F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)

FIRST:
☐ Read the application packet including the “frequently asked questions.”
☐ Obtain a letter from your department (advisor or department chair) verifying your program end date, the desired OPT start date, and recommendation for the OPT (see sample letter on page 10)
☐ Fill out an I-20 request form and mark “New I-20 for Optional Practical Training” and complete checklist including:
  » Current official University transcript
  » Current I-20
  » Department letter

SECOND:
☐ Bring the items listed above to the International Student & Scholar Services and sign in to speak with an Advisor on duty.
☐ Or, if you are living a long distance from Salt Lake City, e-mail the International Student & Scholar Services (International@utah.edu) with the subject line reading “OPT”.
☐ An IC advisor will print out a new I-20 for you within 2 weeks which will include our recommendation for your OPT on page 3. You will send a copy of this new I-20 with your application.
☐ Fill out form I-765 (download from www.uscis.gov, directions on page two) and collect supporting documents (listed below). If submitting the form online, do not submit your application until after receiving your new I-20.

THIRD:
☐ Mail the documents listed on the checklist below to the USCIS at one of the addresses listed below (in Utah) or on page 3 (outside of Utah). You MUST send your application within 30 days of getting the new I-20 from the IC.
☐ Be sure to keep copies of everything you mail for your own records!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For U.S. Postal Service deliveries including</th>
<th>For (non-USPS) courier service deliveries (Fed Ex, UPS, DHL, etc)</th>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.P.S. express mail</td>
<td>USCIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>PO Box 21281</td>
<td>1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix, AZ 85036</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ 85034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(* see back of this page for important instructions regarding your return address on the I-765)

OPT PACKET CHECKLIST:
☐ 1. Form I-765 (which you will download from uscis.gov) (follow instructions on page 2)
☐ 2. A copy of page 1 and page 3 of the new I-20 that the IC advisor gives you with the recommendation for Optional Practical Training on page 3.
☐ 3. A copy of both sides of your I-94 Card (with the new online version, there is just one page)
☐ 4. A copy of photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
☐ 5. A copy of the F1 visa page of your passport (even if expired).
☐ 6. A copy of ALL previous I-20 issued to you in your current education level (if you do not have these, check with the IC advisor to get copies of University of Utah’s I-20s or your previous schools’ international office.)
☐ 7. If you had a previous EAD card, include a copy of the front and back.
☐ 8. Two passport type photographs (taken within 30 days of submitting application). Print your name and I-94 card number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of I-765. DO NOT CUT THE PHOTOS!

Checklist continues on next page!
9. **Fee of $380.** Checks may be made payable to the *Department of Homeland Security.* You may send a money order or a personal check drawn on funds from a bank in the U.S., NO CASH. Attach the check to the front of the I-765.

10. **If you are applying for the 17 month extension** (see page 7), you must also include a copy of your transcripts or diploma as long as it states the degree field. Staple all documents together and send by **certified mail** with a return receipt OR **federal express** (so that you have a tracking number). You will receive a receipt notice (Form I-797) from the USCIS. You may also attach **Form G-1145** to the first page of your application to receive an E-verification of application acceptance.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING OUT FORM I-765** ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov))

- Check first box “permission to accept employment” or “renewal” if you are applying for a 17-month extension; fill out lines 1 through 16 (17 if applicable); sign and date:

- **#3 Return Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 3 ½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address—the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the card is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your card will be returned to the immigration service and destroyed. If you want to use a friend’s address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first.

- **#3 Return Address:** Note: If the return mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Utah, please check the chart on page 3 for the proper mailing address for your application.

- **#10 Alien Registration Number:** in most cases you will use your I-94 number found on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport). It is usually an 11 digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.

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

- **#16 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 OPT, fill out as follows:
  - For summer OPT PRIOR to end of program requirements: (c) (3) (A)
  - For POST – Completion (after program requirements) OPT: (c) (3) (B)
  - For the 17 month extension of OPT (see FAQ #10 below): (c) (3) (C)

- **#17 If you are applying for the 17 month extension, you must also complete this section with your degree field and your employer’s “E-Verify” number.**

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

**REQUIRED UPDATES (ADDRESS AND EMPLOYMENT).** Immigration regulations REQUIRE that while you are on OPT, you MUST notify the University of Utah IC when you change your address AND/OR when you are NOT employed by filling out our information update form on the web at: [http://ic.utah.edu/pdf/FormAddressUpdate8-19-09.pdf](http://ic.utah.edu/pdf/FormAddressUpdate8-19-09.pdf)

**TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON PRACTICAL TRAINING:**
- In order to re-enter the U.S. while you are on Optional Practical Training, you must have a valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp, I-20 signed within the last six months, the EAD (OPT work card) or the receipt notice for you OPT application AND your job offer letter.

- **NEVER ENTER the U.S. in any VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1 while on your OPT** (it will invalidate your OPT!)
### Choosing your Start Date
(see OPT time-line illustrated on the back of this page)

You are allowed to pick a start date any time within the 60 days following your graduation date or your last day of registration (whichever is earlier). There is some leeway if you finish your coursework and need an earlier start date. There are many overlapping time constraints which affect your OPT application (see OPT time-line illustrated on the back of this page). When choosing the start date for your OPT card, the most important priorities to weigh are:

1. **Choose the earliest day that you might want to start working (you cannot begin working BEFORE the start date on the OPT card).** What if someone offers you a job with the stipulation that you start the day after the program end date? Plan for any possibility.

2. **If you want the latest possible day to start your work authorization,** the latest day you may choose as your start date for the OPT work authorization is 60 days after your program end date. Please note that your status as a student ends after the program end date and you are only given limited privileges during that 60-day grace period. 
   
   **If you chose this option, please be aware that if there is a delay in the processing time of the OPT, you may be denied the full twelve months of employment due to the 14 month rule. See #7 under the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ in this packet for more details.**

   **REMEMBER:** You may not change these dates after you apply for OPT.
Your OPT Timeline
(For example only – your actual dates may be different than those listed here)

I don’t have a job lined up

Apply up to 3 months before

Program End Date

OPT Start Date

Grace period of 60 days to either leave U.S., transfer to another school, or change to another visa category

Application Window

90 days

OPT employment of 12 months

*Cannot accrue more than 90 days aggregate total of unemployment during 12 months
*If eligible, can file for STEM 17-month extensions. Must file before expiration of EAD card.

OPT application should be received by the International Student & Scholar Services no later than 2 weeks before the Program End Date. Though not recommended, students can apply for OPT during 60 day grace period.

Can choose any day within 60 day window after graduation for OPT start date.

*Cannot request start date MORE THAN 60 days after graduation date.

OPT application should be received by the International Student & Scholar Services no later than 2 weeks before the Program End Date. Though not recommended, students can apply for OPT during 60 day grace period.

I do have a job lined up

Apply 3/1/2013

60-day grace period

Program end date

5/3/2013

End date on 12 month EAD card.

Depart U.S.

Job start date – any day within the 60 days after you graduate

12 month OPT

Example:

5/6/2013

5/6/2014

*Please note – if you are simply remaining in the U.S. for the grace period, you cannot leave and re-enter

OPT – Frequently Asked Questions

Apply no more than 3 months before you graduate, not earlier than 120 days before your chosen start date, and no more than 60 days after the program end date. Also, you must send your application within 30 days of the IC processing and e-mailing you to pick up the new I-20.
1. **What is F-1 Optional Practical Training?**
Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in your chosen profession for one year. Its purpose is to “round out” or complement your academic work. As an international student on an F-1 visa, you may obtain temporary employment to gain personal experience in your field of study. Permission for this temporary employment is obtained through the students’ school and through USCIS. The OPT program allows students to work for one year in the field in which they graduate. The employment must be directly related to your major field of study and it must be appropriate for someone having your level of education. You may work anywhere in the United States.

*Please note that this is not an entitled benefit.* USCIS has the right to deny any OPT application at their discretion.

2. **What do I need to do to be eligible for the Optional Practical Training?**
- You must have been in lawful student status for an academic year (at least nine months) and you must currently be in lawful status.
- You must not have had more than one year of full-time CPT employment on your current degree level.
- You must have an anticipated program end date.
- You must be graduating with a Bachelors, Masters or PhD degree. Non-degree students, student attending certificate programs and those doing post-doctoral research are not qualified for an OPT.

3. **If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of practical training, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?**
After completing one OPT, you must complete a higher academic level (Bachelors, Masters, or PhD) before you are eligible for another OPT. If you complete a PhD degree, you may not apply for a Masters level OPT, even if you have never participated in the OPT on that level before.

4. **Can I use the OPT before I graduate?**
Students can sign up for the Pre-completion OPT if they wish to work:
- while taking only thesis hours (a minimum of 3 hours is required). This applies only to graduate students.
- while taking classes, provided that OPT does not exceed 20 hours a week or
- during your vacation semester.

Generally, the CPT is a better option for students than the Pre-completion OPT. Please see the International Student & Scholar Services for more details.

5. **How long will my OPT application take to process?**
Applying for practical training is a two-step process. You must first obtain your certified OPT I-20 from the International Student & Scholar Services, which is approximately 2 weeks processing, and then mail your application along with all the required documents to USCIS to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, which can take up to 3 months to approve.

6. **When should I submit my OPT application?**
You may submit your application 90 days before you graduate. You must apply for Optional Practical Training no earlier than 90 days before you graduate and no later than 60 after you graduate. For undergraduates, your program end date is considered to be the last day of your graduation semester. For thesis students, your program end date is considered to be the day you complete your program requirements – not necessarily the last day of the semester. It could be your defense date, the day you complete your graduation requirements, or the end of the semester. For non-thesis students, your start date is the last day of the semester.

7. **Do I get a grace period after my OPT?**
Yes, your lawful F-1 status expires 60-days (called a ‘60-day grace period’) after the date you complete degree requirements. You are expected to leave the country by that date unless you file a timely application for practical training or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.

*Be aware that the ending date of your I-20 form will be changed to match to the start date of your OPT.*

Please see the enclosed OPT Timeline (page 4) for more details.

8. **Is there a deadline for applying to USCIS with my new I-20?**
You need to have your completed OPT application at the appropriate USCIS Service Center within 30 days of the OPT being processed by the International Student & Scholar Services. Applications that arrive after the 30 days will be rejected and you may have to apply again if you are still in your 60 grace period. If you are past your grace period and the application is rejected, you will need to apply for a new F-1 visa status or return home.

9. **What is the 14 month rule for post-completion OPT?**
Federal regulations state that post-completion OPT must be completed within 14 months of your program end date. If you decide to apply for OPT AFTER the completion date of your program, USCIS may still take 90 days to process the I-765 application. The time that USCIS takes to adjudicate your request will be taking time away from when you would have been working on OPT. This means that if the processing time for your OPT goes beyond the 60 days past your program end date on the front of your I-20, this time will be deducted from your 12 months.

10. **Can I get a confirmation that my application has been received by USCIS?**
If you would like email confirmation that your application has been received by USCIS, you may fill out Form G-1145 [http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf] and attach it to the top of your application. The notice you will receive will not be a guarantee that they will approve your application, but merely a confirmation that it arrived at their offices for processing.

11. **What is my program completion date?**
For undergraduate and MS non-thesis students, the program completion date is the last day of the final semester of required enrollment. For MS thesis and PhD students, the program completion date can be the last day of the final semester of required enrollment OR the defense date. (Please note that the defense date must fall within the final semester of required enrollment. If it falls in an intersession period, the program completion date will be the last day of the final semester of enrollment). MS thesis and PhD students become eligible for post-completion OPT once all the course requirements for their degree have been met.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT EMPLOYMENT**

12. **Do I need to have job offer to apply for the OPT?**
You don’t need a job offer to apply for the OPT. It is however, required for the application of the 17 month extension.

13. **Do I need to have a job while I am OPT?**
Yes, you do have employment while on your POST-completion OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension. This total of unemployment applies through the entire period of the OPT. If you had 30 days of unemployment on the OPT and you lost your job 6 months into the OPT, you still have 60 days of unemployment to find a new job.
While on POST-completion OPT, you MUST update your employment information with the International Student & Scholar Services.

14. **What if I can’t find a full time job?**
USCIS currently requires that students on the OPT program not have more than 90 days of unemployment throughout the duration of your OPT. The International Student & Scholar Services strongly recommends students that are nearing the 90 days of unemployment apply for volunteer work. Interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employment” for the purposes of OPT employment.

15. **Does the job I have while on OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?**
Employment does NOT have to paid employment, although it is recommended.

16. **I have a job offer but my EAD card has not arrived yet. Can I begin work?**
No. Personal possession of the EAD card is required to show that you have legal working status. Any employment done before the EAD card has arrived is illegal and may harm your future chances of obtaining an H-1B visa, permanent residency or other types of benefits from Immigration.

17. **Do I have to do anything with International Student & Scholar Services while I am on OPT?**
International Student & Scholar Services needs to report your participation in the OPT program by adding employment information to your SEVIS record. Please bring a job offer letter to the International Student & Scholar Services (or e-mail International@utah.edu) so we may update your records. International Student & Scholar Services will print a new I-20 with your employment information.

You should bring your EAD card to International Student & Scholar Services so we can make a photocopy of the card for your file. We also accept scanned and emailed or faxed copies as well. We will verify that the information on your EAD card matches with the information on the USCIS system.

18. **What is the H1-B Cap Gap Extension?**
The “H1-B Cap Gap Extension” extends your work authorization through to the start of your cap subject H1-B visa if your OPT ends after your cap subject company has applied for a H1-B for you but before the H1B starts on the following October 1st. This cap gap extension is available to all F-1 students using OPT in any field, as long as you have a pending or approved “cap subject” H1-B application and the employer applied for in with a request for change of status as part of the application. The extension is automatic; you do not have to do anything at all to get the extension. “Cap Subject” refers to any H1-B application that must be counted against the quota on H1B applications.

If your OPT will expire before the start date of the H1-B, bring in your application receipt notice (the I-797) and International Student & Scholar Services will be able to print you a “Cap Gap” I-20. Students that are applying for a H1-B through the University of Utah do NOT need a Cap Gap extension.

19. **What is the 17 month STEM OPT extension?**
Students on OPT with a bachelor’s, master’s or Ph.D. may have a one-time 17-month extension of the OPT to 29 months. You can use this extension only one time – not after each degree. **This extension applies only to students who have graduated with degrees in certain majors called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).** The fields are actuarial science, computer science applications except data entry/microcomputer applications, engineering, engineering technologies, biological and biomedical sciences, mathematics and statistics, military technologies, physical science, science technologies and medical science.

Every year, the Department of State only allows a certain number of H1-B visa applications to be approved. The 17-month extension allows the employer another chance to submit the application for the H-1B visa. Although the 17-month extension is designed to eliminate the gap in the H-1B application process, it is currently available to all students on an OPT who have qualifying STEM degrees and E-Verify employers.

The additional requirement of the 17-month extension requires that those students hired under the 17-month extension be employed by companies that are registered by the U. S. Government’s E-Verify program. Please note that not all employers in the United States are currently enrolled with the E-Verify program; so be mindful of this as you begin to look for employment or begin the process for the STEM extension.

20. **How do I apply for the 17 month extension?**
Applying for the STEM extension is similar in process to your first OPT. International Student & Scholar Services will make you a new I-20 and you will use the new I-20 to apply for the extension with USCIS. You will need to fill out a new I-765 form, pay the fee to USCIS, and submit all of the necessary documents with this new application. Please see the checklist enclosed in this packet for all the required documents for the STEM extension.

21. **What if I change my mind and I want to cancel my application for OPT? Or what happens if I wasn’t able to graduate?**
Canceling the OPT depends on whether or not you have sent the OPT application to USCIS.

If you **HAVE NOT** sent your I-765 form and the required documents to USCIS, International Student & Scholar Services can cancel your OPT request. Note however that your I-20 end date has been shortened to accommodate your OPT. To maintain your status, International Student & Scholar Services requires you to bring in a letter from your department explaining why you were not able to graduate. The letter also needs to have a new program end date. International Student & Scholar Services also requires you to provide a new financial statement so we can make you a new I-20. **Important:** This needs to be done **before** your I-20 end date has expired. If you wish to cancel your OPT and continue school after this date has passed, you will be out of status and will need to apply for reinstatement.

If you **HAVE** sent in your OPT application to USCIS and they **HAVE NOT** approved the OPT, you can send them a request in the mail to ask the application be cancelled. Mark the envelope ‘URGENT’ and write the receipt number.
on it. Include a letter explaining why you need the OPT application cancelled. OR you can call USCIS to speak with a USCIS representative.

If you have sent in an OPT application and have received your EAD card from USCIS and the start date on the EAD card has not begun, you can attempt to cancel the OPT by returning the card to USCIS. You need to cut up the card and express mail it back to the USCIS Service Center that issued the card. Mark the envelope ‘Urgent’. Please note: Once the OPT has been processed by USCIS, it is very difficult to get it canceled in their system. Just because you give up the card, it doesn’t require USCIS to cancel the OPT. Also be aware that the I-765 application fee is non-refundable. You cannot get your money back once you have applied.

If your EAD card is approved and the start date has begun, you cannot cancel your OPT. Even if you only use a few months and then go back to school, you cannot recover the remaining months of OPT and use them at a later date.

Your best option is to make sure of your graduation date before you prepare to apply for the OPT. This way, you do not risk losing time or money and risk falling out of status because you have not graduated.

If you have your OPT approved and you were not able to graduate, you should not seek employment and do all you can to complete your program requirements. Participation in the OPT program is dependent upon your completion of your degree and OPT employment would be illegal. Once the EAD has been issued, it cannot be cancelled! You will be unable to start post-completion OPT until you graduate, but can work part time on pre-completion OPT until you complete your courses. Note: The USCIS has stated, “Failure to complete a course of study is not a valid reason for cancellation of an I-765 or EAD issued for Optional Practical Training.” Additionally, the USCIS has stated, “loss of job offer is not a valid reason for cancellation of an I-765 or EAD.” If you are not able to complete your requirements for graduation within the allotted 90 days of unemployment, please contact International Student & Scholar Services for details on reinstating your status.

**Questions about attending classes and the OPT**

22. I’m finished with my OPT and I want to return to school. What do I need to know?

If you wish to return to school after you finish OPT or before finishing OPT, you must obtain a new I-20 from the International Admissions Office and register at the University for your classes. Once you have the new I-20 and have registered for full-time hours, you need to give your new I-20 to International Student & Scholar Services so we can activate your status with USCIS. A new I-20 showing the new degree you are seeking and a new expiration date must be reported to USCIS by International Student & Scholar Services to let them know you are no longer on OPT.

If you are changing schools, you must request the school that issued your OPT I-20 to release your SEVIS record to your new school. Register at your new school and take the new school’s I-20 to their International Office and request them to finish your transfer and inform USCIS you have returned to school and are no longer on OPT.

23. Can I take extra classes while on the OPT?

Students are allowed to take classes while on the OPT, but these classes may NOT be part of new degree, are NOT counted as the equivalent of employment, and will NOT count towards maintaining your F-1 status. If you are admitted into a new degree program, you will get a new I-20 and your OPT will be cancelled when classes start. Classes may be applied to a future degree or may be prerequisites, but you should be careful that participation in those does not require you to be admitted into a new program before you are ready to quit the OPT.

See International Student & Scholar Services if you have additional questions.

**Questions about travel while on the OPT**

24. Can I travel home (or anywhere outside of the U.S.) while I am on the OPT?

Pending OPT: If you are applying for OPT after your program end date, you MAY travel outside of the U.S. without having received your EAD card. You must have your OPT I-20 signed for travel, a valid visa in your passport, and your passport should be valid for at least six months. You may also remain inside the U.S. while your application is being processed. Since the USCIS has only recently allowed F-1 students to travel on a pending OPT, we recommend that you also have your receipt from them that you have filed for OPT.

Approved OPT: After you have received your EAD card, your travel documents should include your signed OPT I-20, valid visa, your passport valid for at least six months, EAD card, and a letter from your employer. The letter should state that they have employed you or plan on employing you, and you are coming back to the U.S. to work for them. When you receive your EAD card it will say, “not valid for travel”. This means besides your EAD card you will need your I-20, etc. in order to travel.
These same rules apply for both the initial OPT and the 17 month STEM extension. Please understand that entry into the U.S. is granted at the discretion of the USCIS officer, and you travel at your own risk.

**Dependent Travel:** Since OPT is not noted on dependent I-20s, an F2 dependent must carry copies of the F1 student’s I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card, and proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

25. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the card will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD card, and then start work with the card once I get it?
NO!! If you intend to continue working on your OPT, NEVER enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B status, and you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be **invalid**!

26. Can I renew my F-1 visa while on the OPT?
The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for Optional Practical Training is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. It is possible and many students on OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed.
You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent. Please see an International Student & Scholar Services advisor to discuss in more detail.

27. **What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under OPT?**
You need to take a valid passport, the EAD card or receipt notice for your application, an I-20 created by the International Student & Scholar Services for your OPT application, **AND your job offer letter or proof of employment.** The official job offer letter should show temporary intent and not permanent intent to stay in the US. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there.

28. **Do I still need my I-20 endorsed for travel if I am on the OPT?**
Yes, during the OPT year, if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every six months. If you are not located in the Salt Lake area, mail the original I-20 to the International Student & Scholar Services for endorsement, leaving plenty of time for possible mailing delays both ways.

**OTHER QUESTIONS**

29. **What if I have lost or thrown away my old I-20s?**
International Student & Scholar Services may have copies of your old I-20s in your file. You can request that International Student & Scholar Services make you copies of your old I-20s, but note that it could take up to a week to process your request. Also note that it is your responsibility to keep your I-20’s in your record. It is best if you maintain a well-kept file of your documents in a safe place.

30. **Since I am moving this summer (and I still have not moved to my new address), can I use a foreign address to receive the EAD?**
No, the USCIS requires that you indicate an address in the United States and the address must be appropriate to the Service Center address to which you send your application. You may not put a foreign address on form I-765. Because of jurisdiction issues, this address MUST be appropriate to the Service Center area where you live.
The address you use may be a P. O. Box.

31. **Should I keep a copy of my application?**
Always keep copies of all official documents that you send through the mail. We also strongly recommend that you make copies of any checks or money orders that you mail in to USCIS as proof of payment in the case that your application is lost in the mail.
32. **How can I check on the status of my application?**
When the USCIS sends you your receipt notice in a month to six weeks, you will receive a receipt number which begins with the letters "LIN". Please check their website at [http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis). You can use this "LIN" number to access information about your application.

33. **What happens to my dependents, who are on F-2 visas, during the application and OPT process?**
If you are granted the OPT work authorization and you are still in legal F-1 immigration status, then your dependents are still in legal F-2 immigration visa status. You will receive new I-20s for yourself and all dependents if you are eligible for the OPT work authorization. You do not need to include your dependent's I-20s when submitting documents for OPT approval.
Advisor's Authorization for Optional Practical Training

To the Department Advisor: Students on F-1 student visas may apply to the U.S. Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services for permission to accept Optional Practical Training (employment related to their studies). A student does not need to have a specific job offer to make the application, but they do need a certification of support from their department advisor. The period of training is limited to 12 months for each higher degree a student completes. If, in your judgment, practical training will be an appropriate experience for this student, please write a letter on department letterhead including the following information for the student to submit to International Student & Scholar Services. If you feel the student may not complete the requirements of their program by the desired start date of the OPT, you should wait on writing the letter until the student is in a better position to graduate.

Note to Advisors of Graduate Students in a Thesis program: The OPT may be started at the completion of a student’s program, at their defense date, at the end of the semester or sometime during the 60 day grace period after the student completes their program. Please consult with the student which date both fits their plans and meets your academic requirements. Feel free to contact International Student & Scholar Services with any questions.

OPT recommendation letter needs to be on department letterhead and should include the following:

- Name of Student
- Student ID Number
- Degree Sought (BA, BS, MA, MS, PhD)
- End of program requirements date (Program end date)
- Desired Start Date for the OPT.

**Undergraduate students/Graduate students in a non-thesis program:**
- The end of the semester
- A date within their 60 day grace period

**Graduate Students in a Thesis program only:**
- Estimated or Actual Defense Date
- Program Completion Date
- End of the Semester
- Remaining Required Credits (optional)

- Recommendation of OPT
- Department Advisor’s Signature and Date
- Comments