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 Work-shop
   - 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

I-20 end date

60-day "grace period" → Latest date you can submit application

Earliest date you can submit application

90 days

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
- There is no way to guarantee uninterrupted work permission– be open and honest with employers!

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

1. Review the IES website for application instructions and prepare your draft Form I-765.
2. Complete OPT application through the IES Portal
3. Invite your academic adviser to approve your application through the IES Portal
4. Receive scanned OPT I-20 in your IES Portal account, 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 - 4 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 (> 20 hrs) 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/](https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/)
SEVP Portal

Sign In

Attention: Only students who have OPT approved may use the SEVP Portal. You must create an account and set a password before using this log in page. Go to Portal Help for more information.

Email

Password

Login  Reset Password

This system supports the following browsers: IE11 and above, Mozilla 38 and above, Google Chrome Version 53.0.2785.116 m and above, Safari OS X and above

Department of Homeland Security Consent

You are about to access a Department of Homeland Security computer system. This computer system and data therein are property of the U.S. Government and provided for official U.S. Government information and use. There is no expectation of privacy when you use this computer system. The use of a password or any other security measure does not establish an expectation of privacy. By using this system, you consent to the terms set forth in this notice. You may not process classified national security information on this computer system. Access to this system is restricted to authorized users only. Unauthorized access, use, or modification of this system or of data contained herein, or in transit to/from this system, may constitute a violation of section 1030 of title 18 of the U.S. Code and other criminal laws. Anyone who accesses a Federal computer system without authorization or exceeds access authority, or obtains, alters, damages, destroys, or discloses information, or prevents authorized use of information on the computer system, may be subject to penalties, fines or imprisonment. This computer system and any related equipment is subject to monitoring for administrative oversight, law enforcement, criminal investigative purposes, inquiries into alleged wrongdoing or misuse, and to ensure proper performance of applicable security features and procedures. DHS may conduct monitoring activities without further notice.
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?
Optional Practical Training application

Visit the IES Portal website

[ies-portal.umbc.edu]

Click the button on your user account, or from the IES Portal homepage, find the OPT application under:

F-1 Students > Employment > Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Optional Practical Training application

You must complete ALL sections of the application before clicking “Submit.”

Upload draft Form I-765 (no need to sign yet)
Optional Practical Training application

Read and digitally sign the “Signature Documents”

Complete the OPT Student Request Form
Optional Practical Training application

You must send an electronic request to your academic/department adviser through the IES Portal.

Your adviser will verify your eligibility for OPT.

Click “Request Electronic Recommendation”
Optional Practical Training application

Use the UMBC Directory Lookup section on the next page to look up your academic adviser.

You should only enter your adviser’s details manually if you cannot find them through the Directory Lookup.

Try NOT to use the Manual Entry feature.
OPT Document Review by IES

- If you have detailed questions or doubts about OPT—contact IES ahead of time, before submitting all your OPT application through the IES Portal.

- You are not required to visit the IES office to apply for OPT, everything can be handled through the IES Portal.

- If you would like IES to review your complete assembled OPT application package, stop by our Walk-In Advising hours (1:00 PM - 4:00 PM, Mon-Thu).
Optional Practical Training application

Once IES has reviewed your application, the data will be sent overnight to SEVIS.

Once processed through SEVIS, we will upload your new, signed OPT I-20 to the “Attached Documents” section of your OPT application.
Assembling your OPT application package

Once you receive your signed OPT I-20 in your IES Portal account, you can print, sign, and include that I-20 in the OPT application package you sent to USCIS.

On the IES website, you will find a list of all the other application requirements.

In brief....
G-1145

- 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
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!
I-94

- 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
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

---

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.

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.

**After OPT**

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

Now’s the time to ask!