What is it?
Twelve months of employment authorization that allows off campus work related to student’s academic field of study. No job offer needed to apply.

When can I apply?
Not earlier than 90 days prior to graduation or completion of required coursework (for thesis/dissertation students); not later than 60 days following graduation. ISSO recommends that students apply as early as possible due to lengthy USCIS processing time.

Note: For thesis/dissertation graduate students, fulltime OPT is available upon completion of coursework as long as your defense date is scheduled within the first 6 months of the proposed OPT start date.

Please visit OPT Frequently Asked Questions for additional information, such as traveling while on OPT.

Steps to Apply for OPT

Step One (1) – Complete an Information Session
Participate in one of the required OPT information sessions.

Step Three (2) – Apply Online
Decide on your OPT start date and submit your request for a new I-20 using application Optional Practical Training (OPT) (F-M). Return to complete an existing application through ISSO Connect.

Step Two (3) – Advisor Recommendation
From inside the application, send you advisor a recommendation request. Your advisor must confirm that you are graduating this semester. You may submit your OPT application AFTER your advisor completes your recommendation.

Step Four (4) – Sign Up for a Review Session
Schedule an OPT Review Session (link will be sent via email after completing Step Three). Note: Please allow 5 business days processing time from when you submit your request.

Step Five (5) – I-765
Complete the I-765 at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
* we recommend filling out the PDF version online for highest quality legibility
* please indicate an address where you will be able to receive mail for the next 90-100 days
* for post-completion OPT please use code (C)(3)(B) in item #27

Step Six (6) – Passport Photos
Have 2 passport-style photographs taken. See https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports.html for exact specifications. Try Union Station in the Student Union or Office Print & Ship Center on Harris Blvd & Highway 29 for professional-style photos. Note: Eyeglasses may not be worn in these photos, and photos must have been taken within 30 days of mailing your application.

Step Seven (7) – Make Copies
Make copies of all of the documents in section below entitled ‘Documents Needed For Your Application’ and take them to your scheduled OPT Review Session. Do not send any original I-20s to USCIS
Mail your completed application no more than 30 days of I-20 issuance to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USCIS P.O. Box 660867, Dallas, TX 75266 (any US postal mail service, including priority)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USCIS Attn: AOS, 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400, Lewisville, TX 75067 (UPS, DHL, FedEx)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you are using an address outside of North Carolina on your I-765, be sure to visit the USCIS website to verify the appropriate mailing facility/address

### OPT Application Checklist for USCIS

- [ ] Form G-1145 (electronic notification from USCIS on receipt of application) [www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf](www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf)
- [ ] Form I-765 (signed within 30 days of mailing application to USCIS) [www.uscis.gov/i-765](www.uscis.gov/i-765)
- [ ] $410 personal check or money order NO CASH. Make payable to ‘U.S. Department of Homeland Security’
- [ ] Two passport photos (2x2) with name and I-94 # written on back. Photos must be taken within 30 days of mailing your OPT application (see step 6 on reverse page for additional instructions and a link to photo requirements)
- [ ] ISSO Coverletter
- [ ] Photocopy of form I-20 with ISSO advisor’s OPT recommendation (ISSO will provide the I-20 at review session)
- [ ] Include a photocopy of any I-20s issued for previous work authorization (CPT or OPT)
- [ ] Include a photocopy of your initial entrance I-20, I-20s from previous institutions (transfer students), or previous degree levels
- [ ] Printout of your I-94. You can access that form at: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/)
- [ ] Photocopy of passport ID page with current expiration date
- [ ] Photocopy of most recent U.S Visa
- [ ] Photocopy of previous EAD card(s) - if applicable

### Important Reminders While on OPT

1. Ways to track your application and EAD
   - Use trackable mailing service (such as USPS Priority, FedEx, UPS, or DHL)
   - G-1145 sends text or email once received (allow 10 days from mailing)
   - Monitor your payment for processing
   - Receipt notice (I-797) mailed to address on I-765
   - Case status updates through USCIS
   - Sign-up for Informed Delivery through USPS
2. Once your application has been received, allow USCIS to do their work and DO NOT contact them simply because you feel nervous or anxious.
   a. Too many communications can cause confusion and potentially result in an unnecessary/erroneous ‘Request for Information’ or Denial.

3. If you have an unexpected change of address, report it using Form AR-11.

4. Check Case status updates through USCIS only once per day (at most). If your case is ‘outside normal processing time’ as per the website, you may submit an online inquiry (NOT the same as an expedite).

5. Remember what qualifies as ‘employment’ during standard OPT:
   a. Minimum 20 hrs/week. Can be more but not required.
   b. Can be an internship (paid or unpaid) or permanent employment.
   c. ALL EMPLOYMENT MUST BE IN FIELD OF STUDY, AT LEVEL OF STUDY ON I-20!

6. Make good decisions before accepting a job. Take a day or so to think about it if needed.

7. Remember to submit an update form to the ISSO within ten days every time:
   a. You change your address
   b. You begin or end a position
   *No new I-20 is generated, simply updating information in SEVIS record
   *You will receive an email to open SEVP Portal account upon issuance and start date of EAD

8. Travel and re-entry to the U.S. requires EAD and offer letter plus valid visa and passport.

9. Do not listen to friends/friends-of-friends regarding THEIR situations. This just causes more unnecessary stress and their information is unreliable! No one can predict processing for your case.

10. Read the ISSO’s OPT websites and Frequently Asked Questions page PRIOR TO CALLING OR EMAILING THE ISSO!

11. Breathe, relax, and believe that everything will be just fine!

Disclaimer: The ISSO staff serve as student/scholar services professionals and are trained to advise on F-1 and J-1 immigration regulations for UNC Charlotte students and other relevant visa categories for UNC Charlotte foreign-born faculty members.

While the ISSO advisors are highly knowledgeable in these areas, they are not immigration attorneys and therefore cannot assist petitioners with some complex immigration forms or processes. Furthermore, the content on the ISSO’s website is informational only and does not constitute official legal advice.