OPT
A step-by-step guide
What is OPT?

- Optional Practical Training
- Work permission for 1 year (with option to extend 2 years for STEM degrees)
- Purpose is to gain experience in your field

- One year of OPT per degree level
  - Must be progressively higher (i.e. bachelor → master → doctoral)
OPT Application Process

1. **OPT Workshop**
   - Learn about OPT and ask any questions

2. **Prepare App**
   - Gather ALL required docs and forms

3. **IES review**
   - Get new I-20 and mail app!
Don’t I need a job to apply for OPT?

NO!

- Why not??

- USCIS can take up to **three months** to review your OPT application

- It would be **WAY TOO LATE** to apply if you waited to find a job first
When can I apply?

- Apply for OPT during your last semester at UMBC
- The earliest you can apply for OPT is 90 days before your I-20 end date
- The latest you can apply for OPT is 60 days after your I-20 end date

Approximate OPT timeline by grad term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring grads</th>
<th>Fall grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earliest date</td>
<td>Feb 25</td>
<td>Sept 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-20 end date</td>
<td>May 25</td>
<td>Dec 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latest date</td>
<td>July 24</td>
<td>Feb 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another way to think about it

Earliest date you can submit application

90 days

I-20 end date

60-day “grace period”

Latest date you can submit application
Don’t wait until it’s too late!

- Remember that many other students will want to apply for OPT around the same time you do
- **OPT applications cannot be rushed**
- We process applications as they come in, **not based on your OPT start date**
- USCIS can take up to **90 days** to review your OPT application
Choosing a start date

Earliest date you can submit application

90 days

I-20 end date

60-day "grace period"

OPT start date can be ANY time during "grace period"
If I don’t have a job, how do I pick a start date?

- Based on the job market or how much job hunting you’ve done so far
- Allow time for application processing – this can take up to 90 days
- Consider travel and what you might do during break from school

- Remember: you do not have to have a job on your OPT start date
OK, I’ve chosen a start date. Now what?

1. Complete OPT application (*more on this to follow*)
2. Get academic (departmental) adviser’s signature
3. Email ALL required documents to ies@umbc.edu
4. Receive scanned OPT I-20 by email, print and sign
5. Mail application to USCIS
6. Wait (patiently!) for approval
After you apply, you receive:

1. Receipt
   - Usually arrives between 2 weeks and 1 month after submission

2. Approval notice
   - Usually arrives after about 3 months

3. EAD card
   - Usually arrives about 1 week after approval notice

*If you submit form G-1145 you will also receive email and text updates*
I’m approved!
Way to go, you!
What are the rules governing my OPT time?

- You must be working!
- The expectation is that you will be working during your year of OPT.
- You also have up to 90 days of unemployment time, meaning it is OK not to have a job in your SEVIS record for up to 3 of your 12 months of OPT.
- All jobs during OPT must be directly related to your UMBC degree program.
- Part-time or Full-time, paid or unpaid — all OK during OPT.
  - You must be working at least 20 hours per week (combined) to meet these requirements.
What are the rules governing my OPT time?

- Unlike CPT, you are allowed to change jobs at any time.
- However, you must update your SEVP Portal:
  - change jobs
  - get a new job
  - end an earlier job
  - change your address
- SEVP Portal: https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/
Employer #: 722631  
Finmeccanica  
Date: 7/1/2017 - 6/14/2018  

Self Employed:  

Employer Name: Required  
Enter the legal name of the company that hired you.  

Finmeccanica  

Employer Address: Required  
Address:  
Enter the address where you work. Enter the street address in the top line. Use Address 2 line for the name of the building, if it is normally part of the address. See https://studyinthesates.dhs.gov for more details.  

320 23rd St S  

SEVP Portal
Health insurance

This is **VERY serious:**

- You will no longer be automatically enrolled in UMBC’s health insurance
- You can choose to remain on UMBC’s plan by contacting uhs@umbc.edu
- You **need** to think about this! It is extremely dangerous to be in the US without health insurance. See about options your employer might have, or consider the Healthcare Marketplaces established through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)
Continuing education

- You are free to take classes during OPT
- But you may **not** begin a new **degree program**, or your OPT ends automatically
- Register for courses as a “non degree-seeking” or “visiting student”
- Degree-seeking programs would require you to transfer your SEVIS record or change your Education Level, which **automatically ends** your **OPT** approval
Got it. Let’s do this.

Ready to complete the OPT application?
IES OPT Info Sheet

- SEVIS ID, I-20 end date, Major
  - Copy from page 1 of your I-20
- OPT dates, fill if you have decided
- Read the statements at the bottom
- Sign and date
Adviser form

- Review with your academic (departmental) adviser – not IES!
- Adviser is confirming you have completed all coursework requirements of your degree program, but not necessary thesis/dissertation/capstone work
- This form is required in order to receive your OPT I-20
I-765

▪ Step-by-step instructions:
  ▪ https://ies.umbc.edu/opt-application-information/
Fill this form out so you will receive email and text updates when USCIS takes action on your application

We recommend that you use an email address other than your UMBC email address

Make sure to use a mobile/cell phone number for the SMS text updates

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**G-1145**

- Complete this form and clip it on top of the first page of your immigration form(s).
  - Applicant/Petitioner Full Last Name
  - Applicant/Petitioner Full First Name
  - Applicant/Petitioner Full Middle Name
  - Email Address
  - Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)
I-94

- Available online
  Search for “I-94” – choose .gov site
- Enter name **exactly** as it appears on your F-1 student visa
- Copy passport number and issuing country from your passport
- Click next....
I-94

- Available online
  Search for “I-94,” choose .gov site
- Enter name **exactly** as it appears on your F-1 student visa
- Copy passport number and issuing country from your passport
- Click next….
- This is your I-94 record!
The “Admission (I-94) Record Number” will be entered on the form I-765

You can also view your **Travel History** through this site

The most recent entry record will also be entered on the form I-765
Passport and visa

- Make photocopies of your current passport and F-1 student visa
- If your F-1 visa is in an older passport, include copies of both old and new passport in your application
- Your F-1 visa can be expired
- Your passport cannot be expired
Forms I-20

- You should make copies of **all** the I-20s you have ever been given
- Yes, **ALL** your old I-20s
- If you cannot find one or more of your old I-20s, you should include as many as you still have
- USCIS is most concerned with I-20s that show work authorization, but remember to include all available I-20s
OK. Now what?

Got it all? Now put it together and make an appointment with IES
OPT Document Review by IES

- Gather **ALL** the required documents
- Email the required documents (IES OPT Info sheet, **signed** academic adviser form, completed I-765) to ies@umbc.edu and wait for us to send back your new OPT I-20
- If you have detailed questions or doubts about OPT– contact IES ahead of time, before submitting all your documents
- You are not required to visit the IES office to apply for OPT, everything can be handled over email. If you would like IES to review your complete assembled OPT application package, please stop by our Walk-In Advising hours (10-12, Mon-Thu)
Now mail it away!

Once you have your new OPT I-20 from IES, you can submit your application
Special topics

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates
Before your OPT start date, the same rules apply to international travel as when you were a full-time student. You must carry your valid passport, visa, and I-20 with a travel signature not older than 1 year.

After your OPT start date, you must ALSO carry your EAD card, a job offer letter or proof of employment, and your I-20 signature cannot be older than six months.

After your I-20 end date but before your OPT start date, no US Embassy or Consulate will renew your visa.

So be sure to consult with IES regarding any travel if you do not hold a valid F-1 visa.

Special topics

1. International travel
2. MVA/DMV
3. Ph.D. end dates
It can be difficult to renew your driver’s license or State ID Card while your OPT application is pending.

When your I-20 end date has passed but your OPT start date has not yet arrived, you may have difficulty renewing your license.

Be sure to complete the **SAVE verification** online before you go to the MVA.

There is a link to the SAVE verification form from IES’s website.

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**Special topics**

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates
• Doctoral students have some flexibility in their I-20 end dates, as many students conduct ongoing dissertation research during their OPT period.

• There is a type of OPT called **pre-completion**, which, as the name suggests, is OPT authorization before your academic program is complete and your I-20 end date arrives.

• IES generally discourages this option when **full-time CPT** is available, but we are more than happy to discuss your options if you are an eligible Ph.D. student.

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**Special topics**

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates
After OPT
Post-practical training options
After OPT

1. STEM OPT
2. I-20 transfer
3. Change of Ed Level
4. Leave US
Students in approved STEM disciplines have the option of extending their year of OPT an additional two years.

You must submit another OPT application to USCIS before the end date of your post-completion OPT and no earlier than 90 days before that end date.

Must show you have earned your degree OR that you have a thesis pending (IES cannot prove this).

Can only work for employers enrolled in E-Verify.

Must submit I-983 Training Plan for each and every employer you work for during STEM OPT.

See IES’s website for further information about STEM OPT.
When your OPT ends (or your STEM OPT ends, if you are eligible and apply), you have another 60-day grace period, during which you cannot work but can legally remain in the US.

You can choose to begin a new degree program, either at UMBC through a Change of Education Level, or at another school through an I-20 transfer.

If you do not wish to begin a new program, your F-1 status requires that you leave the US within the 60-day grace period.

Instructions on changing your education level or transferring your I-20 to another school are available on IES’s website.

**After OPT**

1. STEM OPT
2. I-20 transfer
3. Change of Ed Level
4. Leave US