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# **OPT FOR F-1 STUDENTS**



## A QUICK

# OVERVIEW

- Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit for F-1 students to work off-campus in a field directly related to their major area(s) of study
- OPT is offered as Pre-Completion, Post-Completion, and STEM Extension, each requiring a separate application
- Students are granted 12 months of OPT; if STEM eligible they can be approved for an additional 24 months (totaling 36 months)

# ELEGIBILITY

- Full-time enrollment for at least one academic year
- Be in good academic standing
- Employment must be directly related to the student's field of study



Students become eligible for another twelve months of OPT when they enroll in a higher degree level

## **PRE-COMPLETION VS POST-COMPLETION**

### **PRE-COMPLETION**

- Pre-Completion OPT can be used before the student completes their degree. While school is in session (fall and spring semesters) students are eligible to work part-time (maximum of 20 hours per week); during winter and summer break students are eligible to work full-time.
- Part-Time OPT will accrue time at a half rate (i.e. 2 months of part-time Pre-Completion OPT will equal one month of full-time), this will be subtracted from your total 12 months of OPT.
- Twelve (12) months of full-time pre-completion OPT will forfeit post-completion OPT.

### **POST-COMPLETION**

Post-Completion OPT is used once the student has completed their degree.

Students do not need a job in order to apply for Pre or Post Completion OPT.

Once granted by USCIS, unemployment time will begin to accrue from the start date of your OPT.

Students may apply for periods of OPT before completion of studies, save the total twelve-month period to be used after completion of studies, or use a combination.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

- While on OPT students are restricted to 90 cumulative days of unemployment.
- If you accrue 90 days of consecutive unemployment, SEVIS will automatically terminate your SEVIS record, and you will lose your student status effective immediately.
- Once you report your new employer information to the I-Center, your 90 days of unemployment will stop accumulating.
- If you do not have an employer at the time of your initial OPT application, you will need to update the I-Center once you find employment.



\*Please note: The International Center strongly suggests that you report your employer information (if you already have it) at the time of your application. This will avoid any risk of unemployment buildup. You are responsible for tracking your unemployment days!

## **OPT Employment Activities**

- Regular paid employment for at least 20 hours a week
- Multiple short-term employments (gigs) for musicians, artists, etc.
  - It is recommended to keep track of your gigs in written to keep with your files
- Work for hire: Services performed based on a contractual relationship
- Self-employed business owner: must have proper business licenses
- Employment through an agency for at least 20 hours a week
- Volunteers or unpaid interns: may not violate any labor laws. Minimum of 20 hours a week

# WHEN TO APPLY

## **PRE-COMPLETION**

Students may apply for pre-completion OPT as early as 90 days before the proposed start date of the employment.

Students in their first year of F-1 student immigration status should work closely with their I-Center advisors to confirm their eligibility and to determine the employment start date.

# WHEN TO APPLY

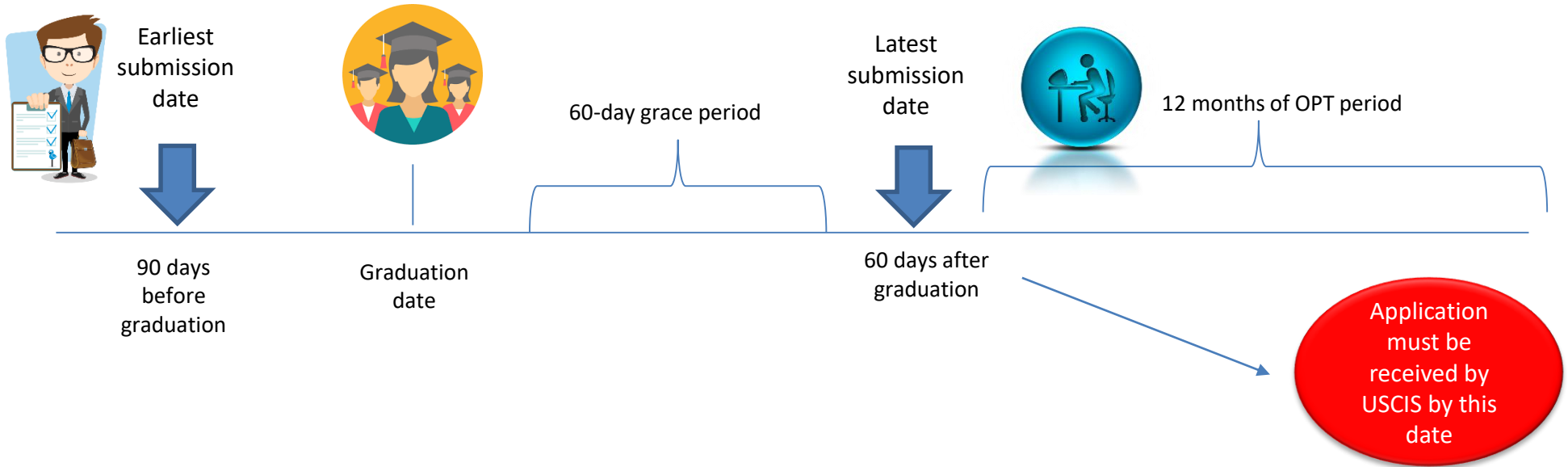
## POST-COMPLETION

- Students completing a program of study can apply for post-completion OPT as early as 90 days before the date of completion and/or graduation.
- For most degree programs, the date of commencement is the program completion date. For students completing their programs at other points in the academic year, the completion date is determined between the student and their academic advisor.
- Departing the U.S. prior to filing your application with USCIS will forfeit your OPT benefit and your remaining grace period.
- Students applying for post-completion OPT must apply before their 60-day grace period ends in order to be granted the OPT benefit. Students traveling during the break must apply for OPT before their departure.



# WHEN TO APPLY

## POST-COMPLETION Application Timeline



**USCIS is taking 2-5 months in processing OPT applications.  
File your OPT application as early as possible!**

# HOW TO APPLY FOR OPT AT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER

All F-1 students who plan to apply for either pre-completion or post-completion OPT must first attend an OPT workshop. See the I-Center OPT Sessions Calendar for dates, times, and to sign up.

After attending a mandatory OPT workshop please follow the instructions below:

**1**

[OPT Cover Page](#)

**2**

[OPT Questionnaire](#)

**3**

[Form I-765](#)

**4**

[Current I-94 Record or Card](#)

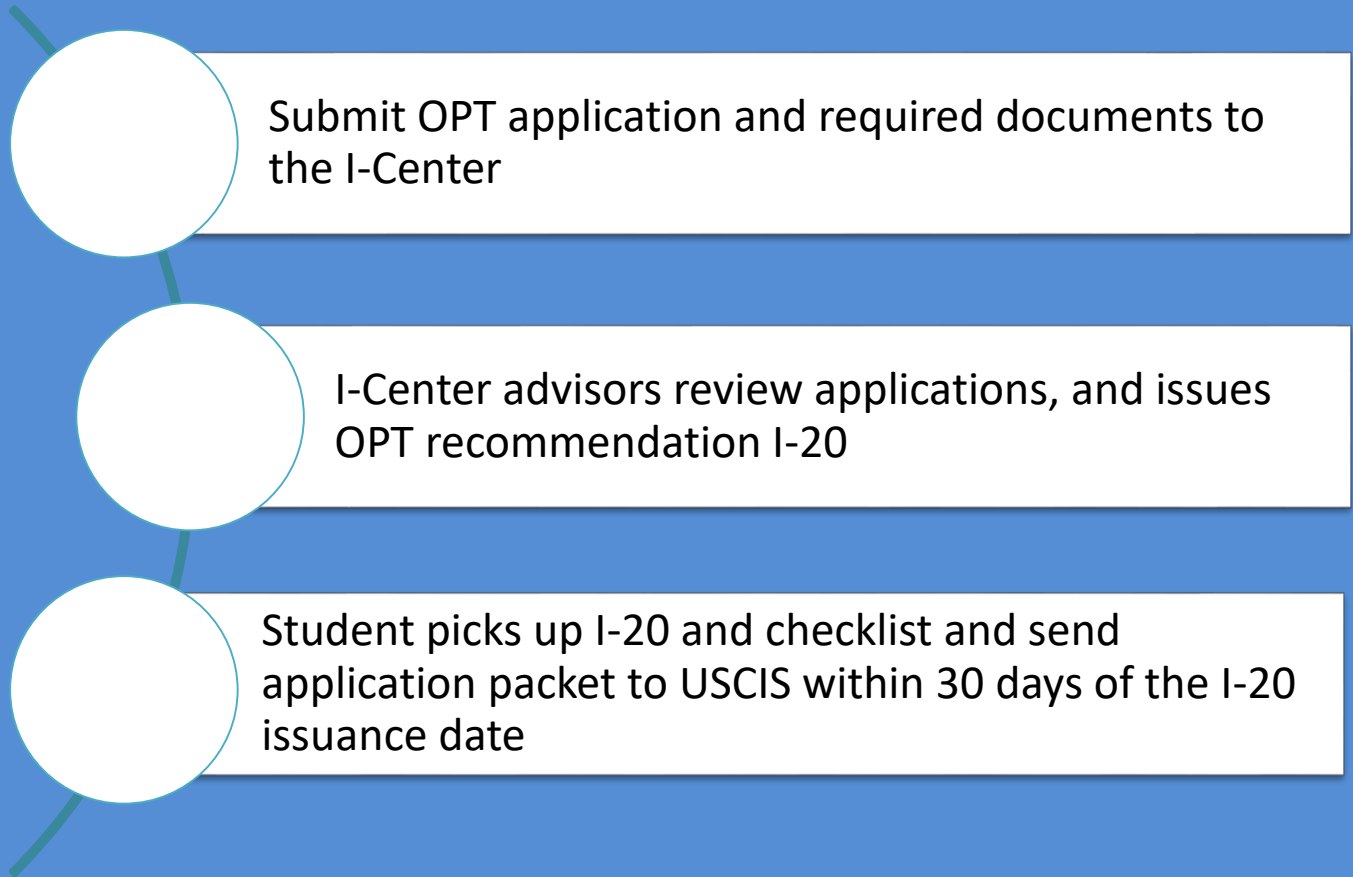
**5**

[Guidelines for Academic Advisors \(Graduate Students only\)](#)

**6**

Employment Offer Letter (if applicable)

# How to Apply



Submit OPT application and required documents to the I-Center

I-Center advisors review applications, and issues OPT recommendation I-20

Student picks up I-20 and checklist and send application packet to USCIS within 30 days of the I-20 issuance date

# **SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS**

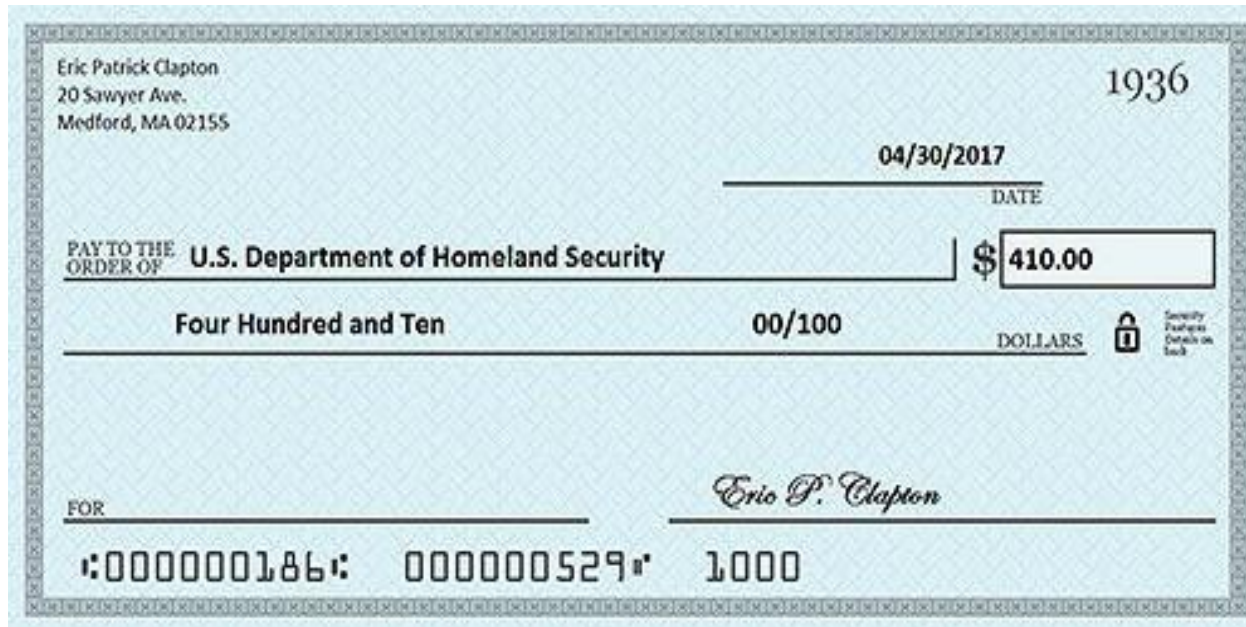
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## **YOU WILL NEED TO PREPARE THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS TO SEND TO USCIS**

- Copy of OPT recommendation Form I-20 signed by your advisor, and YOU.
- Completed and signed Form I-765
- Copies of ALL Form I-20s that have ever been issued to you, by Tufts and/or previous institutions.
- Copy of most recent I-94 record or card; if you have a paper I-94 card please include a copy of the front and back in your application.
- Copy of your most recent F-1 visa stamp
- Copy of your passport identification page
- Passport photos
- \$410 filing fee (preferred method is personal check, money order, or credit card (Form G-1450)
- Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance - USCIS

# SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS (CONT.)

## Sample of Personal Check



# **SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS (CONT.)**

- Two recent photos, according to USCIS specifications
  - Two color photos taken within 30 days of the date the application is filed
  - Write your full name printed in pencil or felt-tip pen on the back, as well as your SEVIS ID number
- Photo Instructions from USCIS: The passport-style photos must be 2" by 2". The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background. Head height should measure 1" to 1 3/8" from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8" to 1 3/8" from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member. Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and Alien Receipt Number on the back of the photo.
- G-1145: Use this form to request a text message and/or email when USCIS accepts your form.



sample photo



Use the OPT Application Checklist to ensure you have included ALL required documents  
USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of the date it was issued and signed by your I-Center advisor. If USCIS does not receive your application by the 30th day, your application will be automatically denied, and there will be no recourse available to you.

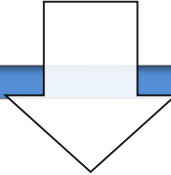
## **OPT Application Process**

- You are advised to apply for OPT well in advance of the start date of your anticipated employment. Job offers are not required in order to apply for OPT, however they are highly recommended.
- In most cases, provided that you have obtained the required recommendation from your I-Center advisor and submitted the required documents to USCIS, OPT is rarely denied by USCIS. However, problems occur when the application guidelines are not followed (e.g. not all documents are submitted, incorrect mailing address, wrong photograph format, etc.).

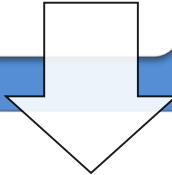
Note: Students who apply for post-completion OPT and then fail to graduate on the date indicated in their application risk violating their student visa status and possibly forfeiting their OPT. Students who do not graduate as planned must contact their I-Center advisor immediately.

# TRAVEL WHILE OPT IS PENDING

Traveling while your OPT is pending must be done with cautious. USCIS may send you request for further documentation which can only be mailed from within the U.S.



Students traveling during this time should always use the I-Center mailing address on the Form I-765. When the EAD card arrives at the I-Center students will be notified immediately and will be asked to make a shipment request using eShip Global.



If you have any questions about travel while OPT is pending, please contact your International Student Advisor.



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# **FURTHER QUESTIONS?**

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**INTERNATIONAL CENTER ADDRESS:  
20 SAWYER AVE, TUFTS INT'L CENTER  
MEDFORD, MA 02155**

**PHONE: 617-627-3458**

**Email: [internationalcenter@tufts.edu](mailto:internationalcenter@tufts.edu)**