Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Procedures and Follow-up Issues

This information sheet provides important information to graduating F-1 international students about obtaining and maintaining authorization for Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). You will also be given another information sheet, “Responsibilities and Restrictions of F-1 Visa Holders during Post-Graduation OPT.” It is extremely important that you read both information sheets completely and thoroughly and keep them for your future reference. USCIS will hold you responsible for knowing and complying with the information contained in these information sheets; failure to do so may have serious consequences for your legal status in the U.S.

To apply for OPT employment authorization from USCIS, you must do the following:

1. Schedule an appointment with Lauren Clarke

   - Contact Dean of Students Office 542-2337 or e-mail Lauren Clarke to schedule an appointment. Preferably, this initial meeting should take place not later than the middle of October for December graduation and February for May graduation.

   - It is not required that you have an actual job offer at the time you submit your OPT application – you may (and probably should) apply in anticipation of finding appropriate employment. Furthermore, USCIS processing times can easily reach three months and even longer. Because delays in processing can interfere with your ability to start working and/or travel outside the U.S. after graduation, you should not postpone scheduling an appointment / submitting an application until you’ve confirmed a job. Earlier is better.

   - At the meeting we will discuss your possible employment plans and the relevant USCIS regulations, and review the necessary application forms.

2. Read the handouts. You Must apply no sooner than 90 days before graduation and 60 days after. If the application is received by USCIS too early or late they will send it back.

3. Complete application forms in blue ink printing clearly or fill on line and print

   - Form I-765  [http://www.uscis.gov/i-765](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765)
   - Line 1: Enter your family name in CAPITAL LETTERS.
   - Line 3: Write Address: Student Affairs Office, Amherst College PO Box 5000 Amherst MA 01002-5000 or reliable address in states. Check where to apply if you do not use a MA address.
   - Line 10: Fill in your current I-94 number (located at upper left corner of the white card in your passport or on line at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html)
   - Lines 12 & 13: This information is on the red entry stamp of your most recent I-94 card.
   - Lines 14 & 15: Fill in “Student.”
   - Line 16: complete with (c)(3) (B) for post-completion OPT
   - Signature for “Certification” must sit between the two lines, meaning above the bold line. This signature will be scanned for the EAD card.
4. Schedule appointment to submit application materials with Lauren Clarke
Receive Rules of OPT and sign confirmation form. Ask any questions.

Send to USCIS

- Completed and signed Form I-765 “Application for Employment Authorization”
- All previously issued copies of I-20 forms
- Copy of New signed I-20 issued with OPT request. Must be received no later than 30 days from issuance
- Passport copies (visa page, last entry stamp, Biographical data page with expiration date.
- I-94 card (small white card, usually stapled to a page of your passport)
  or print out [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html)
- Any previously issued EAD cards (if applicable)
- Employment confirmation letter (if applicable)
- Check or money order for $380 made payable to Department of Homeland Security
- 2 U.S. style passport photographs [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photo-examples.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photo-examples.html)
  (lightly print your name on back of photos)

5. Mail your application packet within 25 days maximum of the new I-20 form date.
   The application must be received by USCIS processing within 30 days of the new I-20 date.

For United States Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries, via “certified mail / return receipt requested” to:

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For Express mail and courier deliveries to:

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

Note if you are not using a MA address

Check website

[http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses#Lockbox Addresses](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses#Lockbox Addresses)

- The USCIS Texas “lockbox” service will deposit your check and forward the application to the Vermont Service Center (VSC).

- Your OPT application must be received at the VSC no more than 90 days before and up to 60 days after your “completion of studies” date of May 25, 2014. Applications received at VSC outside this application period will be disqualified by USCIS with no exceptions and no refund of the application fee.

- Make sure to write your return address in the upper left corner of the envelope.

- If you use the United States Postal Service you have several mailing options that can track your post. Inquire at the Post Office for details.
• NOTE: Please be aware that, although on-line “e-filing” of the Form I-765 is available, it is NOT recommended for F-1 students filing for OPT permission. E-filing may look like an attractive option on the surface, but there are many problems and delays that can occur with the on-line system when it is used for OPT applications. The USCIS-Vermont Service Center, which is responsible for the processing of OPT applications for students enrolled in schools in the New England area, has stated that the preferred method of OPT application is the paper-based application packet that is mailed to the VSC.

8. Follow-up processing information:

• Within 2-3 weeks, USCIS will mail to you a “Form I-797C: Notice of Action - Receipt Notice,” confirming that your application has been received and stating that a decision will be made within 90 days (although, in fact, it may take shorter or longer than 90 days). The I-797C notice from USCIS will include the “receipt number” assigned to your case. This is also referred to as your “EAC case number;” a ten-digit number, with the prefix “EAC,” located in the upper left corner of the I-797C. With this number you can track your case through the case status on-line at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do.

• Occasionally, USCIS may send a follow-up “Request for Evidence” notice (usually a blue sheet), asking for some additional documentation. If you receive such a request, please consult with Lauren Clarke about the proper response. Failure to do so will seriously jeopardize your OPT application.

• Application processing time at VSC varies – usually between 1-3 months, but sometimes even longer. The longer processing time may be expected as the semester progresses, since the number of applications submitted tends to increase through the end of the semester.

• If your application is approved, you will be mailed an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), a photo identification card that serves as your proof of permission to engage in OPT employment.

• If you are leaving campus and have not yet received your EAD card, it is imperative that you speak with Lauren Clarke to make the necessary arrangements for the proper handling of your EAD card when it arrives. Because the EAD card is a secure document issued by the U.S. government, it cannot simply be forwarded to a new address as can other standard mail.

• It is your responsibility to keep the office informed of your employer and address as well as any changes in your living address. We will update this in the SEVIS system.