalidation policy before you travel to ensure you qualify! All other travel documents are required during any period of OPT.

**23. In what way is my application to the embassy for a new visa sticker affected by being on OPT?**

The risk of visa sticker denial while on OPT is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program. Therefore, if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return to your home country, the visa application will be denied. However, many students during OPT get their F-1 visa stickers renewed. Be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent.

**24. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new F-1 visa sticker while I am on OPT?**

Valid passport, EAD, OPT I-20, job offer letter or proof of employment and employer/address reported to immigration via the SEVP Portal. Because you are seeking a nonimmigrant visa, the official job offer letter should indicate that your employment is temporary and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you will apply your OPT work experience there.

**25. Do I still need to get a travel signature on my I-20 from OIE while on OPT?**

Yes, while you are in F-1 status on OPT if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every 6 months. If you are not located in Pittsburgh, mail the original I-20 to OIE for endorsement along with the OIE Request For Services [Form](#), leaving plenty of time for mailing delays.

**26. What are the common mistakes students make when applying for work authorization under OPT?**

The following common mistakes can delay your OPT application processing or even result in a denial of your application:

- Application is not submitted within the timeframe
- Application is incomplete
- Check/Money Order is dated or signed incorrectly
- Passport pictures do not follow requirements
- Failure to respond to a Request for Further Evidence (RFE) by the given deadline stated by USCIS

**Employment Related Information**

**Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9):** When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (IRS Form I-9) which verifies your eligibility to work in the U.S. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. This form requires you to document your identity and work authorization. For F-1 students, the most typical combination of documentation is your passport, I-94 Departure Record, I-20, and EAD.

**Social Security Number (SSN):** For payroll purposes, you will also need to provide your SSN. If you do not already have an SSN, you are required to bring your passport, I-94 record, OPT I-20, and EAD to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and apply for an SSN card. The same documents are required for a replacement card. **\*\*To find the closest SSA, visit on the SSA [website](#).**

**Social Security Withholding and Other Taxes:** In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. fewer than five years are “non-residents for tax purposes” and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. If you are a non-resident for tax purposes and your employer does withhold FICA, speak to your payroll office. You and your employer can refer to Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens” for additional information. Your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. The results of the filing will determine if any of the withheld income taxes can be refunded to you.