OPT: Optional Practical Training
Ground Rules

• Please submit your questions via the chat (ideally, at the end)

• Questions submitted throughout the presentation will be answered at the end

• Please refrain from asking case-specific questions

  • E.g. of a case specific question: “In my specific situation, X is also happening, and I also will be traveling to country Y, and I don’t have Z document—will that impact my app?”

• For those, sign up for an advising appointment by emailing isss@drew.edu.
F1 Student Life Cycle

What can I do after I complete my program of study?
What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training
POST Graduation

- OPT is post graduation work authorization that is directly related to students’ major(s) not minor
- 12 months of work authorization for all degrees.
  *STEM degree can apply for 24 month extension (after first 9 months of OPT)
- No job needed to apply!
- You cannot pursue a new program of study while on OPT
What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training POST Graduation

- OPT Application is ONLINE and authorized by USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- Cost is $410 to apply (check for accurate cost)
- Authorization must be obtained BEFORE you can begin employment
Who is eligible for OPT?

- F-1 students who are “in-status” and will successfully complete a degree.
- Students must complete at least one academic year as a full time student on current I-20.
- Students must be physically inside the United States to submit your application.
- Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT per degree level - after graduation.
- *STEM degree students can apply for STEM Extension before their 12 month of OPT ends and receive additional 24 months of OPT.
Types of Employment

- OPT employment can be paid or unpaid. “Volunteering” or “unpaid work” is permitted
- Full time: Must be at least 20+ hours per week
- Multiple employers are fine
- Self Employment is fine
- Students permitted to change employers during OPT
Students MUST submit application to USCIS within 30 days of the date on the OPT I20

When should I apply for OPT? https://www.timeanddate.com/

**F-1 OPT APPLICATION TIMELINE**

- **90 Days To Graduation**
  - Earliest date to apply
  - Strongly recommended to apply very early

- **Graduation Date**
  - Congratulations! You did it!!
  - Your earliest employment start date

- **60 Days After Graduation**
  - Latest date for OPT application to be received
  - Your latest employment start date
CONSIDER your OPT Start Date

Decide on an OPT start date BEFORE requesting OPT I20:

- You **DO NOT** need to have a Job Offer to apply for OPT
- You **MUST** pick a start date within 60 days **AFTER** your program ends
- Check your Program End Date on I-20! Use this tool to calculate appropriate start date within 60 days of your program end date. 
  
  [https://www.timeanddate.com/](https://www.timeanddate.com/)

It is **IMPOSSIBLE** to change the requested OPT date after the application has been submitted to USCIS. Choose your dates CAREFULLY.
How to Apply for OPT

➤ STEP ONE: Apply to graduate with the REGISTRAR’s office:

1. Confirm with your Academic Advisor that you are eligible to graduate

2. Apply for graduation through your treehouse account

3. Treehouse ➔ REGISTRAR Tab ➔ Graduation Application link

For more information on grad application: https://www.drew.edu/commencement/apply-to-graduate/

***If you will not complete your program by the program end date on your I-20, please email isss@drew.edu ASAP.***
➤ **STEP TWO: Request your OPT I20**


- **ISSS will email the I-20 with OPT requested to your Drew email. Print, SIGN page one and scan/upload I-20 with OPT requested to your computer.**

- **DO NOT complete the I-765 application process UNLESS you have received a new OPT I-20 from the International Center. You cannot apply/submit your application for OPT until you have received your new OPT I-20 from ISSS.**

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**Students MUST submit application to USCIS within 30 days of the date on the OPT I20**
How to Apply for OPT

OPT Form I-765 Online Application Process

➤ STEP THREE: Gather all supporting documents BEFORE you begin the I-765 online application.

- Passport Photo (no more than six months old) [CLICK HERE]
- I-94 - download PDF here: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home)
- I20 from ISSS with OPT Requested - printed, signed with blue ink and saved to your laptop
- Previous EAD • Front and back (only required if you have previous OPT)
- Passport ID Page • If your passport will expire within 6 months of applying for OPT, you should renew your passport before filing for OPT.
- F-1 Visa Photo and Stamp Page • It is ok if visa is expired or you do not have a visa stamp
- Previous I-20s (recommended - if you have multiple SEVIS ID numbers (Leave of Absence etc) and CPT.
- Filing Fee $410 - US Bank Account/Debit Card or Credit Card

[ISSS Tip]: Create a folder on your desktop and name OPT. Add supporting documents to this folder so you have all documents in one place.
How to Apply for OPT

OPT I-765 Online Application Process

➤ STEP FOUR: Create online account @ USCIS -https://myaccount.uscis.gov/

Need help? Click here for instructions. 
https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/how-to-create-a-uscis-online-account
How to Apply for OPT

OPT Form I-765 Online Application Process

STEP FIVE: Begin your I-765 application
Complete I-765 Form online, upload evidence online (drag & drop feature), electronic signature online, pay online

1. Login to your USCIS Account
2. Select ‘File a Form Online”
4. Select Eligibility Category
   a. (c)(3)(B) – Post-Completion OPT
5. If you do not have a Social Security Card, you can request one on I-765 application.
6. Upload evidence
7. Review and digitally sign your form
8. Pay the filing fee
Tips for completing the I-765 online

- **Eligibility Category**
  - (c)(3)(B) – Post-Completion OPT

- **Mailing Address**
  - If you list an address where you do not officially live according to the U.S. Postal Service, put the name of the person who is living there in the “in care of” field.

- **What is your A-Number?**
  - Select “I do not have or know my A-Number.”

- **What is your USCIS Online Account Number:**
  - Select “I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number.”

- **Upload evidence**
  - I-94 (most recent I-94)
  - Government Issued ID (passport, visa and visa stamp)
  - I-20 showing OPT Requested

- **Additional Information**:
  - Include previous SEVIS ID Numbers, I20 w authorized CPT, or OPT.
OPT I-765 Application

Additional Tips/Resources

- While completing the I-765, students' responses will be automatically saved. If you log out, you may log back in and resume where you left off last time.

- After you pay online and click submit, your application is submitted and filed. Receipt number is produced immediately on screen. You can view receipt info through the USCIS online account (they will also mail receipt and RFE notices).

- Students can upload corrections if they feel there was an error with their online application after filing.

- Students need to be INSIDE the US when filing.
Mailing Address Issues...

The most common issues we see with OPT applications is not with the application material but with address and mailing issues. Once your OPT has been approved, USCIS still needs to get the Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) to you. They are going to send it to the address listed on your I-765.

- It crucial to use an accurate, reliable address that will be valid for 4-5 months into the future.
- If your home mail system tends not to be reliable, consider sending it to a trusted friend or family member.
- If you are going to move 3-4 months after you submit your application, make sure to use a different address.
- If you are sending to a friend/family member and want them to send it to you abroad, remember that this increases the risk of the card being lost in the mail or mishandled. We do not recommend this.
- ISSS does not permit the use of our address for OPT application purposes
- Make sure to have the correct mailing address for your application.
I’ve Applied Now What?

I’ve Applied Now What?

After You Submit Your Application

Track your case online

After you submit your form, you can track its status through your USCIS account. Sign in to your account often to check your case status and read any important messages from USCIS.

Respond to requests for information

If we need more information from you, we will send you a Request for Evidence (RFE) or Request for Information (RFI). You can respond to our request and upload your documents through your USCIS account.

Receive your decision

The decision on Form I-765 involves a determination of whether you have established eligibility for the immigration benefit you are seeking. USCIS will notify you of the decision in writing. If your application is approved, we will either mail your EAD to you or we may require you to visit your local USCIS office to pick it up. If USCIS cannot approve your application, you will receive a written notice explaining the basis of your denial.
USCIS Case Status

Processing Times

https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/

Spring 2023 Grads - average 90+ days*

Fall 2023 Grads - average 30-60+ days*

* from date USCIS received OPT Application

Can’t wait for normal processing times?

Optional Premium Processing

USCIS premium processing is an optional service that allows USCIS to process an application within (up to) 30 calendar days from the day they receive the request for premium processing.

Fee: $1,500 (in addition to $410 filing fee)

Why Premium Processing?
Common reasons for using premium processing include:

- You are starting (or continuing) employment and you need USCIS to complete the processing of your application sooner than they would under normal processing.
- Peace of mind.
I’ve Been Approved

When your application is APPROVED, USCIS will email and mail an approval notice to you.


Two weeks after approval, you will receive Social Security Card (if you requested through I-765 application)

Once approved, you can begin working as of the start date listed on your EAD Card or when you have the EAD Card in hand

How will I receive my EAD Card?

United States Postal Service

Register for Informed Delivery through USPS to get daily images of mail being sent to you. With Informed Delivery, you can:

- Automatically track the packages you’re expecting
- Set up email and text alerts
- Enter USPS Delivery Instructions™ for your mail carrier
OPT approved, what’s next?

Student receives email approximately one week after OPT approved status or one week before OPT start date

- Activate the SEVP Portal email (check spam/junk)

SEVP Portal Account

Students use SEVP Portal to meet their legal reporting requirements while on OPT:

* reach out to ISSS if you are close to your start date and have not received SEVP Portal link
What to Report to SEVP

Report within 10 days

- New Address/Phone
- Change of Employer location
- Start/End Employment
Unemployment

What Time counts?
- Each day— including weekends— during OPT authorization that the student does not have qualifying employment

How will DHS enforce?
- SEVP monitors the number of days of unemployment through SEVP Portal. SEVIS records are being automatically terminated when 90 days of unemployment is reached
- Students may be denied future immigration benefits because of unlawful presence

Allowed 90 Days of Unemployment on OPT. Unemployment only starts after the OPT start date on your EAD card
Travel on OPT

OPT Pending vs. OPT Approved

OPT Pending

NOT RECOMMENDED! Before you graduate and have OPT Pending.

After you graduate & OPT PENDING DO NOT travel and try to reenter the US after you graduate and if your OPT is still PENDING

OPT Approved

YES! You can do short term travel while OPT is APPROVED. Need to travel with all documents including valid passport/valid visa, I20 with OPT approved, signed for travel, EAD Card AND Offer Letter. ***Passport must be valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S.
Int’l Student Hiring Process

Interstride
https://student.interstride.com/
https://drew.edu/internships-career-development/

E-Verify

Top 200 Employers for OPT and STEM OPT
Before you land an interview:

Employers may include questions on the application to find out whether or not you are eligible to work.

- If mandatory question: "Will you now or in the future require sponsorship in order to begin or continue employment in the United States?" If mandatory: Answer NO if there is an area to explain your answer. If not mandatory, do not answer.

  ➢ If there is a place to explain your answer on the application, you can state that you OPT work authorization for _______ through _______.

ISSS Recommendation: Include this statement as a note on the top of the resume/CV:

Employment Authorization valid _______ through _______. No sponsorship needed.
STEM OPT Extension

*students on OPT with STEM degrees are eligible to apply for STEM Extension up to 60 days before your 12 months of OPT expire

- 24-month OPT extension permitted if:
  - STEM students (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) -
  - Verify STEM degree with CIP Code on DHS program list
  - Employer uses E-Verify
  - Complete I-983 by employer and student
  - Employer to provide formal training plan, regular evaluation, and notification to DHS

Need More information on STEM OPT Extension: https://studyinthesates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-extension-overview
Life after Drew!

- Family coming to Drew for Commencement in May? Need a Formal Letter of Invitation? Request [HERE](#)
- Move off campus - must move out of campus housing on last day of semester!
- Purchase Private Health Insurance
  - ISO Insurance
  - Visitor Guard
  - ISI Insurance
1. Apply for Graduation

2. Decide on an OPT Start Date/Submit **OPT Request Form** to ISSS - OPT I-20 emailed to student within 24-48 hrs (as long as request is made within 90 days of graduation)**

3. Review OPT I-765 Online Application guidelines/tips

4. Gather all supporting documents

5. Create USCIS account

6. After receiving OPT I20, Complete I-765 online application

***The I-765 application is your personal application for employment authorization. You are responsible for following all USCIS instructions and making sure that the application is correct and complete. The International Student Center will not have access to your application and cannot correct, edit, or change any information on your application for you. If you have any issues or questions regarding your I-765 application, you will need to work directly with USCIS.

*NOTE: Application must be received by USCIS within 30 days after the OPT I-20 is requested by ISSS!*
Follow us!

Questions????

• Email: isss@drew.edu
• Website: www.drew.edu/isson

Mark Your Calendar!
Wed, Jan 31st @7PM

ROAD TO THE GREEN CARD Workshop

Wednesday, Jan 31st, 2024
TIME: 7:00 PM
In Person and Zoom
SEM Hall - Room 109

Presented by: International Student & Scholar Services & Immigration law group Nachman, Phulwani, Zimovcak (NPZ) Law Group, P.C. (VISASERVE)