

# OPT Instructions

USC OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

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# What is OPT?

Post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a 12-month work authorization benefit for F-1 students seeking employment experience in the U.S. after completing their academic program.

OIS can issue OPT I-20s to USC students in their final semester who meet OPT eligibility requirements.

The student then uses the OPT I-20 to apply for the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).



# What is OPT?

***CONTINUED***

If USCIS approves the student's OPT application, they will mail the student their EAD, which indicates the approved OPT start and end dates covering a period up to 12-months.

Once the OPT EAD is received and the EAD start date is reached, the student must fulfill certain employment and reporting requirements with OIS and SEVP in order to maintain F-1 status.

OPT is a benefit of F-1 status, not a separate visa status. Therefore, OIS continues to monitor status maintenance for F-1 students on OPT.



# When can students apply for OPT?



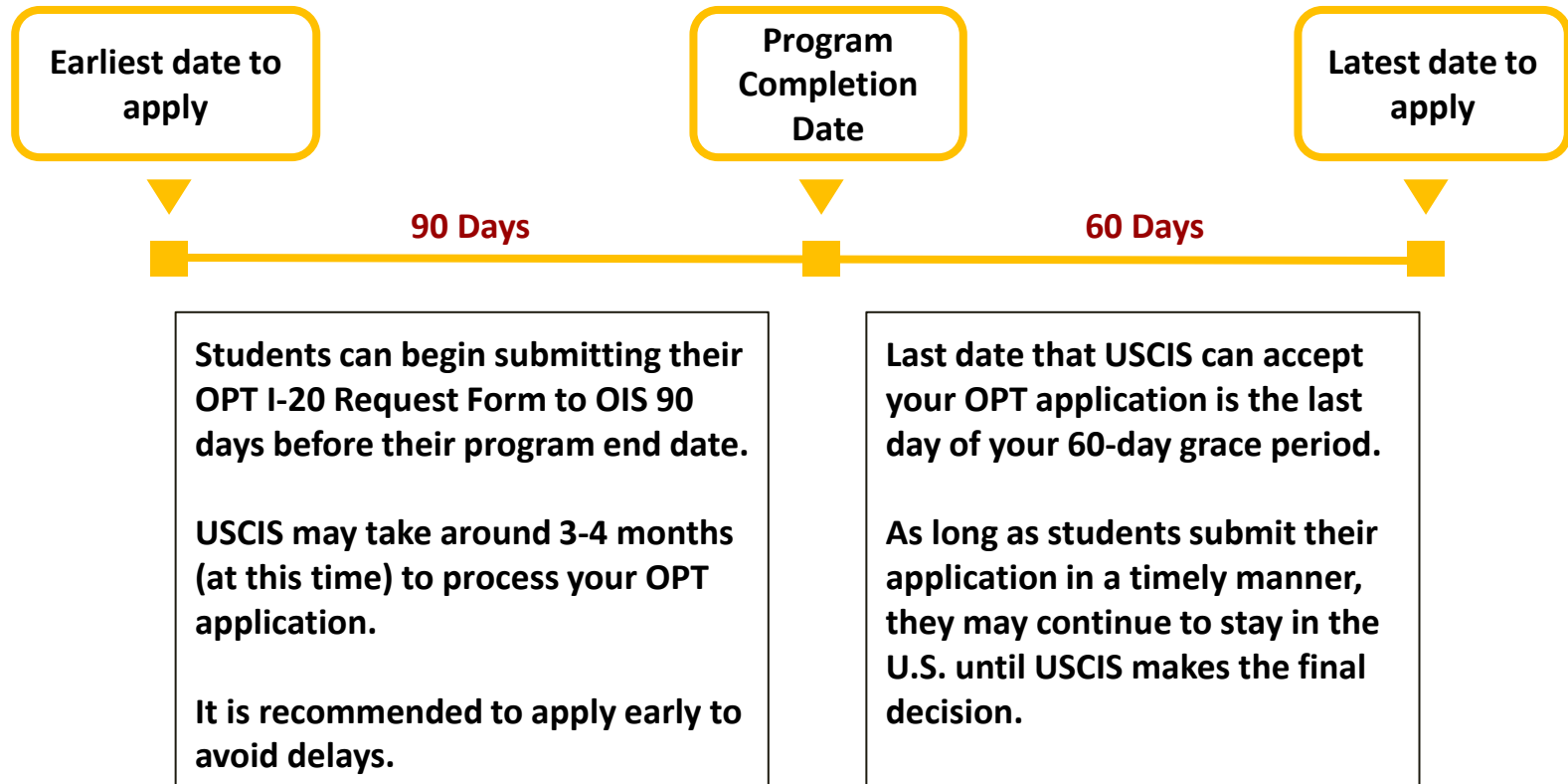
Students can apply for OPT during their final semester at USC by requesting an OPT I-20 from OIS and then submitting their OPT application to USCIS for approval.

USCIS accepts completed OPT applications with an OPT I-20 as early as **90 days prior to their program end date** and as late as **60 days after their program end date**.

In accordance with USCIS submission deadlines, OIS accepts OPT I-20 requests up to **90 days prior to program end date**, and up to **40 days after the program end date**.

After receiving the OPT I-20 from OIS, the student must submit their OPT application to USCIS for adjudication within **30 days** of the *Date Issued* on Page 1 of the OPT I-20.

# OPT Application Timeline





# How long does the entire OPT application process take?

## ▶ Student requests OPT I-20 from OIS

The OIS processing time for complete and correct requests submitted via Trojan International is 10 business days *after* submission date. OIS will email the OPT I-20 to students once the request has been processed.

## ▶ Student submits online Form I-765 and supporting documents to USCIS

After submitting the online Form I-765, supporting documents, and filing fee, students will be issued a receipt number which they can use to track the status of their application in their USCIS account.

## ▶ USCIS adjudicates OPT application and if approved, mails EAD to student

USCIS processing time from the "received" date on the receipt notice is approximately **3 to 4 months**

***Approximately  
3 to 4 months***



# A job or job offer is not required to apply for OPT

However, the student must meet other eligibility requirements...

TIP: The USC Career Center is an excellent resource for learning more about the U.S. hiring process or starting a job search







# To be eligible for OPT, students must have:

- Maintained F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year (i.e., two consecutive academic semesters)
- Applied for graduation with their academic department



## What if a student is worried that they will not graduate on time?

If there is a chance the graduation date might be delayed due to low GPA or other circumstances, the student must receive final confirmation from their academic department (or VGASP advisor, for Viterbi graduate students) *before* filing for OPT

It is extremely difficult to withdraw or cancel an OPT application once it is sent to USCIS for processing



# To be eligible for OPT, students should not have:



- Accrued 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) at current degree level
- Previously completed OPT at the same degree level - OPT can only be approved once per higher degree level

## What if a student has participated in part-time CPT?

Part-time CPT has no impact on OPT eligibility

## Can OPT be retroactively approved for a previously obtained degree?

No, OPT is “use or lose” per higher degree level; it cannot be retroactively applied for on a previously earned degree



# OPT Application Overview

STEP	PROCESS	SLIDE #	REMINDER
1	<b>STUDENT REQUESTS OPT I-20</b> Student submits OPT I-20 Request to OIS via Trojan International  <b>*GRADUATE VITERBI STUDENTS</b> Graduate Viterbi students must submit the Graduate Viterbi OPT I-20 Request to OIS via Trojan International	10-13	OIS processing time for correct requests is 10 business days beginning the day <i>after</i> submission date
2	<b>STUDENT SUBMITS OPT APPLICATION TO USCIS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student receives an email from OIS with their signed OPT I-20</li><li>• Student prints and signs OPT I-20 (in ink) and uses the “Guide to Filing Form I-765 for Post-Completion OPT” to submit application online to USCIS</li></ul>	14	Important reminders to prevent OPT application rejection or denial
3	<b>USCIS ADJUDICATES OPT APPLICATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• USCIS provides receipt number to student upon submission of online Form I-765</li><li>• USCIS adjudicates OPT application within 3 to 4 months of receipt date and mails decision notice to student</li></ul>	15-16	Refer to processing times posted on USCIS website
4	<b>STUDENT RECEIVES EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT (EAD)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If OPT is approved, USCIS mails student OPT EAD</li><li>• Student can begin working based on EAD start date</li><li>• Once employed, student reports their employment to OIS via Trojan International.</li></ul>	17-22	Students must inform OIS that they secured a job by submitting the OPT/Employment Status Update form within 10 days of employment.

# How do students choose their OPT start and end dates?



- ▶ As a part of the OPT I-20 request form, students will need to choose an OPT start date which is the date they would like to begin their OPT. The OPT start date must be within the 60-day grace period. Ultimately, it is up to USCIS to approve the OPT start date. Since OPT can be approved up to 12 months, students can choose an end date that is 12 months after.

Expected Graduation Date	Earliest OPT Start Date	Latest OPT Start Date	OPT End Date
Summer 2023	08/09/2023	10/07/2023	Once you choose a start date, please enter an end date that is 12 months later. That is the last day that you may request to work during OPT.  <b>Example</b> Start Date: 08/09/2023 End Date: 08/08/2024
Fall 2023	12/14/2023	02/11/2024	



# Program End Date and Thesis/Dissertation Students

- ▶ Master and Doctorate thesis/dissertation students may choose the following program end dates:
  - A. Thesis/Dissertation upload date or
  - B. Semester end date of the completion of your thesis/dissertation
    - a. Please consult with your academic department (as it may impact your funding).



# When can students request an OPT I-20 from OIS?

- ▶ Students can request an OPT I-20 from OIS as early as **90 days before** the student's program end date, and **no more than 40 days after** the student's program end date.

Reminder: Students can apply for OPT up to 60 days after their program end date, so as soon as they receive their OPT I-20 from OIS, they must apply for OPT through USCIS's online system.

FINAL SEMESTER	PROGRAM END DATE	EARLIEST OPT I-20 REQUEST SUBMISSION DATE	LATEST OPT I-20 REQUEST SUBMISSION DATE
Summer 2023	August 8, 2023	May 10, 2023	September 18, 2023
Fall 2023	December 13, 2023	September 14, 2023	January 22, 2024



# How To Request an OPT I-20 from OIS

1

## Submit Completed OPT I-20 Request to OIS via Trojan International

- OPT I-20 Request (for non-graduate Viterbi students)
  - Once submitted, the form will automatically be sent to your Academic Advisor for signature.
- OPT I-20 Request for Viterbi Graduate Students
  - Upload the Graduate Verification Form you received from Viterbi VGASP

*Dual majors must obtain both academic advisors' signatures. Electronic signatures are accepted.*

2

## OIS Reviews OPT I-20 Request

- Once academic advisor signs the OPT I-20 Request, it will automatically be routed back to OIS for review. After the academic advisor signed your request for OIS, please allow 10 business days for OIS to process your OPT I-20.
- Viterbi Graduate Students, please allow 10 business days from when you submit your OPT I-20 Request to OIS via Trojan International to review and process your OPT I-20.

3

## OPT I-20 is emailed directly to student

- OIS will email the OPT I-20 to student
- Student must print the OPT I-20 and sign their name (in ink) on page 2



# Next Steps After Receiving OPT I-20 From OIS

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**Prepare supporting documents (including the OPT I-20) and submit Form I-765 online to USCIS**

- ▶ **Refer to the “Guide to Filing Form I-765 for Post-Completion OPT” for required application documents and instructions on how to complete the online Form I-765**

Follow the USCIS instructions and OIS guidance carefully; failure to comply could result in rejection or denial of the OPT application.

- ▶ **USCIS must receive complete and correct OPT applications:**
  - **No more than 30 days after *Date Issued* on Page 1 of the OPT I-20**
  - **No more than 60 days after *Program End Date* on Page 1 of the OPT I-20**

USCIS will deny any applications that are received after either deadline—no exceptions. Students at risk of missing either deadline should contact OIS immediately.





# Next, USCIS reviews and adjudicates the student's OPT application

- After submitting the online Form I-765, supporting documents, and filing fee, students will be issued a receipt number which they can use to track the status of their application

- USCIS processing time is 3-4 months; current processing times are updated on the USCIS website– select “Form I-765” and “Potomac Service Center” from the drop-down menus

- If OPT is approved, USCIS will issue an approval notice and mail the student their Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

- Student can begin work on or after the approved start date printed on the EAD





# Student may only begin working on or after the OPT start date printed on their EAD\*



- ▶ On/after the OPT EAD start date, students will receive a reminder to report their employment to OIS. Please complete the OPT/Employment Status Update form within 10 days of gaining employment.
- ▶ Employers generally require a valid passport, I-94, OPT I-20, OPT EAD, and SSN as proof of work authorization.

\*Working in a paid or unpaid position prior to the OPT EAD start date is a serious violation of the student's F-1 status and will result in termination of the student's SEVIS record by SEVP and/or USCIS



# To maintain F-1 status on OPT, students must:

- ◆ Submit OPT Employment Status Update form via Trojan International in a timely manner.
- ◆ Engage in employment that is directly related to their major or field of study
- ◆ Work at least 20 hours per week
- ◆ Not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment between the dates printed on the EAD
- ◆ Comply with all OPT reporting requirements, as specified by U.S. immigration regulations – **all updates must be reported within 10 days of the change**

See OPT Reporting Requirements for additional guidance



***Failure to comply with these requirements will result in termination of the student's SEVIS record by SEVP and/or USCIS***



# All employment on OPT must be directly related to a student's field of study

USCIS determines if a student's OPT employment is directly related to the student's field of study

**What does "directly related" mean? If a student can answer "Yes" to the questions below, their job is most likely "directly related"**

*Can the student explain to USCIS how their job relates to specific courses and skills they learned at USC?*

*Does the student apply the knowledge they gained from studying in their major to their job on a day-to-day basis?*



# Work Hours and Compensation on OPT

- Students must work at least 20 hours per week to maintain their F1 status while on OPT.
- Employment can be paid or unpaid

# Employment Types Allowed on OPT



- **Standard, full-time employer** - Student works for one employer—at least 20 hours/week.
- **Multiple employers** - Student works for more than one employer—combined total should be at least 20 hours/week.
- **Multiple short-term employers** - Musicians or other performing artists may work for multiple short-term employers (i.e., gigs). Students should maintain a list of all gigs, including the dates and duration of the gigs.
- **Work for hire/contract** - Also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, the term “work for hire” describes a service based on a contractual agreement rather than an employment PREVENTION relationship. This means that the individual is performing a service.
- **Self-employment** - Students may start a business and be self-employed. Students must be able to prove to DHS that they have the proper business licenses and are actively engaged in a business related to their degree program. OIS recommends that self-employed students seek consultation from a lawyer.
- **Employment through an employment/staffing agency or consulting firm** - Students may gain employment through a 3rd party agency.
- **Unpaid/volunteer jobs** - Students may work on a volunteer basis or as unpaid interns, where this does not violate any U.S. labor laws. Labor laws vary by state. Check with the company’s Human Resources office for restrictions.



# What is the 90-day unemployment rule on OPT?

● Students are limited to a **total of 90 days** of unemployment over the 12-month EAD period while on OPT

● Accrual of more than 90 days of unemployment is considered a violation of the F-1 status and the ***student's SEVIS record will be automatically terminated***

## When do students begin accruing unemployment?

07  
Students only start accruing unemployment on/after the approved OPT start date printed on the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

## What happens if a student accrues more than 90 days of unemployment?

SEVP and/or USCIS will terminate SEVIS records of students who accrue more than 90 days of unemployment, which would end the student's F-1 status and may negatively affect future U.S. immigration benefits

## Students who are unemployed should select one of the following solutions before their 90th day of unemployment:

- Begin a new degree program at USC
- Transfer SEVIS record to another school
- Change visa status
- Depart the United States



# Students on OPT must report changes to employment and/or personal contact information



Students must comply with all **OPT Reporting Requirements** to maintain their F-1 status on OPT, including reporting employment to OIS via Trojan International.

All updates must be reported to OIS and in the SEVP Portal **no more than 10 days after the change.**

***Failure to comply with reporting requirements will result in termination of the student's SEVIS record and OPT work authorization by SEVP/USCIS***





# OPT Rejection, Request for Evidence (RFE), or Denial

Students that receive a returned or rejected OPT application, RFE, or denial notice from USCIS must contact OIS for guidance *before* responding or resubmitting their application to USCIS

**Rejected:** If a student's application is rejected, the student will need to request a new OPT I-20 from OIS. USCIS will deny the OPT application if the student re-applies with an expired OPT I-20. USCIS must receive the new application within 30 days of *Date Issued* on Page 1 of the OPT I-20.

**RFE:** If USCIS needs more information to process a student's application, they may issue a Request for Evidence (RFE). The RFE will explain which additional documents are required to process the OPT application and a specific deadline to respond by.

**Denial:** If a student's OPT is denied, USCIS will indicate the reason for the denial on the denial notice. Due to the long OPT application processing time with USCIS, student's whose applications are denied will likely not be eligible to re-apply for OPT.



## Quick Links and Resources

- [Check USCIS Case Processing Times](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Guide to Filing Form I-765](#)
- [How to Calculate Processing Days](#)
- [Maintaining F-1 Status](#)
- [OIS Trojan International](#)
- [OPT Employment Reporting Requirements](#)
- [OPT Employment Status Update form](#)
- [OPT I-20 Request](#)
- [SEVIS Transfer Out Request Form](#)
- [SEVP Portal \(Optional\) Overview](#)
- [Social Security Administration \(SSA\)](#)
- [Travel and Re-entry Requirements While on Pending or Approved OPT](#)
- [USC Career Center](#)
- [USC Graduate Admissions](#)
- [USCIS Case Status Tracker](#)
- [USCIS Change of Address](#)
- [USCIS Form I-765](#)



# Questions?

OIS International Student Advisors are available to answer questions via email, one-on-one advising, or through group advising sessions.

## **OIS Live – Virtual Front Desk and Advising**

*OIS Advisors are available for one-on-one consultation Mondays through Fridays via Zoom. No appointment is necessary. Advising hours and Zoom meeting link are posted on the [OIS website](#).*

## **OIS Zoom Group Advising and Webinars**

*OIS offers group advising sessions covering topics such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) via Zoom. Refer to the [OIS eCalendar](#) for upcoming dates and times.*