International Enrollment & Services

12 Months of OPT: Application Procedures

Please read the following instructions carefully. Although International Enrollment & Services can provide information, the OPT application is your application. We do not approve the application or have the authority to influence the process. If there is a request for information or to correct a problem, we will notify you of the request, but it is your responsibility to respond. Please note that if you choose to travel, it could be difficult to respond to requests from USCIS about your application.

Step 1: Complete Your OPT Application:

Gather the Following Documents

- Completed OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING CERTIFICATION Form (see *Tips for Completing Your OPT Certification Form* below)
- Completed I-765 Form
- Photocopy of all previously issued I-20s (pages 1 and 2) (pages 1 and 3 of the old design I-20s)
- Photocopy of passport identification page
- Photocopy of F-1 visa page
- Two passport-style photos (see *Photo Specifications* below)
- Printout of your electronic I-94 information, which can be obtained at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/
- Photocopy of previously issued EAD (if applicable)
- $410 check or money order payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" (Do not use a future date. Use the date that you signed the check. The date format for your check should be as follows: month/day/year)
- Completed G-1145 Form

Tips for Completing Your OPT Request Form

Request form must be signed by your *academic* adviser before you submit it to International Enrollment & Services.

Choosing an OPT Start Date

- The "start date" is the date your work permission begins. You cannot work earlier than the start date, but you can start working later.
- Your requested start date must be within 60 days after your program completion date. **For example**, if you graduate or complete your exchange program May 6, your start date can be no later than July 5.

- Changing the requested OPT dates after the application has been mailed to USCIS can be very difficult. Choose your dates carefully.

Photo Specifications

- Lightly print <u>your name and your I-94 number</u> in pencil on the back of each photo.
- See photo checklist in OPT packet for more details

Step 2: Submit Your Completed OPT Application to International Enrollment & Services

Submit your completed OPT application (except the check & photos) to International Enrollment & Services. An international advisor will review your application, note any items missing or needing to be changed, and will issue a new, updated I-20 with an OPT recommendation printed on page 2. ***Allow 4-5 business days for processing.***

You will receive an email from your international advisor or the Office of International Enrollment & Services (international@etsu.edu) to pick up the application materials and new I-20.

Step 3: Pick Up Your Application; Mail to USCIS

1. Review your application to make sure it is complete.
2. Sign your OPT-endorsed I-20 at the bottom of page 1 before photocopying it and mailing it to USCIS.
3. Mail your application within **30 days** of the new OPT-endorsed I-20 being issued. **Late applications will be denied by USCIS.**

- Do not mail your original passport, I-94, or I-20 (**only mail copies**).
- It is recommended you send your application by certified mail, return receipt requested.
- If your I-765 mailing address is in Tennessee (including ETSU International Enrollment & Services) mail the entire application to:

   - **For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries**

      USCIS
      Attn: I-765 C03
      P.O. Box 805373
      Chicago, IL 60680-5374

   - **For Express Mail and Courier Service Deliveries**

      USCIS
      Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)
      131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
      Chicago, IL 60603-5517

After You Mail Your OPT Application to USCIS

USCIS will send you a receipt notice (I-797 Notice of Action) confirming receipt of your OPT application, assigning a "receipt date," and assigning a case number. Carefully review the notice to make sure your name is spelled correctly. If it is not, contact USCIS as request on the I-797 receipt notice.

You may use the case number on your receipt notice to check the status of your application online (https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do). It is normal for your case status to say "initial review" or "case received" for most of the 2-3 month processing period.

You may not begin employment until USCIS approves the OPT application and you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Authorized OPT dates will be on your EAD card.

WARNING

You must report your practical training/employment to International Enrollment & Services. **If you do not report your practical training/employment, the U.S. government will terminate your F-1 SEVIS record 90 days after the OPT start date printed on your EAD card.** A terminated SEVIS record cancels OPT authorization and requires you to leave the U.S.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if my EAD card has incorrect information on it?

1. Wait to receive a job offer so you can show your EAD to your employer. The correction process may require you to mail the incorrect EAD to USCIS. Ideally, you should wait to request the correct after your employer has copied your EAD for hiring purposes.
2. To correct the EAD, submit a request through the USCIS website to correct a typographic error (https://egov.uscis.gov/e-Request/Intro.do).

What happens if I move after I mail my OPT application?
The U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from USCIS if the address on the envelope does not match the name on the mailbox. Consider using the International Enrollment & Services address on the I-765 application. We will send you an email when the card arrives.

East Tennessee State University
International Enrollment & Services
Box 70668
Johnson City, TN 37614

How long does it take to get approved for OPT?

Approximately three months from the date USCIS receives your application, though it can be faster depending on the time of year.

If I change my mind and decide not to work, can I cancel my OPT authorization?

The answer depends on your situation. If you were issued a new I-20 with the OPT recommendation but have not yet mailed your application to USCIS, you must notify your international adviser of your change in plans. International Enrollment & Services can cancel the OPT recommendation.

If you have already mailed your application to USCIS, a request can be submitted to USCIS to halt processing. Your application fee will not be returned and we cannot guarantee that your request will be honored. If you have received your EAD card and wish to cancel authorization, contact your international adviser. Cancellation in this situation is highly unlikely. OPT application are not meant to be cancelled.

I didn't submit my OPT application early enough, and I realize I might not get the OPT start date I requested. How do I know what date USCIS will authorize?

Unfortunately, it is difficult to estimate. The authorization depends on when the application arrives and the workload at USCIS. If they process your application after your requested start date, they might defer the start date to their day of processing, up to 60 days after your program end date. However, there is no way to predict which date it will be.

How long does it take to get the Receipt Notice/Notice of Action (NOA)?

Approximately two-to-three weeks after USCIS receives your application. You might verify with your bank whether your check has been cashed. If so, the NOA is likely on the way.

When I receive my EAD card, should I give a copy to International Enrollment & Services?

Yes, if you requested your EAD be mailed to you directly, submit a photocopy to International Enrollment & Services. If your EAD is mailed to International Enrollment & Services first, we will make a photocopy before you pick up the EAD.

I have heard that I can apply for a "temporary" EAD card. Is this true?

In the past, students were able to apply for a temporary EAD card if their application was pending for more than 90 days. Processes have changed, and temporary EADs are no longer issued. If your application is pending for more than 90 days, contact USCIS via the contact information on your Notice of Action letter.

What if I lose my EAD card?

If you lose your card, you must apply and pay for a replacement. Complete a new I-765 Form and resubmit it to USCIS with all supporting documents, including the fee. Contact your international

adviser for an updated I-20. We recommend you keep your EAD at home (not in your wallet) because of the expense and time in applying for a replacement.

How can I get my EAD card if it is mailed to the International Enrollment & Services office and I move away from the Johnson City area?

If you move from the Johnson City area before your EAD arrives, you must arrange for the EAD to be mailed from International Enrollment & Services to your new address. We recommend choosing a [mailing option](#) that can be tracked. Standard First-Class mail through the U.S. Postal Service cannot be tracked, and if the EAD is lost, you must submit a new fee and application to USCIS for a replacement.

I am a graduate student and I've completed all required coursework. I only have thesis or dissertation remaining. Can I apply for OPT authorization to begin before I graduate?

You can apply for either pre-completion OPT or post-completion OPT. There are advantages and disadvantages to consider when deciding which option works best for you. We recommend you schedule an appointment with your international adviser to further discuss your options.