



Optional Practical Training (OPT) Tutorial

How to prepare your application materials for submissions to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)

OPT Tutorial Outline

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What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training is a temporary employment authorization by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) that allows F-1 students to gain practical work experience.

- Allows for off-campus work authorization in a student's area of study (Post-Completion OPT: 12 Months).
- Student must be in full-time F-1 status for at least one academic year.
- Available to all majors and students in certain area of study may be eligible for a 24 months extension near the end of the 12 month period.
- You are only eligible for 12 months of full-time OPT for each higher degree level earned.

Are you eligible for OPT?

Post-Completion OPT

Have you been in a valid student status for one academic year?

At PSU, one academic year means enrollment for consecutive:

- ♦ Winter – Summer Quarter
- ♦ Summer – Winter Quarter
- ♦ Spring – Fall Quarter
- ♦ Fall – Spring Quarter

Will you be completing your program of study at PSU in the next 90 days?

The application for OPT cannot be submitted more than 90 days before your program completion date.

Have you engaged in Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?

You must not have engaged in a full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for over 12 months at the same educational level.

You DO NOT need to have a job offer to apply for OPT. The authorization is based on your program completion, not a specific employer.

Types of Qualifying Employment

OPT Employment must be a minimum of 20 hours per week in a job that is related to your degree program. The burden of proof is on the student to demonstrate the relationship. The types of employment allowed during the initial 12-month period of OPT includes:

- ❑ Paid employment
- ❑ Multiple employers
- ❑ Work for hire (commonly referred to as 1099 employment)
- ❑ Self-employed business owner
- ❑ Employment through an agency
- ❑ Unpaid/Volunteer employment

Application Process Overview

1. Prepare your application materials

Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize the required documents.

2. Request an OPT I-20

The OPT I-20 will be ready for pick-up after ¹⁾ you have submitted the OPT request form, ²⁾ Career Services has reviewed your completed application, and ³⁾ you have cleared your balance with Finance Office.

3. Mail your OPT application packet

4. Receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Step 1:

Prepare Your OPT Application Materials

Application Materials

Required documents for OPT application:

- ❑ 2 U.S. Passport Photos (with name and I-94 number written lightly in pencil on back of each) which are less than 30 days old
- ❑ USCIS Fee of **\$410**. Credit Card, Check, or Money Order made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”
- ❑ Original form I-765 (<https://www.uscis.gov/>)
- ❑ Photocopy of OPT I-20 that was issued by DSO within the past 30 days (Page 1-3). Don't forget to sign it!
- ❑ Photocopy of passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp, if applicable
- ❑ Photocopy of paper Form I-94 (both sides) or electronic I-94 record.
- ❑ Photocopy of PSU CPT I-20s, if applicable.
- ❑ Photocopy of previous OPT I-20s and previous EAD card, if applicable.
- ❑ Form G-1145 to confirm receipt and obtain case number in advance of paper notification.

Gather the Required Documentation

Passport Photo Requirements

The photos required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of U.S. style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the [U.S. Department of State](#) website.

- Submit 2 identical color passport photos taken within 30 days of filing your application. The photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched. The passport-style photos must be 2” by 2”. You must remove your glasses and your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member.
- Use pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and I-94 number on the back of the photo. Do not damage the photo surface by pressing hard while writing.

Gather the Required Documentation

Credit Card, Check, or Money Order

- **USCIS Payment Methods:** Check/Money Order or Credit Card Payment for \$410
- **Check/Money Order** should be made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” with SEVIS number in the memo line. Money order can be purchased at banks, post office and some local grocery stores. Make sure a name and address are printed on the check. If the address has changed, that is fine.
 - Do not use “temporary checks” often issued by the bank when opening a new account. These checks have no name or address in the upper left hand corner.
- For Credit Card payment, submit form [G-1450](#), authorize payment amount \$410.

Gather the Required Documentation

Form I-765

Download the I-765 form from the [USCIS website](#).

Important: Use the most current version. It is best to download and complete the form prior to submitting to Career Services. Verify the form again just before mailing the application since USCIS updates it frequently.

Complete form by typing answers into the PDF or print legibly in **black ink**. Answer all questions fully and accurately. State that an item is not applicable with “N/A.” If the answer is none, write “None.”

Completing the I-765 is simple, but some parts can be confusing. The following slides will help you complete those “tricky” questions.

On July 16, 2018, the current version of the I-765 was updated. This tutorial reflects the newest version.

Complete the Form I-765

Top Portion: Leave the entire section “For USCIS Use Only” and “ To be completed by an attorney or Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)-accredited representative” blank.

Part 1. Reason for Applying

Check the “1.a.” box for “Initial permission to accept employment.”

Part 2. Information About You

#1 Name: Your entire family name should be in CAPITAL letters. Use upper and lower case for the first name. Please write your name exactly as it appears on your I-20.

#2-4 Other Names Used: Enter your previous names, including names you have used on official records or documentation. If none, write “N/A.”

Complete the Form I-765

If you are typing the I-765 electronically, be aware that the form does not allow you to write the “/” character into these fields. You will need to hand-write the “N/A” wherever this appears in the instructions.

Part 2. Information About You (Continued)

#5.a. If the mailing address belongs to someone other than yourself, put their full name (First Name Last Name) here. If this is your address, write “N/A”.

#5.b.-5.e. Write a valid mailing address in the U.S. It may be a residence, commercial address, or P.O. Box.

U.S. Mailing Address

This is where you would like the Receipt Notice and the EAD card to be mailed. *This is very important!*

The address should be valid for at least 3-5 months, the length of time it will take to process the application. If you have plans to move during this time, use a reliable friend or family member’s address to receive the EAD (indicate this in #5.a.)

Complete the Form I-765

#6 If you listed a mailing address that is NOT your physical living address, select “No” and complete **#7.a.-7.d.** with your current physical address. If “Yes”, write “N/A” in **#7.a.-7.d.** Physical address should reflect where you actually live.

Other Information

#8 F-1 students do not have an A-number, leave this blank.

#9 F-1 students do not have an USCIS Online Account Number, leave this blank.

#10-11 The responses to these questions should be straightforward. Please complete them accurately.

#12

Check “No” if you have never applied for an EAD.

Check “Yes” if you have previously applied for an EAD. You will need to provide copies of your previous EADs.

Complete the Form I-765

#13.a.-17.b. Social Security Number (SSN)

#13.a.

Check “Yes” if you have been issued an SSN, and enter your SSN with one letter in each box in #13.b.

Check “No” if you do not yet have an SSN.

#14

Check “Yes” if you want a new or replacement SSN card and complete #15-17.b.

Check “No” if you do not want a new or replacement SSN card.

#16.a.-17.b. Parents Names (If applicable): Your father’s and mother’s family name should be in CAPITAL letters. Use upper & lower case for the first name.

You should receive your Social Security card from SSA about **two weeks** after receiving your approved EAD from USCIS.

Complete the Form I-765

#18 Countries of Citizenship: List all as applicable or write “N/A” in **#18.b.** if you do not have multiple citizenships.

#19 Place of Birth: List the name of the country as it was named when you were born, even if its name has changed.

#20 Make sure your Date of Birth is in the correct format of Month – Date – Year.

Information About Your Last Arrival

#21.a. I-94 Number: Use your current I-94 number. This is the number found on the electronic I-94 record or on the top left corner of the paper Form I-94 card.

#21.b-e. Passport Information: Enter the information directly from your passport; use the information of the passport you last used to enter the U.S. (this should match the country on your I-20).

#21.c. Travel Document: Write “N/A” here.

Complete the Form I-765

#22 Date of Last Entry into the U.S.: Your most recent entry date can be found on your passport admission stamp electronic I-94 record, or paper I-94 card.

#23 Place of Arrival into the U.S.: Name of the Port of Entry city from your most recent entry. This information can be found on your passport admission stamp, electronic I-94 record, or paper I-94 card (usually as a code, i.e. “LOS” for Los Angeles.) If you drove across the border, write the name of the city where you entered the U.S.

#24 Immigration Status at Last Entry: Status in which you entered the U.S. If you entered with an I-20 as a student, write “F-1 Student.”

#25 Current Immigration Status: Current status should be “F-1 Student”.

#26 SEVIS ID: Your SEVIS ID appears on the top left side of your I-20 and starts with N00....

Complete the Form I-765

#27 Eligibility Category: Use the following code for post-completion OPT: (c)(3)(B).

#28-31.b. Other Eligibility Categories: Write “N/A” in these fields. N/A means not applicable. These questions are NOT applicable to applying for your 12-Month Post Completion OPT. **#28** is for STEM OPT applicants only.

Part 3. Applicant’s Statement

#1.a. Select 1.a. to indicate that you have read and understood the questions.

#2 Write “N/A” in this field.

#3-6 Provide your information as request.

Complete the Form I-765

Applicant's Declaration and Certification:

Read the entire declaration carefully.

Applicant's Signature

#7.a.-7.b. Hand sign your name and provide the date of the signature.

IMPORTANT!

Your signature will be scanned and must fit within the box. It must NOT touch the box outline. If the signature is too big and crosses a line, your application could be delayed. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than normal.

Complete the Form I-765

Troubleshooting Signature Line:

In some cases, the “Don’t forget to sign!” automatic reminder will not disappear when you print the form.

You should remove the auto-filled “Don’t forget to sign!”

We recommend trying:

- To open the form in the most recent version of Adobe Reader
- To print a blank version of the form’s second page from your web browser.

Complete the Form I-765

Part 4-5. Applicant's Statement

This sections are not applicable to you, since you've completed the form yourself, so write "N/A." This section is for those who use an interpreter or other paid preparer to complete the form.

Part 6. Additional Information

You only need to complete this section if you have:

- Previously had other SEVIS IDs
- Ever been authorized for CPT or OPT

If neither of these apply to you, leave Part 6 blank and you are done with the I-765.

The next slide will contain information on how to complete Part 6.

Complete the Form I-765

Part 6. Additional Information (Only if this is applicable to you)

#1.a.-1.c. Provide your name again as listed in Part 2, 1.a.-1.c.

#2 Leave blank.

#3.a.-3.c. Reference Page 3, Part 2, Item 27

#3.d. **List all previously used SEVIS number** – include from all previous F-1 programs in the U.S. including high school, short stays, community colleges, or previous I-20s at PSU.

#3.d. **If you have had previous CPT and/or OPT**, write “See attached documentation for previous CPT and/or OPT authorizations” and include copies of all previous CPT and OPT I-20s and EAD cards with your application.

If you COMPLETED any part of Page 7, Part 6:

You must add your signature and the date to Page 7. Simply sign and date in the blank space at the bottom of Page 7.

Complete the Form I-765

You are done with the I-765!

Review all the information on the form for accuracy. You must submit **ALL 7 pages** of the I-765.

Make a copy of your completed I-765 application to keep for your records, in case there is a problem with the application.

Gather the Required Documentation

Photocopy of OPT I-20 (All pages):

- Must be received by USCIS within 30 days of being issued by DSO.
- Original must be signed by the student at the bottom of Page 1.
- The requested OPT start and end dates will appear on Page 2.
- **Do not mail the original I-20!**

Gather the Required Documentation

Photocopy of Passport and Visa:

- Photocopy the passport biographic page (with photo and passport expiration date)
- **Passport must be valid!**
- Photocopy the F-1 visa, if applicable.
- **Visa does not need to be valid.**

Gather the Required Documentation

Photocopy of I-94 Information:

The I-94 can be *either*:

- An electronic I-94 record. Visit <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94> to access and print your record. (Select: Already Visiting & Need Proof of Visitor Status?)

OR

- A paper I-94 card stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides, even though the back side may be blank.

Gather the Required Documentation

Photocopy of Previous PSU CPT I-20s:

- Please include all PSU CPT I-20s with your current SEVIS Number. Copies of your original I-20s are best, but if you have lost a document, please request these from DSO when you turn in your **Instruction of OPT Application**.
- Old and new versions of the I-20 are acceptable.
- Copy all 3 pages. Keep the original for records.
- *If you have never used CPT at PSU, you do not need to include previous I-20s.*

Gather the Required Documentation

Photocopy of Previous OPT I-20s and EAD, if applicable:

- If an EAD was received in the past, include a copy of the front and back of the card.
- Can be from OPT approved at a prior institution or different education level.
- Include previous OPT I-20s and I-797c notice of approval as well if available.

Gather the Required Documentation

Form G-1145:

This is an optional form.

- Attached to the top of the OPT application packet. Use this form to request text and email notification(s) regarding your application. Download the form at: <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>

WARNING!

USCIS will rarely contact you by phone regarding the status of your OPT application.

If you receive a phone call from a person claiming to work for USCIS or any other government agency, do not provide your personal information to them. Note the person's name and phone number and contact a PSU Career Services Officer before responding.

Step 2:

Request an OPT I-20

Requesting for OPT I-20

Complete the Instruction for OPT Application
(<http://www.psuca.edu/download-forms/>)

- Complete the Student Information Section
- Choose your OPT Start Date
- Print a copy of page 8 of this tutorial and write your name on the top right hand corner of the page.
- Submit the Instruction for OPT application form, page 8 of the tutorial and the complete OPT application package to Career Services to make an appointment to review your document.

Choose your OPT Start Date

- Your OPT start date is the date that your (proposed) 12 months of work authorization begins.
- Your OPT start date must be within 60-day grace period after the program completion date.
- The requested start & end dates will be noted on Page 2 of the new OPT I-20.
- The end date will usually be 1 year from your start date (*i.e. a July 2 start date will have a July 1 end date.*)

NOTE:

Once USCIS receives the OPT application, it is not possible to change the requested start and end dates.

Requesting for OPT I-20

Meeting with Career Services

- Bring completed OPT Application Package.

Clearing all Balance Due with Finance Office

- All current balance needs to be cleared with Finance Office prior to DSO release of OPT I-20.

Check your OPT I-20 for Accuracy

After receiving your OPT I-20, notify DSO immediately if there are any errors.

PAGE 1

Program End Date

Program completion date will be updated to the program completion date (*I-20 will remain valid through OPT authorization period on Page 2 or the approved EAD card dates*).

School Attestation

Make sure there is a DSO signature. Check the date – USCIS must receive your application within 30 days of this date.

Student Attestation

You should sign & date I-20. Students 18 and over do not need a parent's signature.

Check your OPT I-20 for Accuracy

After receiving your OPT I-20, notify DSO immediately if there are any errors.

PAGE 2

OPT start and end dates requested (OPT start date may be adjusted if USCIS does not complete the processing of your OPT by the requested date. Apply at least 90 days before requested start date, if possible.)

OPT applications must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after the date listed in the Travel Endorsement date. Please see DSO if there are concerns that the application will not arrive on time.

Step 3:

Mailing Your OPT Application Packet

Mailing the OPT Application from California

USCIS Mailing Addresses

*For people who live in California**

FedEx, UPS & Other Express Carrier Mail

USCIS

Attn: AOS

1820 E. Skyharbor, Circle S

Suite 100

Phoenix, AZ 85034

U.S. Postal Service Mail

USCIS

P.O. Box 21281

Phoenix, AZ 85036

If using USPS, choose Express or Priority Mail option and choose Certified Mail.

* If your address on the I-765 is **NOT** in California, speak with the Career Services Officer. The OPT application may need to be mailed to a different address.

Mailing the OPT Application from Outside of California

If using a mailing address in...

Alaska, Arizona, **California**, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Northern Mariana Islands.

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia

Mail your application to...

USPS

USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Express Deliveries

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor,
Circle S, Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

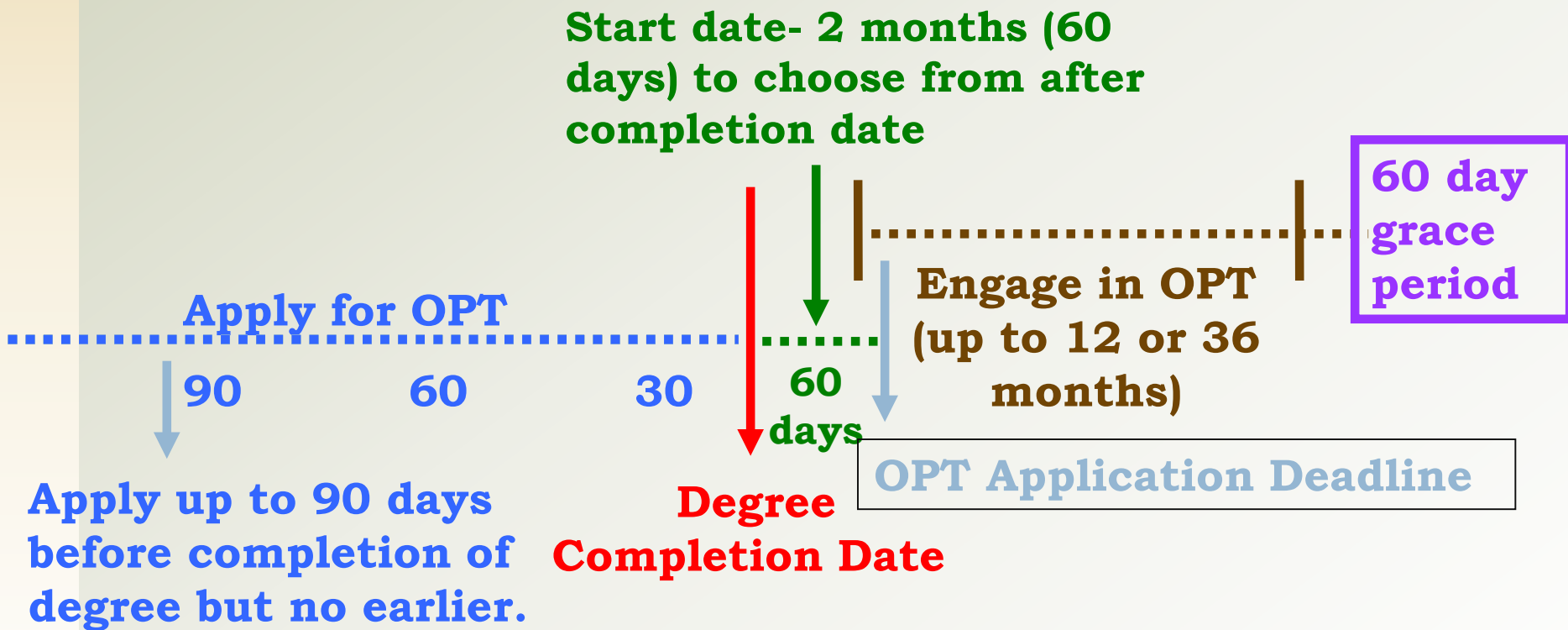
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy.
121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX
75067

The Application Deadline

- USCIS must **receive** your complete OPT application no later than **30 days after the OPT I-20** has been issued.
- The issue date is located next to the advisor's signature on Page 1 of the OPT I-20. Please account for mailing time.
- Additionally, USCIS must receive your application before the end of your 60 days grace period.
- You *should* apply for OPT before you graduate/finish coursework.

Your application must be submitted to USCIS from within the U.S. If you exit the U.S. after your program completion date without applying for OPT, you cannot return and will lose your option for OPT.

Post-Completion OPT Time Frame



Step 4:

Receive Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card

I-797 Notice of Action

You should receive the notice by mail within 2-4 weeks after mailing the OPT application to USCIS.

- **The I-797 is very important.**
If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.
- The I-797 is necessary if you want to:
 - 1) Inquire about the status of your OPT application
 - 2) Travel outside the U.S. when your OPT is pending.

Receipt Number

The case number for the OPT application at USCIS. Check the status of the case on the USCIS website at:

<https://www.uscis.gov/>

Received Date

Date when USCIS begins processing the application. (It may not be the actual date the application was received, but it is when the case was entered into the system.)

Address Information

Verify your name, date of birth, and address on the I-765 receipt notice.

If There is a Problem with Your Application...

If there is a problem with your application, the USCIS will send you a notice by mail called a “**Request for Evidence**” (RFE). An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejected. It simply means that you need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued.

- Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application – usually by about one month.
- In some cases, if too many items are missing from your application, the USCIS will return the entire application to you. If this happens, you must make the corrections and send the application before the end date of your 60-day grace period.

To avoid delays, review your application materials for completeness and sign all forms before mailing them to USCIS.

The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

- Review card to make sure the information is accurate.
- Present your EAD to employers as proof of your legal work authorization in the US.
- The EAD is a required document for entry to the US during OPT.
- **Send a copy of your EAD card to PSU Career Services (careerservices@psuca.edu) and a copy of your Job Offer Letter. Please also complete the [report form](#) on the school website.**

Student's Responsibilities

Your Responsibilities During OPT

- Reporting Requirements
- Employment Requirements
- Travel Documents for Re-Entry
- Applying for an F-1 Visa on OPT

Reporting Requirements

The following must be submitted to PSU Career Services
(careerservices@psuca.edu)

- You **MUST** report any changes to your employment, address, and/or name within 10 days.
- You **MUST** submit a copy of your EAD card upon receipt.
- You **MUST** submit a Career Placement Information Form after receiving employment.
- You **MUST** submit a job offer letter after receiving employment.

SEVP Portal

The Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has its own “SEVP Portal” for students on OPT/STEM. One Day 1 of your approved OPT, you will receive an email from SEVP with instructions on how to create an account. This email will come from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov

- Be aware of scams – SEVP will NEVER ask you for a payment to register to register for the optional SEVP Portal.
- Registration for SEVP Portal is OPTIONAL.
- **The SEVP Portal will NOT replace our student reporting requirement. We ask that ALL PSU students on OPT continue to report to PSU for all STEM OPT reporting requirements.**

Travel Documents for Re-Entry

Documents	<u>Before</u> Completing Program & <u>Before</u> EAD Issuance	<u>After</u> Completing Program & <u>Before</u> EAD Issuance	<u>After</u> Completing Program & <u>After</u> EAD Issuance
Valid passport	✓	✓	✓
Valid F-1 visa stamp (if applicable)	✓	✓	✓
OPT I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signed within 6 months by DSO	✓	✓	✓
Evidence of continued enrollment (e.g. Enrollment Verification)	✓		
Evidence of financial support	Strongly recommended	Strongly recommended	Strongly recommended
OPT receipt: I-797 Notice of Action		✓	
Job offer letter from employer		Strongly recommended	✓
EAD (Employment Authorization Document)			✓

Your admission to the U.S. is always at the discretion of the Customs and Border Protection Officers. To avoid problems, you must have the required documents outlined above.

Important Information on Travel

- Avoid long absences from the U.S. during the OPT period. Time spent outside of the U.S. while unemployed by a U.S. employer counts toward your 90 days of unemployment.
- Attempting to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT can be risky.
- You must not enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1. This may result in the loss of your OPT eligibility.

Travel after Program Completion, But Before OPT Card is Received

- There is a high risk associated with travel and return while your OPT is pending after the program completion date. If there are any problems with your application, you may not be able to respond to USCIS in a timely manner, which could delay processing of your EAD.
- If your OPT application is denied while outside the U.S., you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply.

Applying for an F-1 Visa on OPT

If you are traveling abroad and your F-1 visa has expired, you must obtain a new F-1 visa before returning to the U.S. When going to your visa interview, bring the documents below.

1. Valid passport
2. Valid I-20 with travel endorsement from PSU DSO within the past 6 months
3. EAD card
4. Job offer in field of study
5. Evidence of sufficient funds (e.g. a bank statement, a letter from a sponsor or a job offer letter)
6. Any additional supporting document

Check the [U.S. Department of State website](#) for more information about getting a visa and specific requirements at the local embassy or consulate.

Additional Information

Important Information

- You **MUST** work a minimum of **20 hours per week** in a position related to your field of study.
- You **CANNOT** exceed more than **90 days of unemployment** while on OPT. Days of unemployment prior to your EAD start date do not count towards the 90 days. **It is your responsibility to keep records of your employment and any periods of unemployment.**

Additional Questions?

Please speak with Career Services.

To make an appointment, email:
careerservices@psuca.edu