

**International Education Services**

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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**Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application**

Please review the following information carefully. Fill out all the required forms requesting information before scheduling an appointment with IES:

 IES OPT information sheet

 Academic advisor recommendation form (**Not required for STEM extension or Pre-completion OPT**)

 I-765 form. Form is available from U.S.C.I.S. website at the link below. Please type if your writing is not extremely neat. <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>

Checklist of documents **required** to process your application**:** (**To be mailed out to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox**)

 Form I-765 (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf)

 Copy of new I-20 **issued by international advisor** recommending OPT

 Check/money order for **$380 only** made out to the **Department of Homeland Security**. (Do not abbreviate)

 2 passport size photographs (no older than 1 month, not used on previous immigration documents)

 Copy of your I-94 (front and back).

 Copy of your passport biography page (include pages of passport extensions showing passport validity).

 Copy of your F-1 visa (even if expired).

 Copies of **ALL** previous I-20’s (including previous schools).

 **IF applicable -** Any previous OPT or EAD cards that have been issued to you under F-1 status (copy front and back).

 **If applying for STEM extension**, you must include copy of official transcript or diploma showing acquired STEM degree.

 **OPTIONAL** form G-1145, for email notification of updates to your application
http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf

* Bring the documents to one of the IES advisors for review (*make an appointment*)
* A new I-20 will be issued that includes recommendation for OPT on the 3rd page. A copy of this new I-20 must be sent in with your application.
* If living out of state you can email or fax (410-455-1130) the documents for review.
* Keep copies for your own records.

The completed application should then be mailed to the appropriate address:

**For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):** **For Express mail and courier**:
USCIS USCIS
PO Box 660867 Attn: AOS
Dallas, TX 75266 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
 Suite 400
 Lewisville, TX 75067

**Definition of OPT**

OPT is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in your field of study at an off-campus location after (and occasionally before) you complete your studies. OPT is authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and requires support from the IES office via a new I-20 with an OPT recommendation on the third page. OPT is NOT required for all F-1 students, but is a benefit of F-1 status available to graduating students if you would like to pursue it.

While on OPT, you will still be in F-1 immigration status, and UMBC will still maintain your F-1 immigration record/SEVIS record.

**Eligibility Requirements**

1. Have been in full time student status for at least one academic year, most recently.

 **NOTE-** You can be enrolled less than full-time in your last semester, but must have been enrolled full-time in the two semesters prior to your last semester.

2. Hold valid F-1 status

3. **You only have one year of OPT per degree-level** (Bachelors, Masters, PhD), so you cannot have done OPT at the same degree level previously. If you have received a previous degree in the US and worked on OPT afterwards, your new degree from UMBC MUST be a higher degree.

Please note: You do NOT need to have a job offer in order to apply.

**Timeline to Apply**

* This timeline is based on your I-20 end date, which should reflect your graduation date (or date of completing all required coursework, for Graduate students). Your I-20 end date can be adjusted if necessary.
* The **earliest** you can apply is 3 months before your I-20 end date.
* The **latest** you can apply is 2 months after your I-20 end date (your application must be received by USCIS before this deadline).
* OPT applications can take up to 3 months to be approved, so plan ahead! You should apply at least 3 months before the **start date** you choose to make sure your OPT is approved in time.

Please read on to learn more about selecting a start date.

**Choosing a Start Date**

* The **Start Date** is the day your 1 year of OPT begins. You have some flexibility so that you can choose a date that best suits your situation
* The **earliest** date you can choose is the day after your I-20 end date
* The **latest** date you can choose is 2 months after your I-20 end date

Tips to choosing a start date –

* Choose a date that gives enough time for your OPT application to be approved. The IES office can give you the best idea of current average processing times, though it can take up to 3 months.
* If you have been aggressively applying for jobs, you might want to choose an earlier start date, or if you have not begun your job search, you might want to choose a later start date.
* If you plan to be sponsored for an H-1b visa, plan your OPT dates to complement a possible H-1b application. See below for more information on H-1b timelines.

**Starting OPT before Graduation – Graduate students only**

Graduate students have some flexibility in applying for OPT before completing their degree program at UMBC:

1. **Altering the I-20 end date:** Graduate students who have finished their academic coursework, but not their required final project, research or thesis, are eligible to end their I-20 academic program and apply for OPT while completing their research. This is not required, but is an option for students that want to start working before completing their research.
2. **Pre-Completion OPT**: Graduate students who have completed all academic coursework and have their research pending can choose to apply for Pre-Completion OPT, which means your OPT start date is before your I-20 end date. This is rarely recommended for the following reasons:
	1. You need to apply again for Post-completion OPT, including the application fee. Deadlines are often difficult as well.
	2. You can often use CPT (Curricular Practical Training) to accomplish the same goals and avoid applying for OPT twice, which also gives you more time to work on OPT.

Please speak to an International Student Adviser in the IES office to carefully consider your options based on your particular situation. Please note, to apply for the 17 month OPT STEM Extension, you will need to have formally graduated and received your degree before the end of your first year of OPT.

**Applying for OPT**

To apply for OPT, please prepare the documents listed on the checklist in the first page of this application. Once you have the required forms completed and the required documents gathered, please make an appointment with an International Student Adviser to review your documents and receive the required “OPT Recommendation” I-20. You will then be able to mail package of documents to USCIS for review, using the addresses noted on the first page of this application.

**Please note**, the I-20 you receive from the IES office is only valid **to apply for OPT** for 30 days! If you wait until after 30 days to apply, please request a new I-20. **Your OPT application will be denied if the I-20 is more than 30 days old!**

After you mail your application, you will receive three documents from USCIS:

1. **A Receipt** – the receipt contains your unique case number, and means that no information was missing from your application. The case number can be used to track the application online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov). If anything was missing, you will receive an **RFE** (Request for Further Evidence), or the package returned to you. The receipt usually arrives in 2-3 weeks after the time of application.
2. **An Approval Notice** – this form notifies you that your OPT application has been approved. It will reach you after the required time to process your application, which can vary between 1-3 months. Please check with the IES office to see what the typical processing time is when you apply.
3. **The EAD Card –** The EAD (Employment Authorization Document) usually arrives within one week of the Approval Notice. This card actually gives you work authorization in the US, and will have your picture and the date you chose as your start date indicated. **You cannot begin working until you receive this card, and you have reached your OPT start date as noted on the card.** The EAD card will be required by your new employer to prove your work authorization.

**Responsibilities while on OPT**

**Employment:**

* You must be working while on OPT. You have up to 90 days of unemployment throughout the year of OPT.
* Employment must be related to your field of study at UMBC. If you work more than one job at once, all jobs must be related to your field.
* Employment can be part-time or full-time (minimum 20 hours per week).
* Employment can be paid or unpaid.
* You can switch employers as often as you like, but must notify the IES office of any changes in employment.
* The IES office will check in after about 6 months of your OPT time to confirm that your immigration record is accurate, via email. Please be sure to respond to this email.

**Reporting Changes of Information to IES:** While you are on OPT, you will still be in F-1 immigration status and UMBC will still be responsible for maintaining your immigration record. So that your record is kept current, please notify us of changes to any of the following as soon as possible:

* Change in Address
* First employment
* Changes to employer
* To notify us of changes in employer, please email the following information:
	+ E**mployer name and address**
	+ **Position title**
	+ **Start date**
	+ **Best mailing address to mail the new I-20**

A formal job offer letter is not required. **Your I-20 will have the new employer information noted on it, and will be sent to you at the best mailing address.**

* Email us at **ies@umbc.edu**

**Travelling Internationally while on OPT:**

* **BEFORE** your OPT start date, you can travel abroad with the usual travel documents – your I-20 (with OPT dates on third page and travel signature that is less than one year old); valid visa; valid passport. You can travel abroad while your OPT application is pending.
* **AFTER** your OPT start date, additional documents are required, and you must have a job (even if it is a volunteer position). Please prepare to present the following:
1. Your valid passport with a **current** F-1 visa.
2. I-20, signed for travel **within the last six months**, and with your current position listed on the third page.
3. Your job offer letter or proof of employment.
4. Valid EAD card.
* **Renewing your visa**: You can renew your visa while on OPT, but please consult an International Adviser in the IES office before leaving the US for advice on how to approach the visa interview. **Your visa cannot be renewed while you have a pending OPT application – only after your OPT start date!**

**Health Insurance:**

Please recall that your UMBC student Health Insurance will expire after your last semester at UMBC. You can choose your own health insurance plan, use one offered by your employer, or choose to continue your enrollment in the UMBC plan while you are on OPT. To continue your UMBC health insurance, please contact the University Health Services office directly at uhs@umbc.edu

**Continuing Education while on OPT:**

Students MAY NOT begin a new degree program while on OPT. Coursework outside of a degree program is acceptable

**After OPT**

As your OPT is nearing its end, you need to be aware of your options and plan accordingly. These are some of the most common next steps for students completing OPT:

1. **OPT 17-month STEM Extension**

The “STEM Extension” allows F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in a “STEM” field (science, technology, engineering or mathematics), to apply for a **one-time** 17-month extension to follow one of their regular 12 month OPT periods. You **cannot** apply for 29 months of OPT all at once**.**

The STEM Extension requires that students be employed by an employer that is “E-verified” – enrolled in the US government E-verify program, maintained by Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration. You can ask your employer if they are E-verified, or check online here: <http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/about-program/e-verify-employers-search-tool>

If you are employed by an E-verify employer and wish to apply, you will need to complete a new OPT application, following the same guidelines as regular OPT. including a few extra documents noted on the checklist in this application. You can apply up to 3 months before your first year of OPT expires. At the latest, your STEM extension application must be received by USCIS before your first year of OPT expires. \*Students with a pending STEM extension application can continue working after their first year of OPT has expired, even if the new EAD card for the STEM extension has not yet arrived.

1. **H-1b Cap Gap**

Students whose employer has filed an H-1b status application for them may be eligible to use the H-1b Cap Gap to continue working between their OPT end date and their H-1b start date.

In general, all H-1b status applications can be submitted by the employer after April 1, and despite the date of approval, all H-1b work authorizations start October 1 of the same year. If your OPT expires before October 1, you may be eligible for the Cap Gap to extend your OPT work authorization until Oct 1. You MUST have a pending H-1b application before your OPT expires to qualify, and your OPT end date must be after April 1 and before Oct 1. If this is your case, please contact the IES office to request an I-20 with the Cap Gap notation.

1. **Transfer to Another School, Start a New Degree Program**

If you will continue your studies at another school after OPT, you MUST transfer your immigration record to the new school within 60 days of your OPT end date. To transfer your record, contact the IES office with a copy of your admission letter to the new school.

1. **Leave the US**

After your OPT end date, if you will not use the previous options, you have 60 days before you need to leave the US. Please note, you do not have work authorization during that time.

**Instructions for filling out form I-765**

Check first box “permission to accept employment” if applying for pre or post completion OPT or “renewal” if you are applying for a 17 month STEM extension.

􀂉 **#3 Return Address:** Use your own address. This must be an address at which you will receive mail for at least 3 ½ months from the time USCIS receives your documents.

\***Alternatively**, if you think you are going to move at the time you are graduating and are unsure whether you will still be residing at your current location, you can use our office address as the return address. The address is:

**UMBC,** **1000 Hilltop Cr, Admin224, Baltimore MD, 21250.**We will contact you when the documents arrive and then mail the documents to you as appropriate.

􀂉 **#10 Alien Registration Number:** in most cases you will use your I-94 number found on the I-94 card that you received when you entered the U.S. (small white card given on the plane and attached on your passport)

􀂉 **#11 Previous employment authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an OPT card at UMBC or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT, an EAD card under another visa category other than F-1, or an H1B visa. If you are applying for a 17 month STEM extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.

􀂉 **#13 Place of last entry**: This would be the port of entry used to enter the U.S. Either by land, sea or air. Write the name of the port or city. This information can be found on the stamp on your I-94 card.

􀂉 **#16 Eligibility Categories:** Fill out as follows:

* **For PRE-COMPLETION OPT (OPT start date prior to I-20 end date):**

 **( C ) ( 3 ) ( A )**

* **For POST-COMPLETION OPT (OPT start date after I-20 end date):**

 **( C ) ( 3 ) ( B )**

* **For 17 month OPT STEM extension: ( C ) ( 3 ) ( C )**

􀂉 **#17 If applying for the 17 month extension, you must complete this section with your degree field, name of employer as listed in E-verify and your employer’s E-verify identification number.**

􀂉 **Certification:** Remember to sign and date the I-765!

.**IES OPT Information Sheet**

This form is to be completed by the student. It is used by IES advisors to process your OPT I-20 recommending eligibility to apply for OPT to USCIS through SEVIS. The following information is required:

**First name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Last name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­­­­\_\_\_\_**

**SEVIS ID:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Telephone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Personal Email address you will use while on OPT:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**OPT START DATE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ OPT END DATE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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**I-20 End date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Major/degree level\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**To be filled out only if applying for OPT STEM extension**

End date of current OPT period:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Job title:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Employer:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Employer Address:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Employer E-verify ID:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor’s Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Supervisor’s contacts:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



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**Academic Advisor’s recommendation form**

This form is to be **completed by the** **Academic Advisor** during the last semester when the student is going to graduate and apply for OPT.This form can be returned in hard copy or **via email**. Alternatively, an email directly from the advisor confirming the student’s expected completion of coursework in the current semester is acceptable. If you have any questions please direct them to the IES office at 410-455-2624 or ies@umbc.edu. This form is only required if the student is applying for post completion OPT.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Academic Advisor’s name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 By checking the box you are confirming that the above mentioned student is in their final semester at UMBC and is expected to graduate at the end of it.

Advisor’s signature­­­:­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Notes: