OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
The OPT workshop will cover these topics:

- What is OPT and your eligibility to apply
- Detail of the OPT application procedures
- Understanding the obligations during OPT and maintaining F-1 status
- Step-by-step process to file your OPT application online with USCIS
- Essential resources and information
OPT Overview:

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

- OPT is work permission available for eligible F-1 students. It allows students to have real-world work experience related to their major field of study.
- Designated School Official (DSO) recommends OPT in SEVIS (but cannot authorize the work period)
- Student must apply for the work permit with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) with the DSO recommended I-20.
- If approved, USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The student must not begin working before the start date on the EAD after it is received.
OPT Overview - Types of OPT:

- **Pre-Completion OPT:** A period of employment authorized prior to the end of a student’s program of study. It may be part-time or full-time. (Most schools will authorize CPT instead)

- **Post-Completion OPT:** A period of employment authorized after the student’s program of study has ended. It must be full-time.

- **H-1B Cap Gap OPT:** For students whose prospective employers filed a qualifying H-1B-cap subject petition. (Only possible for Spring and Summer graduates)

- **OPT STEM-Extension (24 months):** For students who majored in designated Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) degrees approved by DHS.
OPT Eligibility – who is Eligible for OPT?

- F-1 students who have attended an SEVP certified institution (i.e. received an I-20) on a full-time basis, for a minimum of one academic year
- May be authorized for up to 12 months of OPT
- Each subsequent application for a new Post-Completion OPT must be for a higher degree level – OPT may only be granted once per degree level, and only if moving upward in degree level
- F-1 students with one year or greater of Full-Time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are no longer eligible for OPT at that current degree level
- Part-Time CPT does not affect OPT eligibility
OPT Application Procedures

- **Deadline**: Your application must be received and receipted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) within 30 days of the DSO’s recommendation, and within your 60-day grace period, whichever is earlier.

- Application filing window: F-1 students may apply for Post Completion OPT from 90 days prior to the degree program completion, and up to 60 days after the program end date.

- A timely-filed OPT application means that you may legally remain in the U.S. while the OPT application is pending with USCIS

- You should apply as early as possible for OPT, when you find out that you will meet the graduation requirements.
OPT Application Procedures

Make sure that you verify your degree level on your I-20 prior to filing for OPT.

For example: If you are discontinuing your doctorate program and finishing with a master’s degree, your I-20 must be updated to show this change.

The date indicated by your academic advisor / graduate advisor will be used as the new I-20 Program End date on your OPT recommended I-20. This is the official closing date of the semester unless an otherwise agreed upon date with your thesis/dissertation advisor.

This section needs to be signed by the Dean, Dissertation/Thesis Advisor, or the student’s Academic Advisor. The student is applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT), which is available through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It allows an F-1 international student to work for up to one year in their field of study. In order to recommend the student for this post-completion practical training, we need to know the expected completion date. A student is allowed to apply 90 days before the completion of studies. It is helpful for the student to apply as early as allowed under law, since it may take up to three months to process the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card from DHS. If the student does not complete the degree when expected, the EAD card may be cancelled as long as it has not been approved by USCIS. If the card is cancelled the student may reapply for OPT with the cancellation letter from USCIS.

NOTE: Engineering majors have additional steps to follow. Please check with your department before attending a group OPT appointment.

This student has applied for graduation at the following degree level (please circle one):

Bachelor  Masters  Doctorate

2. This student is expected to complete/has completed all degree requirements on ____/____/____.

Attention Advisors: A student cannot prolong their stay in the U.S. by taking additional courses they do not need (because they failed to apply for graduation) or they are administratively enrolled. If the student has completed all degree requirements, they are required to take action to maintain status. The federal regulations in 8 CFR 214.2(f)(3)(ii)(C) state:

“If the student is not required to take any additional courses to satisfy the requirements for completion, but continues to be enrolled for administrative purposes, the student is considered to have completed the course of study and must take action to maintain status.”

Academic or Thesis/Dissertation Advisor:

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Associate Dean of College: ____________________________ Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

(Engineering Only)
OPT Application Procedures – Shorten I-20

- Because the I-20 Program Dates must match your degree program dates, it is necessary that our office shorten your I-20 program end date – This date will correlate to the date listed on the OPT Academic Verification form.

- If you find that you will have a delay in completion of degree requirements, you must request an I-20 Program Extension immediately, before your program end-date, or risk violating your F-1 status.

- SEVP strongly recommends that a student who may not be able to successfully complete all program requirements on time postpone applying for Post Completion OPT until after his or her program ends (within the 60-day grace period).

- Your I-20 can only be extended prior to the new I-20 program end date - not after.
OPT Application Procedures – Shorten I-20

- For all Thesis track and Dissertation track students with all coursework completed: After applying for OPT, you must find a job in your field of study and work a minimum of 20 hours per week while completing the Thesis / Dissertation. The thesis/dissertation work cannot be used as employment.
  - SEVP Policy Guidance issued on April 23, 2010 states: Can a student in a graduate-level program who has completed all program requirements, aside from thesis or equivalent, apply for either pre-completion OPT or post-completion OPT?
    - Yes, a student who only has the thesis or equivalent remaining may either apply for pre-completion OPT or post-completion OPT while completing the thesis/dissertation.

- Master’s students cannot switch to Non-Thesis track as this would require an I-20 program extension, and if you are already beyond your program end-date, you would be out of status.

- For all students: You cannot work on-campus or on CPT after completing your program of study, no matter if you have shortened your I-20 or not. No CPT or on-campus work can be done after the I-20 has been shortened.
  - You must wait until the EAD card is approved and the EAD start date to begin work again.
Understanding your 60-day Grace Period

1) **Apply for OPT** (Which can you do 90 days before you graduate and up to the 60-day period after). You cannot apply for OPT-X in your grace period after OPT ends. It has to be applied for before (more in the OPT-X slides at the end).

2) **Change of Degree Level at UH**. If resuming study at University of Houston, the new I-20 must be printed prior to the 60-day grace period ending.
   a) Your OPT work authorization ends, and the EAD card becomes invalid, on the date that you are registered with the new I-20 in SEVIS if the I-20 is issued before the grace period begins.
   b) The first day of classes must be within 5 months and the next available semester from the end of your period of OPT.

3) **Transfer to Another Institution**. If resuming study at another institution, the SEVIS record must be transferred to the new institution prior to the 60-day grace period ending.
   a) Your period of OPT ends upon the transfer release date in SEVIS if done during your period of OPT.
   b) The first day of classes must be within 5 months and be the next available semester of the OPT EAD card end date or the date of your transfer. You should also not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment during the OPT EAD date.

4) **Apply for Change of Status** (if eligible). Once the application is submitted, you would be able to remain in the U.S. until a decision has been made.

5) **Make Arrangements to Return Home**. As long as you leave before the end of your grace period, you are able to travel around the U.S. and explore the country during your grace period.

**Note:** Your OPT period cannot continue when classes have begun - You will need an updated I-20 to reflect your new program of study - You may choose to end OPT early to resume study
OPT Application Procedures – Start Date

- You will need to choose an OPT Start Date and fill it in on the F-1 Student Responsibility Form.
- Your requested OPT Start Date can be any day during your 60-day grace period, which begins with the day after the completion of your program of study (Date located on your Academic Verification Form).
- The requested OPT Start Date may not be changed after your application is submitted to USCIS.
- Keep in mind that you cannot begin working until USCIS adjudicates your case and you receive your EAD card with the dates authorized to work.

My requested Post-Completion OPT start date is (mm/dd/yyyy): _____/_____/_________.

*Post-Completion OPT may begin on any day between the date of completing your degree and up to 60 days later.
OPT Application Procedures – **Start Date**

Choose your requested OPT Start Date within this range of dates

**I-20 Program End Date** (from signed Academic Verification form)

60th calendar day after I-20 Program End Date
OPT – Employment Regulations

- All work during Post-Completion OPT must be in a job that is directly related to the student’s degree program, for which the OPT was granted
  - Any employment not related to your field of study is a violation of F-1 status
- Minimum of 20 hours per week (This can an average throughout the month)
- During Post-Completion OPT, employment may be paid or unpaid
- You may be self-employed (No self-employment allowed during OPT-X, so plan ahead!)
- You may work for multiple employers
- You may change jobs as needed
- You must report all employment changes within 10 days using the SEVP Portal (we will discuss in detail later)
- You may not exceed 90 days of unemployment during the entire period of OPT
OPT – Unemployment

- During Post-Completion OPT, unemployment is counted only from the EAD card start date, not from the time of application or graduation.

- Approved business travel or approved vacation travel from a U.S. employer does not count as “unemployment”.

- The maximum allowable unemployment period during Post-Completion OPT is 90 calendar days, accumulative. Plan carefully so that you do not use all of your allowable unemployment period.

- There is NO additional grace period after OPT ends if you exceed the 90 days of unemployment.

- Working less than 20 hours per week counts as unemployment on OPT unless you have multiple jobs that equal 20 hours or more.

- Any SEVIS record on Post-Completion OPT with 90 consecutive days of unemployment may be automatically terminated by the SEVIS system. Report all employment changes within 10 days to avoid consequences.
You will gain access to the SEVP Portal when two things happen:

- First, the OPT request status in SEVIS changes to “Approved”
- Typically, this OPT request status comes directly from USCIS when they approve an OPT application
- Second, the OPT period must be “Active”
OPT – Reporting Requirements

- On the start date of your EAD card (approximately), you will receive an automated email from: do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

- Do not delete this email – you must click on the link in this email to setup your SEVP Portal account. The email used to send this information is your “destination email” in your UH account. Make sure to update your destination email from @Cougarnet.uh.edu to a personal email once you end your on-campus employment.

- The SEVP portal login page is: https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

- The SEVP Portal account is the method used to report employment information during Post Completion OPT
OPT – Reporting Requirements

- You must follow the link to create your Portal account. You must provide your SEVIS ID number to create the account
  - For any troubleshooting on accessing your account, please email sevis@central.uh.edu. There are instances when if you had a prior OPT portal account, it will cause issues in receiving a new link.

- Once you gain access to the Portal, you can:
  - Edit your profile (e.g., SEVIS address)
  - Edit employment information
  - View history
  - Change password

- The SEVP Portal will send you email in these situations: When you create a portal account, confirm that you recently created an account, password was changed, account is locked, email address changed, STEM OPT evaluations are due, or when your OPT authorization ends and the account is being closed.
- Portal Account closes after 180 days following the end of the OPT period.
During your OPT period, you will be able to view your employment information in the Portal and verify it for accuracy.

You must report all changes of employment information within 10 calendar days of the change. The portal account will NOT allow you to add a start date that is more than 10 days old. You will have to report with a current start date and request our office to adjust the date for you.

Failure to timely report may mean missed days count as unemployment.

If you change jobs, **never delete** the previous employer information or **edit the start date** due to a promotion – this causes unemployment time to be calculated.
OPT – Recent DHS Guidance

- U.S. Department of Homeland Security recently published guidance on “Practical Training - Determining a Direct Relationship Between Employment and a Student’s Major Area of Study”

- It requires the F-1 student to provide an explanation of how the job relates the student’s major area of study

- You will use the student access to your SEVP Portal account, and provide an explanation in the text box: “Relation to Field of Study: Explain How this job relates to the degree that qualified you for this OPT”

- You must keep historical records of your employment: **DO NOT delete** your previous information submitted in the SEVP Portal - always “Add” new information
OPT – Recent DHS Guidance

- Below are examples for what to write:

  - **Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering**: I work full time as an Electrical Engineer at ABC Corp., a government contractor. In my job, I analyze client requirements for electrical systems and provide them with cost estimates of such systems. My work requires understanding of electrical circuit theory, which I studied in-depth at the University of ABC.

  - **Bachelor's degree in Business**: I work full time as a Loan Officer at a mortgage company, Happy Homes, where I meet with clients and evaluate, authorize and recommend approval of loan applications. On a daily basis, I use the knowledge I gained in my credit analysis, sales and marketing classes that I took as part of my major program of study.
OPT – Recent DHS Guidance

- **Master’s degree in Music:** I am working at a hospital playing the harp in patient rooms. I also conduct hands-on harp beginner workshops for long-term patients. On average, I work at the hospital 35 hours a week. My duties directly utilize the skills and knowledge I acquired from my coursework and degree in music therapy.

- **PhD in Computer Science:** I am employed as a Computer and Information Research Scientist at ABC Research Institute. I work as part of a team of scientists and engineers that designs experiments to test the operation of various software systems. My work builds on research in complex algorithms and machine learning, which I studied as part of my dissertation.

- **Master’s degree in Kinesiology:** I am working 25 hours a week in a health food store as a consultant for Self-Made Inc., designing and teaching exercise classes that are incorporated into a customer’s overall nutrition and exercise plan. My designs and customer instruction draw upon my studies and classwork in exercise therapy and physical reconditioning.
To view the SEVP Portal Help videos and detailed guides, visit the Study in the States webpage: studyinthestates.dhs.gov
OPT – Reporting Requirements

- Provide a copy of your EAD card – front and back to our office through our online reporting link. This can be accessed through MyUH and going to your academic records tile.
- If you have questions on how to report, please email SEVIS@Central.UH.edu with your student ID number

Save the front and back as a PDF file – Do this within 10 days of receiving the EAD card
OPT – Employment Regulations

- Fill out the rest of the “F-1 Student Responsibility” page under “OPT Self Report” – by signing, you agree to follow all OPT reporting rules and all other regulations pertaining to your time on OPT.

Acknowledgement of Responsibility

I, ____________________________, am responsible for reporting all employment on the SEVP portal and will inform International Student and Scholar Services Office regarding any changes to my status or reporting issues while on optional practical training (OPT).

“By signing, I understand and will follow the above rules and responsibilities.”

Student Signature: ____________________________  Student ID: __________  Date: __________________
**Form I-765**: Our office highly recommends all OPT students to file form I-765 **online with USCIS**, although you can still choose to file the paper application – online filing is user-friendly and much more efficient than paper filing.

Begin by creating an account on the USCIS website:  

www.uscis.gov
Form I-765

Confirm your email address to begin setting up your USCIS online account – it must be an email that you check frequently.

**Important note:** DO NOT use your @cougar@net.uh.edu as this email address will expire once you are no longer employed at UH.
Save your backup code in case you need it and lose access.

Two-Step Verification Backup Code

If you lose access to your authentication device (you get a new mobile device or change your phone number), you can use this backup code to login to your USCIS account. If you change and confirm a new two-step verification method preference, your old code will no longer work.

Please print or save a copy of this code, and store it somewhere safe so that you are not locked out of your account.

Your backup code is: [REDACTED]

Export As PDF

Proceed
Select, “I am an applicant, petitioner, or requestor…”
Form I-765

Select “Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)”
After reading the paperwork reduction notice, details, and security reminder, press “start” to proceed with the application
As you begin the application, use the dropdown menu to select the eligibility category, c(3)(B) for Post-Completion OPT.
Form I-765 – Premium Processing

On April 3rd, 2023, USCIS implemented premium processing for both OPT and OPT-X case filings. To request premium processing for your OPT case, you must submit a form I-907 with the appropriate fee ($1,685). (https://www.uscis.gov/i-907)

When you are filing your initial I-765, it will ask if you wish to add premium processing right away as part of your application. Once you pay the filing fee for the I-765, it will direct you to complete the I-907 form as part of your application. This question will allow you to make the decision to complete premium processing.

You can also choose to complete the premium processing at a later date by selecting the I-907 form in the “file a form” part of your USCIS account online.

Note: You must pay the Form I-907 fee separately from the Form I-765 filing fees if filing by paper. If you submit a single, combined fee payment for multiple forms, USCIS will reject your entire filing. (Please let the counselor if you plan to file I-765 by paper.)

I-907 Instructions:
Form I-765

Select your reason for applying as “Initial permission to accept employment”

Select yes or no, to indicate whether you have previously filed the form I-765.

If you have filed a form I-765, you must add information about this in the “additional information” section of your application. To find the appropriate spot, you should
**Form I-765**

If you have filed a form I-765, you must add information about this in the “additional information” section of your application. To find the appropriate spot, you should follow the outline shown on the right. You will select the “section” of the application, then the “page,” followed by the “question.”

Once you have done this, you can add details about your EAD card such as the “Category” (C03 for OPT, C09 for pending resident, A12 for TPS, etc.), the dates of authorization, the receipt number, and any additional information as appropriate such as the degree level if it’s a prior OPT EAD.
Form I-765

Select “No”, unless you are retaining a lawyer or attorney to file the form on your behalf.
Form I-765

Fill your full legal name, matching your passport name exactly.

Below, answer “No,” unless you have legally changed your name on an identity document or use a specific name on your social media accounts.
Form I-765

Fill all requested contact information, although you may check the box and leave the 2nd telephone number blank; at least one telephone and one email address are required.
Form I-765

Provide a U.S. mailing address which you have carefully verified, and which will **NOT** change in the next 3-5 months. Use the “In Care of Name” line only if your mail is going to location that you do not reside or you are not on the lease agreement. This line should not include your personal name.

Check “Yes”, unless the address you provided is not a physical address (e.g., Post Office box address) or you do not reside at the location that your mail will be going.

Generally, allow the website to verify the address per U.S. postal service formatting standards.
Form I-765

Answer the gender, marital status, birth location, and date of birth questions as shown.
Form I-765

Answer the citizenship, I-94, and arrival questions.

If you arrived on a different status, but changed your status to F-1, then make sure you include the correct status of entry and have your I-797 notice of approval ready to upload in your application file.

Do not forget to verify that your I-94 has your latest arrival date before the admissions number.
Form I-765

Provide your most recent date of arrival in the U.S., place of arrival, and visa status at last arrival.

Provide your passport number, but do not answer the travel document question. Travel documents are for those who enter U.S. without having a valid passport (e.g. refugees);

Provide your passport expiration date of the newest passport;

Provide the country that issued your passport (the country’s government issuing your passport, not the U.S. if you renewed it here);

Select F-1 Student for your current immigration status.
Form I-765

Add your SEVIS number, except the “N” which is already filled; your SEVIS number is on your form I-20, page 1, at the top.

Note: If you have used any prior SEVIS ID numbers while in the U.S. (including J or M status), you will add this in the additional information section of the application. You do not have to include SEVIS ID’s of I-20’s issued to you by a school for initial attendance which you never used.
Form I-765

A-Number: this is assigned by USCIS if you file an application to USCIS, such as an OPT application; if you have never previously filed an application to USCIS, then you will not have an A-Number.

USCIS online account number: you would have this number only if USCIS sent an account access notice to you (most students do not have this when filing for OPT).

Note: It is better to check the box for both of these as “you do not have or know” than trying to figure out if you have either of these.
Form I-765

Answer the Social Security Number questions. Most students already have the SSN when applying for OPT; however, if you do not have the SSN, you may use this section to request the SSN, by giving consent for USCIS to forward your request to the Social Security Administration (SSA), and by providing your parents’ names. If you already have the SSN, you will not answer those questions.

Answers shown here are for a student who already have the SSN.
Form I-765

In this section, you will upload your new passport photo; be sure that it meets the format requirements (e.g., 2x2 inches square, etc.), file size, and file format. Do not use an old photo.
Form I-765

Upload your most recent I-94—which you may download from www.cbp.gov/I-94—click “Get most recent I-94” and enter the data from your Passport or U.S. visa page to get the required document. You should have this already from filling out the earlier sections of the application.
Form I-765

Upload your passport and Visa pages on this section. If you have a previous EAD card (not OPT related), upload this here as well.

**Note:** Do not upload a black and white scan or a reduced size image. USCIS will request you to resubmit these images if necessary and will delay your application approval.
Form I-765

If you had any CPT during this degree program, your OPT advisor will provide a CPT screenshot when the OPT request is ready which you will upload here. If you did not have any CPT, then do not upload anything on this screen.

Any CPT from a prior degree program, please upload the I-20 with the CPT authorization showing on page 2.

Upload any previous OPT EAD cards here as well, both the front and back.
Form I-765

This section is where you will upload your new I-20 with OPT recommendation provided to you after the OPT webinar by the counselor. You will receive this 5-7 working days following submission of your application documents to the counselor.

DO NOT submit your application to USCIS without this I-20 or you will be denied.
Form I-765

Carefully note the application refund policy before continuing and that once you submit, you cannot get this money back.

The current form filing fee is $470.

Note: Paper filing has a $50 additional cost.
Form I-765

You may review your I-765 answers as a draft snapshot, prior to final submission of your application.

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Here is a summary of all the information you provided in your application.

Make sure you have provided responses for everything that applies to you before you submit your application. You can edit your responses by going to each application section using the site navigation.

We also prepared a draft case snapshot with your responses, which you can download below.

[View draft snapshot]
Form I-765

At any time during completing the application, you can exit out and return to continue. Your application will be saved as a draft for up to 30 days.

Be sure that you have uploaded all required documents, including the new OPT Recommendation I-20 that you should receive from us, as well as the CPT screenshot, if you did CPT at this degree level.
Form I-765

After uploading all documents, including the OPT recommendation I-20 you received from us, you can read and acknowledge the applicant’s statement to continue and submit your application.
Form I-765

Check the box, and then type your name as your digital signature.
Form I-765

As you finish the application, you will be redirected to Pay.gov for application payment, and then redirected back to USCIS for your receipt number (case number) unless you chose to continue with the premium processing request first. When you have the receipt number, you have finished the application.
Encountering Fraud While Participating in OPT:

- International students participating in OPT must understand and abide by OPT regulations to maintain their nonimmigrant status.

- International students who rely on recruitment agencies to obtain OPT placements should ensure those agencies are trustworthy and reputable. Reputable recruiters will not modify a student’s resume or academic background to secure OPT placement.

- If you witness fraudulent activity by an OPT recruiter or company, you should contact the ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) tip line at 1-866-DHS-2ICE or www.ICE.gov/tips.
H-1B Cap Gap

- Current regulations allow certain students with pending or approved H-1B petitions to remain in F-1 status by extending their current status until September 30th. This is referred simply as “H-1B Cap-Gap,” meaning the regulations provides a way of filling the “gap” between the end of F-1 status and the beginning of H-1B status that might otherwise occur. The “Cap-Gap” period starts when an F-1 student’s status and work authorization expires and extends this to September 30th.

- To qualify, H-1B petitions have to be timely filed on behalf of an eligible F-1 student that requests a change of status to H-1B before their current OPT or grace period ends. If a student is in their grace period, only the grace period is extended, not the work authorization.

- Timely filed means that the H-1B petition (indicating change of status rather than consular processing) was filed during the H-1B acceptance period which begins April 1st while the student's authorized F-1 duration of status (D/S) admission was still in effect.

- Even though the H-1B Cap-Gap period is automatically applied for eligible F-1 students, you may request an H-1B Cap Gap I-20 from our office which will show evidence to your employer that you are authorized to work during the Cap Gap dates listed on the I-20. You can view more information on our website and also how to print a cap-gap I-20 by going here: Students -> Optional Practical Training -> H-1B Cap-Gap Extension.

- Note: Your OPT employment data must be updated electronically, prior to requesting the H-1B Cap Gap I-20.
OPT STEM Extension

- Applicant must hold a STEM eligible degree, from a U.S. institution, listed on the STEM list (The full list is available at [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov))
- Employer must be enrolled in E-verify upon submission of application to USCIS.
- Employer and employee must agree to, complete, and sign the Training Plan (Form I-983)
- The job has to be paid and at least 20hrs per week. The work still must be directly related to your major area of study.
- Self-Employment is not allowed, and you cannot work for staffing and temporary agencies under most circumstances.
- A new OPT-X recommendation I-20 is required to apply.
- Multiple jobs are allowed, but each job has to meet the criteria listed above.
Locate the 6 digit “CIP code” on your I-20 to determine eligibility, then compare with the STEM list at [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov)

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<th>2020 CIP Code</th>
<th>CIP Code Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>01.0901</td>
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<td>01</td>
<td>01.0902</td>
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Last updated: July 12, 2023
OPT STEM Extension – when to apply:

- The application must be properly filed not more than 90 days prior to Post-Completion OPT EAD card end date, but not after the end date (Late applications are not accepted by USCIS)

- Application must be received and receipted, properly filed with USCIS, on or before the current OPT EAD card end date

- You must be currently on an approved Post-Completion OPT in order to apply for OPT STEM extension

- You may submit your OPT STEM request to our office 90 days prior to the OPT EAD card end date – please hold onto your request to our office until 90 days prior to the OPT EAD end date

- You can file for OPT STEM-Extension using a previous STEM degree in which you did not file for STEM Extension before (given that your current degree is not STEM eligible). If you think you may qualify for this, please follow up directly with a counselor to verify eligibility.
When you are ready to apply for OPT STEM extension, please carefully read the slideshow (powerpoint) on our website for full detailed instructions.
International Travel during OPT

- If your OPT has been approved and you have received your OPT EAD, carefully prepare your documents for travel before leaving the United States, as detailed below.

- Documents you will need for travel internationally:
  - [1] Passport that is valid for at least 6 months into the future
  - [2] Visa which is still valid at the time of reentry to the U.S.
  - [3] I-20 with recent signature by a Designated School Official. During OPT, each travel endorsement on page 2 is valid for 6 months
  - Your current employer info is recommended to be printed on page 2 of the I-20 (You may request a reprint after you have completed OPT reporting)
    - For I-20 reprint, email SEVIS@Central.UH.edu – This email is listed on the OPT Self Report
  - [5] A current job offer letter from your employer. A written statement from your employer that you are returning from a period of approved vacation time may also be helpful, but is not required if the job offer letter is recent
International Travel during OPT

- Check your F-1 visa – if expired, you must renew with the U.S. consulate / embassy – usually in your home country
  - Certain travel under 30 days on expired VISA could be granted to Canada, Mexico, and the adjacent islands except Cuba (unless you’re from Iran, Syria, North Korea, or Sudan).
- If you are planning to travel while pending OPT, please contact an advisor regarding the risks involved. Our office and CBP does not recommend international travel while the OPT application is pending with USCIS, but it is allowed in most circumstances.
OPT Alumni Fee:

In order to process your Post Completion OPT request, an alumni fee of $100 is required to be submitted to our office. Mail a personal check or a money order, payable to “University of Houston”

Do not mail cash.

Download, fill in, and print this “Payment Coupon” and bring it in person or mail it with your OPT Alumni fee to our office.

We recommend that you obtain a tracking number from your courier (USPS, FedEx, UPS, etc.) if you do mail it.

Yes, a friend can pay this fee for you as long as the payment coupon has your information on it. We have these available in our office to fill out.

Download the Payment Coupon from:
https://uh.edu/oisss/forms-and-publications/
**OPT Alumni Fee:**

If you decide to mail a check, use the below address:
University of Houston – Attention: Juanette Davis
International Student and Scholar Services
4465 University Drive, Room N203
Houston, TX 77204

Here’s an example of how to properly fill out a check.
Check your case status – Receipt notice

After filing your application online, USCIS will generate a receipt notice with your case number and downloadable online.

The same receipt number will be on your I-797C notice, mailed to your address as listed on the I-765 application.

Receipt number starts with a 3-letter code followed by numbers. Online applications will begin with IOE…

You will get case status updates by email for when your case is being adjudicated and processed.
Please arrange your documents in the order below prior to submission to the counselor – please email to your OPT advisor as PDF files with student ID number. Do not use Google Drive to share documents.

- Passport copy
- Visa copy (most recent visa)
- I-94 printout - CBP.gov/I-94 or the F-1 approval notice, form I-797A (if you changed visa status in the U.S. – not applicable to most students)
- Previous EAD copy, if you previously had OPT (not applicable to most students)
- Academic Verification form, signed by your college
- F-1 Student Responsibility, fully signed by you, with OPT Start Date, mm/dd/yyyy
OPT

- We appreciate your attention to OPT procedures
- At this time, please submit your complete OPT documents to the counselor
- We will do our best to complete your OPT recommendation request in 5-7 working days
- If you have questions, contact the counselor following completion of the online OPT workshop.
- Thank you

- www.uh.edu/OISSS
- 713-743-5065
- sevis@central.uh.edu

- To track the status of your OPT application, log in to your account online: www.uscis.gov
- USCIS contact telephone: (800) 375-5283