

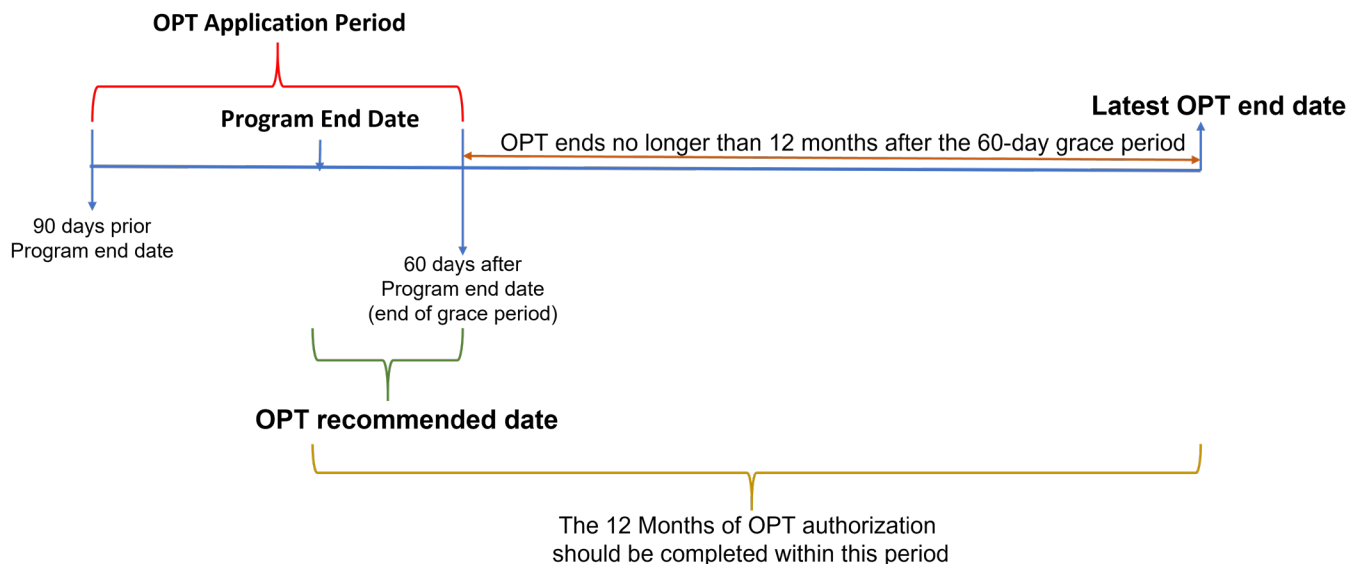
## OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Follow the eligibility criteria to determine if you qualify for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) application:

- ☐ Be under valid F-1 status.
- ☐ Be in good academic standing status (no probation, no incompletes).
- ☐ Be enrolled in your final semester at UWRF.
- ☐ Have been enrolled full-time for at least one academic year (two semesters) prior to applying for OPT.
- ☐ Be physically present in the U.S. at the time of the application.
- ☐ Have never been approved nor used Post-Completion OPT at the current level of study.
- ☐ Have not been authorized for 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT).

### A. Things to Keep in Mind Prior to Applying for OPT:

- ☐ You cannot apply more than 90 days BEFORE or more than 60 days AFTER your program end date.



- ☐ OPT **MUST** be recommended in SEVIS by your DSO **PRIOR** to you sending your application to USCIS.
- ☐ You are responsible for your OPT application; the complete application package or online application needs to be sent to USCIS within 30 days of the OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
- ☐ You can apply online or by mail.

- ☐ Please visit the USCIS website to access the forms required for the OPT application <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
- ☐ If you are applying online, you will first need to create an account at: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>.
- ☐ OPT employment must be in a job that is ***directly related to your major field of study***.
- ☐ Employment must be full-time (more than 20 hrs./week).

## B. Applying for OPT Approval:

**You can apply for OPT either online or by mail.** Prepare your OPT application to be submitted to USCIS:

- ☐ If you apply online, the current fee is **\$410**. **Important note:** the current application fee is increasing to **\$470 for online applications** and **\$520 for paper mail applications**. ***The new fees will become effective on April 1, 2024.*** You will be able to pay with a valid credit/debit card or by providing your bank routing and checking account numbers. If you are applying by mail, you will need either a check or money order, payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**.
- ☐ IF applying by mail, please complete the latest edition of the Form I-765 found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. If you are applying online, you will first need to create an account at: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>. I highly recommend you apply online.
- ☐ Apply for Post-Completion OPT under the category **(c)(3)(B)**.
- ☐ Copy of your **new** signed I-20 with the Post-Completion OPT recommendation on the second page. ***Don't forget to sign your I-20 prior to making the copy or scanning!***
- ☐ Copies of previous I-20 forms if you have had CPT or other OPT authorizations.
- ☐ Copy of your most recent Form I-94.
- ☐ Copy of passport's biographical information page, also include expired passports used under your F-1 visa status.
- ☐ Copy of F-1 visa stamp (exception: Canadian students).
- ☐ Recently taken **passport photo** (no eyeglasses!). If you are applying online, you will only need one digital photo for the online application, but if you are applying by mail, you will need two identical photos. Here are some useful tips for the digital photo: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html>.

- OPT **online** applications tips:

If you are submitting your OPT application **online**, you will need to upload your documents into your online application, follow these useful tips from USCIS (<https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/tips-for-filing-forms-online>):

- ☐ Use a scanner or take pictures of each document. Make sure each image you attach is clear and that all text is readable.
- ☐ Files must not be larger than 6MB in size.
- ☐ Files must be in one of these formats: PDF, JPG, or JPEG. For some forms, we also accept files in TIF or TIFF format.
- ☐ Do not encrypt or password protect your files.
- ☐ If your documents are in a foreign language, upload an English translation along with the original.

**DO NOT CLICK SUBMIT UNTIL ALL YOUR DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PROPERLY UPLOADED, YOUR ONLINE APPLICATION IS COMPLETED AND, OF COURSE, YOUR POST-COMPLETION OPT HAS BEEN RECOMMENDED BY YOUR DSO IN SEVIS AND YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR NEW I-20.**

#### EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS

TYPE	FULL/PART-TIME	STATUS	START DATE	END DATE
POST-COMPLETION OPT	FULL TIME	REQUESTED		

- **IF you are mailing** your application, please send your completed STEM OPT application package to:

#### **U.S. Postal Service (USPS):**

##### **USCIS Chicago Lockbox**

Attn: I-765 C03

P.O. Box 805373

Chicago, IL 60680-5374

#### **FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:**

USCIS

Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)

131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor

Chicago, IL 60603-5517

- **Premium Processing**: you now have the choice to request premium or expedited processing for your I-765 application. To request premium processing, you will need to complete the form I-907 and pay a fee of \$1,500, this is in addition to the \$410 paid for the I-765 application. Important Note: effective February 26, 2024, the premium processing fee is increasing to \$1,685.

Premium processing guarantees that your I-765 will be reviewed within 30 days. This does not guarantee approval, just guarantees that you will receive either an approval notice, a denial notice, a notice of intent to deny, a request for evidence or information, or an investigation for fraud or misrepresentation.

To learn more about premium processing, visit: <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/all-forms/how-do-i-request-premium-processing>.

#### **C. Waiting for your OPT Approval:**

After you submit your application for Post-Completion OPT to USCIS, you should receive an email and/or text message as well as a receipt notice by postal mail, this is the form I-797C, confirming that USCIS has received your application. This notice will include a Receipt Number which can use to check the status of your application on the USCIS website at

<https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. If you have filed your application online, you should be able to check the status directly in your account: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>.

You should start your OPT job search as soon as possible. Make sure your Resume is up to date and you have a cover letter. Please visit Career Services if you need assistance:

<https://www.uwrf.edu/CareerServices/>.

#### D. Things to Keep in Mind While OPT approval is in Pending:

Continue your job search keeping in mind that:

- ☐ OPT employment **must** be in a job that is directly related to your **major** field of study.
- ☐ OPT employment may be paid or unpaid. Volunteer or internship positions which are unpaid, yet relate to your field of study, **could** be submitted as evidence of your OPT activity. *You could work as a volunteer or unpaid intern when this activity does not violate any labor laws* (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/71-flsa-internships>). **Discuss any volunteer position with you DSO prior to accepting this kind of job.**
- ☐ Employment **must** be full-time (more than 20 hrs./week), but you will not be able to work more than 40 hrs./week.
- ☐ Important: you **cannot** begin employment before your OPT application is approved, and you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) in the mail.
- ☐ Employment authorization will begin on the actual date approved by USCIS, which is listed on your EAD card.
- ☐ We do **not** recommend, that you leave the United States (U.S.) while your OPT application is under review or pending, because you may not be able to show evidence of your legal status when you return to the U.S. Also, if you were to receive an RFI (Request for Information) or an RFE (Request for Evidence) from USCIS, you will not be able to reply to USCIS in a timely manner if you are abroad.

#### E. After your OPT Approval

If your OPT application is approved by USCIS, you should receive an email and/or text message as well as an Approval Notice by postal mail or form I-797, confirming that USCIS has approved your application and indicating that your Employment Authorization Document or EAD card is under production. You might receive your EAD card within 10 days of your approval letter.

**If you have a job offer, provide a copy of the job offer and complete job description to your DSO.**

Your DSO will review the information and report your new employment in SEVIS and generate a new I-20.

#### F. Maintaining Status during OPT

Because your F-1 status continues during OPT, you are required to **report any changes** to the following information to your DSO, **within 10 days** of its occurrence:

- ☐ Residence address in the U.S.
- ☐ Email Address.
- ☐ Legal Name.
- ☐ Telephone Number.
- ☐ U.S. Legal Status, inform us if you are planning on changing your status to H1-B, J-1, H-4 etc.

- ☐ Information about your employer, including employer name, address, and starting date, etc.
- ☐ Information about any disruption of your employment such as job termination or change of employers.

#### **G. Periods of Unemployment during OPT**

During OPT, maintaining your F-1 status is also dependent upon employment. **You may not have more than 90 days of unemployment during your post-completion OPT period.** During the period when your OPT authorization begins and ends, each day that you do not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment – *this includes weekends*.

According to current government guidelines, F-1 students may be denied future immigration benefits that rely on the student's valid F-1 status if the Department of Homeland Security determines that the student exceeded the limitations on unemployment during OPT. If you exceed the 90 days of unemployment, your SEVIS record will be automatically terminated, and you will be required to depart the U.S. immediately.

#### **H. Traveling outside of the U.S. during OPT**

During OPT you may travel out of the U.S. and return after a temporary absence. Remember that your DSO must sign the second page of your most recent I-20 prior to your departure. Travel endorsement signatures during the OPT period are valid for 6 months. You are still required to have an unexpired F-1 visa stamp in order to re-enter the U.S., you will also need to carry your valid EAD card.

Contact your DSO to arrange for a signature on your I-20 at least two weeks before your departure. If you will travel frequently during your OPT, it is not necessary to obtain a new signature for each reentry to the United States.

#### **I. End of Your OPT**

Your OPT is automatically terminated if you transfer to another school or begin studies in another educational program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

If you decide to leave the U.S. before the OPT's end date on your EAD, and do not plan to return to the U.S., please contact your DSO with information about your date of departure and last date at work.

If you have maintained status, after the end date of your OPT period, you will receive a 60-day grace period. During this "grace period" you may transfer to another college or university, change to another visa status, or prepare to depart from the U.S. BUT, you may **not** continue with your employment.

**\*\*If you have completed a STEM degree, checked with your DSO to see if you are eligible to apply for STEM OPT. If you are eligible to apply for the STEM OPT program, you will be able to do so up to 90 days BEFORE your Post-Completion OPT employment authorization expires. You will not be able to apply for STEM OPT after your Post-Completion OPT has expired.**