Post-Completion
Optional Practical Training
Information for Spring and Summer 2024 Graduates
Office of International Services

What is Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

- Post-Completion OPT is a type of work authorization for students in F-1 status

- Students on OPT can work in the U.S. for up to 12-months after completing their degree program

- The job must be directly related to their major field of study at USC

- OPT requires a formal application to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

- The Office of International Services (OIS) will continue to monitor the SEVIS records of students who are on OPT; therefore, students are expected to maintain their F-1 status while on OPT.
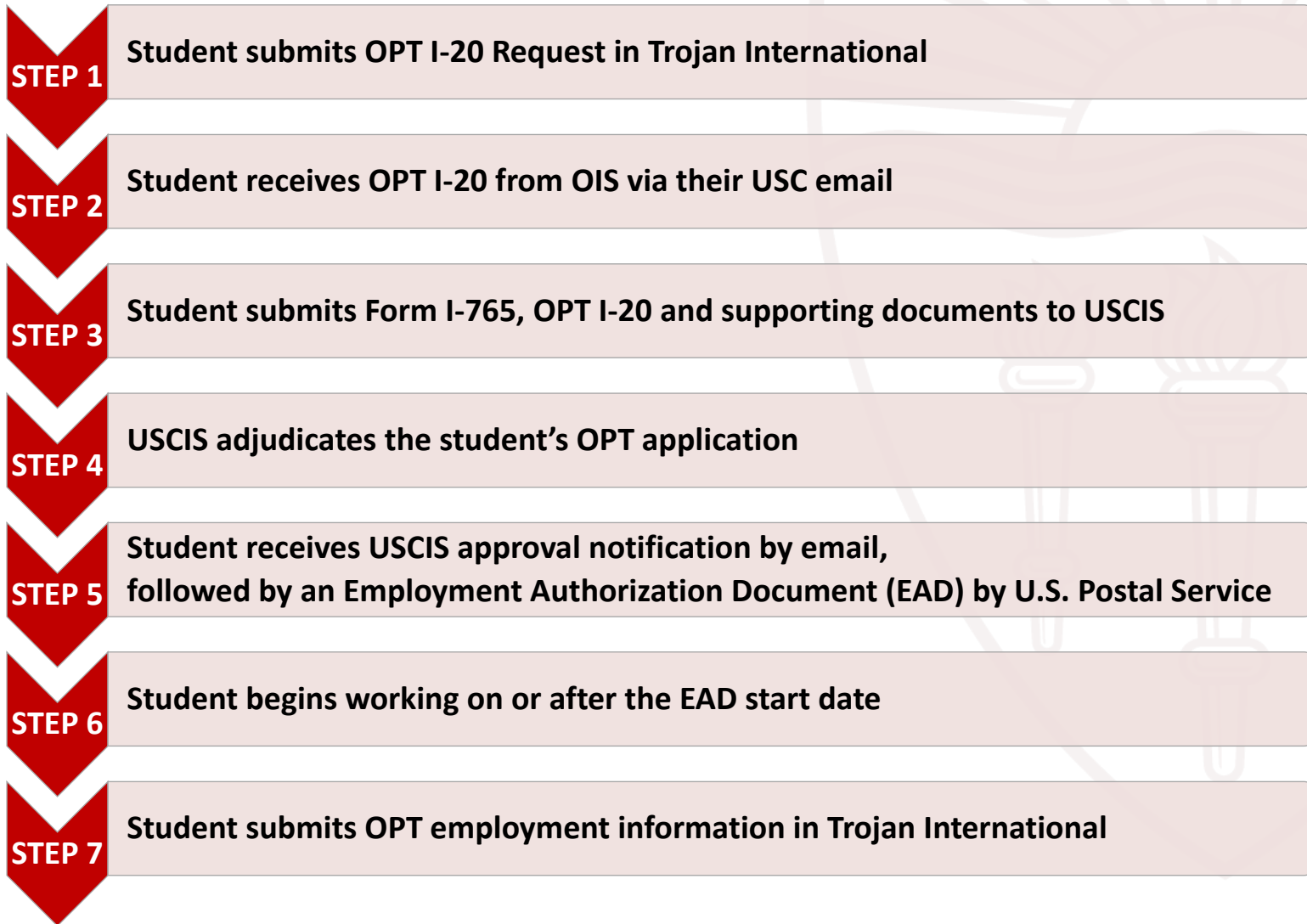
OPT Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for OPT, students:

- Must have <u>maintained F-1 status</u> for a minimum of one academic year (i.e., two consecutive academic semesters).

- Must have confirmed eligibility for graduation with their academic department/unit prior to initiating their OPT application process.

- Must **not** have accrued 12-months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) at their current degree level. Part-time CPT does not impact OPT eligibility.

- Must **not** have previously completed OPT at the same degree level or a higher degree level. OPT can only be used once per degree level.

- Must have submitted their OPT application to USCIS as early as **90 days prior to their Program End Date** and no later than **60 days after their Program End Date**. USCIS will not accept applications received 60 days or more beyond the Program End Date. In addition to these filing dates, there are other important dates students must consider when applying for OPT, which will be addressed in later slides.

- Do not need a job or have a job offer in order to apply for OPT

Post-Completion OPT Application Process Overview

Must be completed in this order

STEP 1 — Student submits OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International

STEP 2 — Student receives OPT I-20 from OIS via their USC email

STEP 3 — Student submits Form I-765, OPT I-20 and supporting documents to USCIS

STEP 4 — USCIS adjudicates the student's OPT application

STEP 5 — Student receives USCIS approval notification by email, followed by an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by U.S. Postal Service

STEP 6 — Student begins working on or after the EAD start date

STEP 7 — Student submits OPT employment information in Trojan International

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STEP 1: Student Submits OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International

When to Apply

Students can request their OPT I-20 from OIS as early as **90 days prior to their Program End Date**. The Program End Date is printed on the Form I-20. This date must align with student's actual graduation date.

Although USCIS accepts applications up until 60 days after the Program End Date, the latest students can request an OPT I-20 from OIS is **45 days after they complete their degree program.** This will ensure OIS has ample time to review the OPT I-20 Request, have student correct any issues if needed, recommend the OPT in SEVIS, email the OPT I-20 to student and provide enough time for student to submit their application to USCIS by the 60th day.

STEP 1: Student Submits OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International (con't)

Students should refer to the table below to determine their appropriate OPT I-20 Request window based on their Program End Date*.

Final Semester of Academic Program	Program End Date	Earliest Date Student Can Submit OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International (90 days prior to Program End Date)	Latest Date Student Can Submit OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International (45 days after Program End Date)
Fall 2023	12/13/2023	09/14/2023	01/27/2024
Spring 2024	05/10/2024	02/10/2024	06/24/2024
Summer 2024	08/06/2024	05/08/2024	09/20/2024

*Master's or doctorate thesis students can use the university's standard semester end date or their thesis upload date for OPT filing purposes. Be sure to adjust the Program End Date to your actual upload date to calculate your OPT I-20 Request window accordingly. OIS will update the Program End Date (if needed) when we process your OPT I-20 Request.

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STEP 1: Student Submits OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International (con't)

Selecting an OPT Start Date*

When completing the OPT I-20 Request, student will be asked to enter a requested OPT start date.

- Students can request a start date that is at least 1-day after their Program End Date and no more than 60-days after their Program End Date.

- Please note, the requested OPT start date does not necessarily end up being the actual USCIS approved OPT start date. The OPT application must be adjudicated by USCIS and often times the approved dates can differ. Because of this reason, students must wait until they receive their EAD in the mail to verify their actual approved OPT start date.

Program End Date	Earliest Requested OPT Start Date	Latest Requested OPT Start Date
12/13/2023	12/14/2023	02/11/2024
05/10/2024	05/11/2024	07/09/2024
08/06/2024	08/07/2024	10/05/2024

*Thesis students using their upload date for OPT filing purposes will need to adjust the requested OPT start date accordingly

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STEP 1: Student Submits OPT I-20 Request in Trojan International (con't)

How to Request an OPT I-20 from OIS

Students can request an OPT I-20 from OIS through Trojan International.

- OPT I-20 Request (for all undergraduate students and all graduate students, except Viterbi graduate students)
- OPT I-20 Request for Viterbi Graduate Students (for Viterbi graduate students only)

OPT I-20 Request Processing Time: 10-Business Days.

- The 10-business days does not begin until the Academic Advisor completes their portion of the OPT I-20 Request

- Incomplete or incorrect OPT I-20 Requests will be returned to students for review and correction, and will require resubmission to OIS for processing. The 10-business day processing time will restart upon resubmission.

USCIS processing time is approximately 3-4 months so we recommend students request their OPT I-20 from OIS as soon as the OPT application period opens to avoid any delays with their OPT application decision from USCIS.

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STEP 2: Student Receives OPT I-20 from OIS via their USC Email

- OIS advisor will review student's academic and immigration records to determine if student has met all OPT eligibility requirements.
    - If the OPT I-20 Request requires additional information, the OIS advisor will send instructions to the student's USC email account.

- If the OPT I-20 Request is complete and no further clarification is needed, the OIS advisor will issue an OPT I-20 and email it to the student's USC email account within 10-business days from when it was submitted.

- Once student receives their OPT I-20 from OIS, they must print, sign and date it.
    - USCIS does not allow students to sign the I-20 electronically.

- SEVP, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Department of State (DoS) have confirmed they accept I-20s electronically signed by DSOs. Please note only DSOs may electronically sign I-20s; students may not electronically sign any documents submitted to USCIS.

- They must quickly move on to STEP 3 of the OPT Application Process as their OPT I-20 is valid for only 30 days from the issue date.

Step 3: Student Submits Form I-765, OPT I-20 and Supporting Documents to USCIS

Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization

After student receives their OPT I-20 from OIS, student must file Form I-765 online via myUSCIS—student must create an account with USCIS if they do not have one.

Once their myUSCIS account has been created, student can complete the Form I-765 online. They will be prompted to upload a copy of their signed OPT I-20 along with supporting documents and pay the non-refundable Form I-765 application fee with a credit card.

IMPORTANT DATES TO CONSIDER*

USCIS must receive student's OPT application:
- No more than 30 days after the "Date Issued" on Page 1 of the OPT I-20
  - If student misses this 30-day deadline, they must submit the OPT I-20 Reprint (Missed 30 Days/Date Change) Request in Trojan International BEFORE submitting another Form I-765 to USCIS.
- No more than 60 days after the "Program End Date" on Page 1 of the OPT I-20
- USCIS will deny any Form I-765s that are received after either deadline.

How to complete the Form I-765

Please refer to OIS's "Guide to Filing Form I-765 for Post-Completion OPT." This guide provides detailed explanation of required documents and instructions specifically for the Form I-765. Please review this document carefully to avoid any erroneous mistakes that can cause issues (i.e. rejection, request for evidence, or denial) with your application.

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STEP 4: USCIS Adjudicates the Student's OPT Application

USCIS Receipt Notice and Processing Times

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

- The current USCIS processing time is an estimated 3-4 months

- Although a job is not required to apply for OPT, students should begin applying and interviewing for jobs so they can begin working once their OPT is approved (must wait until the OPT EAD start date.)

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STEP 4: USCIS Adjudicates the Student's OPT Application (con't)

Receiving a Rejection, Request for Evidence, or Denial
USCIS may send students a Rejection, a Request for Evidence (RFE), or a Denial. If you receive one of these responses, you must contact OIS right away to receive instructions on how to proceed.

Rejection
If an application is rejected, USCIS will indicate this on the Notice of Rejection. Students will need to request a new OPT I-20 from OIS after speaking with an advisor in OIS Live. Students will then submit a new Form I-765 along with supporting documents to USCIS within 30 days of the new OPT I-20, if they are still within 60-days from their Program End Date.

Request for Evidence (RFE)
Students may receive an RFE if USCIS needs more information before their application can be processed. The RFE will explain which additional documents are required and a specific deadline to respond by.

Denial
If a student receives a Denial Notice for their OPT application, USCIS will indicate the reason for denial. Due to the current processing times with USCIS, some students who are denied may not be eligible to reapply if they are no longer within 60-days from their Program End Date.

STEP 5: Student Receives USCIS Approval Notification by Email, Followed by an Employment Authorization Document by U.S. Postal Service

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

If the student's OPT application is approved, USCIS will issue an approval notice and mail the student an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Students must wait until they receive their EAD in the mail to confirm their approved OPT start and end dates.

The start date of OPT can be found here

STEP 6: Student Begins Working on or After the EAD Start Date

How to maintain F-1 status

| Engage in employment that is directly related to your major | Work at least 20 hours per week (paid or unpaid).

You can have multiple employers. | Do not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment during your approved OPT period | While on OPT, travel signatures are valid for 6-months from when it was signed. |

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

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STEP 6: Student Begins Working on or After the EAD Start Date (con't)

Direct Relation to Major

Any employment on OPT must be directly related to the student's major. USCIS determines whether a job is related. Therefore, students should be able to:

- Provide an explanation to USCIS if asked how their job is related to their major at USC

- On a day-to-day basis, apply the knowledge they gained from their academic program to their job

Students can use the following template as a guide if needed in the future:

I work [insert full-time or part-time] as a [insert job title] for [insert employer name]. My duties include [insert list of job duties]. At this job, I use [insert list of relevant skills/knowledge from your coursework], which directly relates to my USC [insert degree level] in [insert field of study].

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# STEP 6: Student Begins Working on or After the EAD Start Date (con't)

Types of Employment Permitted While 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 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.*

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STEP 7: Student Submits OPT Employment Information in Trojan International

Reporting Requirements while on OPT

- Student must submit an OPT Employment Update via Trojan International within 10 days of any change in employment (i.e. layoff, quit, changing employers, etc.)

- Student must submit a SEVIS U.S. Address and Contact Information Update via Trojan International within 10 days of any change in U.S. address

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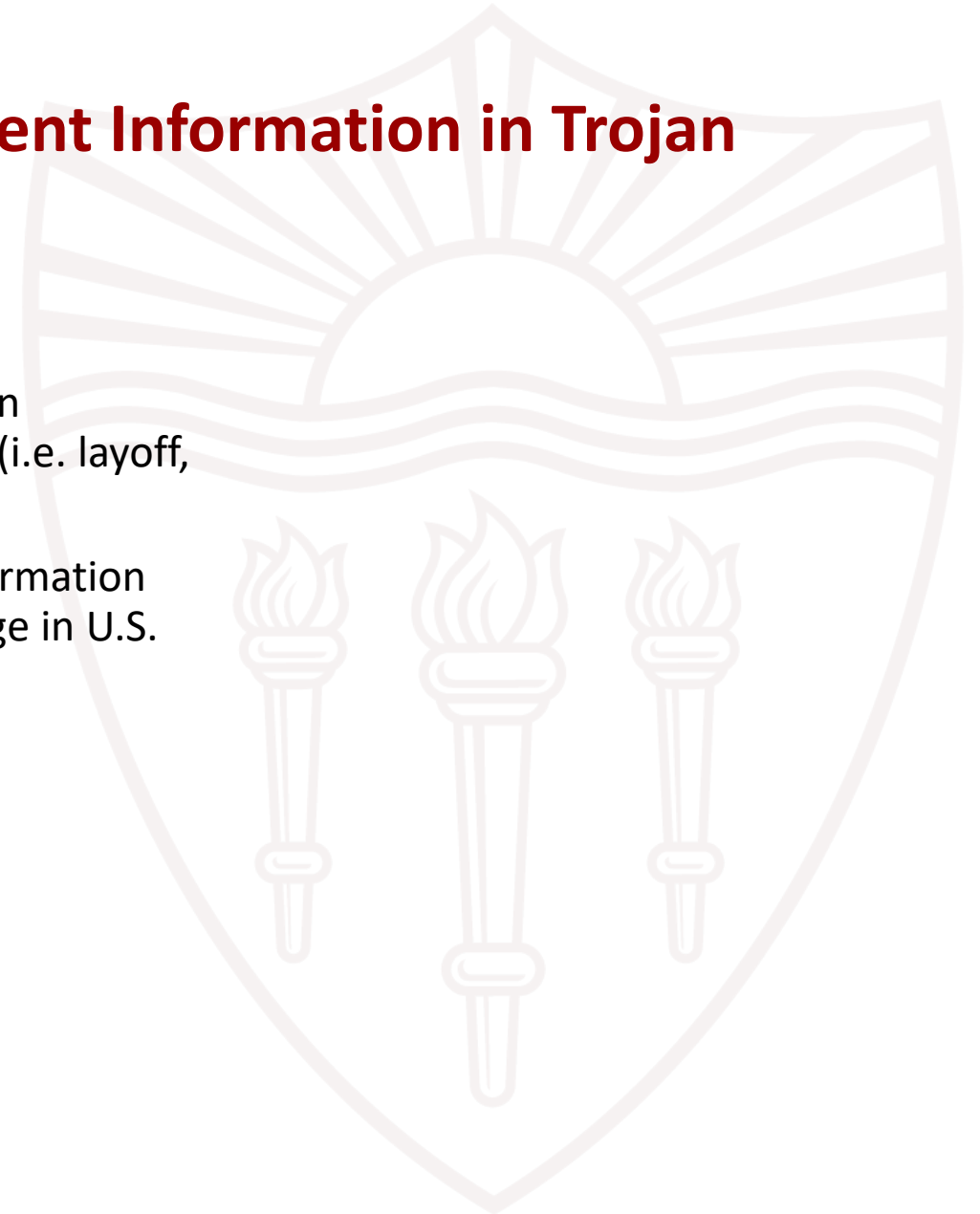
Options After OPT

60-Day Grace Period

Students have 60-days from the OPT EAD end date to do one of the following:

- Begin a new degree program at USC
- Request a SEVIS Transfer to begin a new degree program at another US institution
- Depart the U.S., or
- Change of Status to another U.S. visa type

STEM Majors

Students who graduated from a STEM major that is included on the Department of Homeland Security STEM Designated Degree Program List and wish to apply for the 24-Month STEM OPT Extension should refer to the STEM OPT Extension section of the OIS website for more information. Students must apply for STEM OPT Extension before their Post-Completion OPT ends.

Quick Links and Resources

- Check USCIS Case Processing Times

- Frequently Asked Questions

- Guide to Filing Form I-765

- How to Calculate Processing Days

- OIS Trojan International

- OPT Employment Reporting Requirements

- OPT Employment Update form

- OPT I-20 Request

- OPT I-20 Request for Viterbi Graduate Students

- 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

- SEVIS Transfer Out Request

- SEVIS U.S. Address and Contact Information Update

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Questions?

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

OIS Live – Virtual Advising

OIS advisors are available for one-on-one consultations Mondays through Fridays via Zoom. No appointment is necessary. Advising hours and the Zoom meeting link are posted on the OIS website.

OIS Virtual Group Advising Sessions

OIS offers group advising sessions covering topics such as OPT via Zoom. Refer to the OIS eCalendar for upcoming dates and times.

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