

OVERVIEW

Students are eligible for one year of OPT after each higher degree level meaning you can apply for OPT after you complete your Bachelor's, after you complete your Master's, and after you complete your Doctorate. If you graduate with your Master's and decide to enroll in another Master's program, you will not be allowed to be on OPT again.

OPT is degree specific, not employer specific, meaning you are allowed to:

- Change employers while on OPT
- Work for multiple employers simultaneously

You MUST:

- Actively look for work and keep a record of all search contacts, applications, and resumes if unemployed
- Work in your academic degree field
- Work more than 20 hours per week to stop your unemployment time from accumulating

If you have worked a combined total of more than 365 days/12 months of FULL-TIME (more than 20 hours per week) CPT, you are not eligible to apply for OPT.

- *EXAMPLE: A student has worked full-time CPT for 3 months each summer for 4 years. The total full-time CPT worked is 12 months, thus making this student ineligible for OPT.*

TYPES OF OPT

PRE-COMPLETION OPT: OPT begins before you graduate

- Only recommended if CPT is not an option
- While school is in session: You cannot work more than 20 hours per week and must maintain a full course of study during the period of employment
- During official school breaks: students may work full-time and course enrollment is not required.
- The # of months you're on Pre-Completion OPT are deducted from the 12-month maximum at a rate of 50 percent. *Example: If you work 6 months of Pre-Completion OPT, 3 months will be deducted out of your total OPT time period, leaving you with 9 months of OPT*
- Post-completion OPT does not automatically begin after graduation for students using pre-completion OPT. When a student graduates on Pre-Completion OPT, work eligibility stops UNTIL the Post-Completion OPT application has been approved. Students will have to pay again for the Post-Completion OPT application.

POST-COMPLETION OPT: OPT begins after you graduate

- Must have completed ALL required coursework (ONLY thesis/dissertation courses are still allowed)
- Must be FULL-TIME employment (more than 20 hours per week)
- **You can apply up to 90 days before your program end date/graduation but no earlier**
- You must specify an OPT start date that is before the end of your 60-day grace period

TIMING: WARNINGS

- When you apply for OPT, ISAO will shorten your program time on your I-20. So, if you do NOT graduate as planned, you must ask for an extension on your I-20 **before** your I-20 expires.
- You CANNOT cancel or change dates for your OPT after your application is approved (i.e., I-797 or EAD card issued).
- If you will not graduate as expected, you need to let ISAO know as soon as possible.
- If there is any question regarding you being able to graduate, you should wait to apply until you are sure you will graduate
- Your OPT will be cancelled by USCIS if you:
 - ✓ Begin a new academic program
 - ✓ Transfer to a new school
 - ✓ Leave the U. S. without employment

OVERVIEW OF OPT PROCESS:

1. Gather all required documents and upload these using the Secure Document Upload tool.
2. We will review and process your application and issue the OPT-requested I-20.
3. You will receive an email from our office with the OPT-requested I-20 and instructions how to apply online with USCIS. You will need to apply online no within 30 days of the date we signed your OPT I-20.
4. Within 24-48 hours of applying with USCIS, you should receive your Receipt Notice information with your receipt number.
5. You should receive your approval notice between two to five months and receive your EAD card 2 weeks after that.

OPT: Information and Requirements

6. You can start working if: 1) you have your EAD in hand 2) your start date is not in the future
7. Don't forget about your reporting requirements! See page 4.

PROCESSING TIMES

IF YOU SUBMIT AN INCOMPLETE APPLICATION, IT WILL DELAY PROCESSING

ISAO: 2-10 days from time application is completed meaning all documents have been submitted and correctly filled out

USCIS: 3 Months (90 days) to 5 Months (150 days) - If processing time exceeds your 60-day grace period, don't panic. You are still in status.

DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS WITHOUT FIRST RECEIVING THE OPT-REQUESTED I-20 FROM OUR OFFICE. To do so will result in a denial.

Do not forget to sign your new I-20. Digital signatures on I-20s are not allowed by students.

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR START DATE

OPT rules allow a student to choose an OPT start date anywhere between 1 and 60 days after their completion of studies date. Here are some examples:

	COMPLETION OF STUDY	EARLIEST OPT START DATE	LATEST OPT START DATE
Graduating Spring 2024	May 10, 2024	May 11, 2024	July 9, 2024
Graduating Summer 2024	July 26, 2024	July 27, 2024	September 24, 2024
Graduating Fall 2024	December 13, 2024	December 14, 2024	February 11, 2025

You can choose the earliest OPT start date, the latest OPT start date, **or any date in between**. You can **ONLY** submit your OPT application 90 days before your completion of studies up until 60 days after your completion of studies.

- **If you apply for OPT early** (60-90 days before completion of studies), you will have your choice of any OPT date within the 60-day range after completion of studies because your OPT will probably be approved before the start date you choose. Pick your OPT start date based on either the date you would prefer to start working *OR* the date you expect to start work, if you already have a job offer.
- **If you apply for OPT later** (fewer than 60 days before completion of studies), you should consider the date on which you want or need to start working, however you must also consider when your OPT is likely to be approved. For example, if you are completing your studies on May 10, 2024 and applying for OPT on April 15, 2024, it is unrealistic to select May 11, 2024 as your OPT start date. USCIS will NOT approve your OPT application in 3 weeks. Even if you opt to use premium processing, it might not be approved by that date. (Premium processing can still take up to one month.) If you pick May 11, 2024 and your application isn't approved until June 11, 2024, you might lose one whole month of OPT work authorization (but this won't count toward your unemployment).
- **If you apply on or after your completion of studies date**, then the latest possible OPT start date is your most realistic option.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I SUBMIT MY APPLICATION TO USCIS

Approximately 24 to 48 hours after you submit your application to USCIS, you will receive a USCIS Form I-797 "Notice of Action" with a RECEIPT NUMBER

- You may use the receipt number on your receipt to check the status of your application online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>
- Without a receipt number you will not be able to check the status of your application.
 - USCIS will not give status updates unless processing time exceeds 5 months.

ONCE YOU HAVE YOUR EAD CARD IN HAND

- You are authorized to work beginning on the start date noted on the EAD card & not before.
- You need to upload scanned copies of the front and back of the card using the Secure Document Upload tool.
- You are still a UMKC F-1 student; you are simply an F-1 student on OPT.

OPT: Information and Requirements

- You must follow reporting requirements: <http://info.umkc.edu/ISAO/current-students/opt/>

Lose your EAD card? You may continue working with the same company while your request is being processed.

- You must submit a new application including:
 - A copy of all of the original application component and a copy of your I-797 Receipt Notice
 - New photos
 - You will have to pay for the application again.

UNEMPLOYMENT

- You **should NOT** be unemployed more than **90 days TOTAL** during your **entire** 12-month OPT period. At no point will the 90 days reset/start over.
- Can't find a paid job? You do NOT have to be paid to be considered "employed." If you are unable to find a paid position, you can VOLUNTEER in an area related to your field of study and it will COUNT as employment as long as you work MORE THAN 20 hours/week. This should be reported to ISAO and updated in the SEVP portal.
 - Job site must provide formal letter stating unpaid employment with start and end dates on official letterhead, job responsibilities, etc.
- If you are unemployed and do not want/are not able to volunteer, students are allowed to be self-employed. They must follow all local municipality rules and must keep track of their hours of work. This work should still be reported.
- If you cannot find employment, and prefer not to volunteer or be self-employed, then in order to maintain status during OPT, unemployed OPT participants must begin a new program, transfer, or leave the country. No grace period is permitted. This rule is enforced by USCIS, not ISAO.

UNEMPLOYMENT FAQ'S

- **I graduated on 12/19 and my requested start date is 2/19 but my request was not approved until 3/19, was I considered unemployed for a month?** *Though the start date on your card won't be adjusted (your OPT still starts on 3/19), your 90 days unemployment count DOES NOT begin until 3/19.*
- **I graduated on 12/19 and my requested start date is 2/19 but my request was approved on 1/19 and I received my EAD card on 1/25, do I have to find a job now to avoid unemployment?** *NO, you cannot start work until the start date on your EAD card. And no, the time between 1/19 and 2/19 does NOT count toward your unemployment.*

HEALTH INSURANCE

After completion of your program and graduation, you will no longer be automatically enrolled in UMKC's medical insurance. Health insurance is a requirement under federal law to stay in valid, active F-1 visa status. Medical and accident insurance will now be your responsibility. Be sure to negotiate insurance coverage for you and your family in your employment contract. If your employer does not offer insurance coverage, you may purchase your own health insurance through Anthem or any other company you choose.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

ALL OPT Participants must report the following information to the SEVP Portal or ISAO within 10 days of any changes:

- Report any change in mailing/residential address
- Report any change in your legal name
- Report any change to your visa type/immigration status
- Report any time you change employment
- Report any change in your current employer's name or address
- Report if there are any changes of deviations to an existing I-983 form (24-month STEM only)
- Send a copy of your updated I-983 form when you complete your annual self-evaluations (24-month STEM only)
- Confirm your information every 6 months: OPT/STEM Report Participation Form
- You must report any updates within 10 days of the change

THE SEVP PORTAL

On March 23, 2018: The SEVP Portal gave OPT and STEM OPT students the responsibility of updating their own information.

WHEN WILL I HAVE ACCESS TO THE PORTAL?

- When your OPT/STEM OPT has been approved by USCIS and when the start date listed on your EAD card has passed. *If you have been approved but your start date is still in the future, you will not have access since you are not authorized to begin work yet.*

HOW DO I GET ACCESS TO THE PORTAL?

1. Again, you will ONLY get access to the Portal once your OPT/STEM has been approved and your start date passed
2. You will receive an email with the subject line “Optional Practical Training Approval – the next step. Create an SEVP Portal Account” to your UMKC email address ONLY from: do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov
3. The SEVP Portal is FREE. SEVP will never ask for money in an email.
4. The email will contain instructions and a unique link that can't be shared and expires in 14 days. You will need your SEVIS ID (located on your I-20, start with N). If you do not see the email, check your junk mail or spam folder. If it is not there either, email ISAO at isao@umkc.edu and they will request the email be sent again.
5. If you have entered your SEVIS ID/password incorrectly three times, your account will be locked and you must contact ISAO to unlock it.

STUDENTS ON 12-MONTH POST COMPLETION OPT WILL BE ABLE TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Update your mailing/local/physical address in the U.S.
- Update your telephone number
- Update your employer information: name, address, dates, supervisor, etc.
- View, edit/update, or add OPT employers. Do not delete any employer if you stop working for them. Put the end-date in the information.
- We will automatically print I-20's for changes in OPT/STEM employer information only if it shows a change of employer, or the address location of the employer has changed. The changes should be noted in the Employer form when you upload that form.

STUDENTS ON 24-MONTH STEM OPT WILL BE ABLE TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Update your mailing/local/physical address in the U.S.
- Update your phone number
- Update your CURRENT employer information: name, address, dates, supervisor, etc.
- Monitor and view your current and past employers
- You WILL NOT be able to add a NEW STEM employer. If you wish to add a new STEM employer, you will need to use ISAO's STEM OPT Employer Update form and submit required documentation (including the I-983). We will then update it in SEVIS but you will be not able to see the update in your portal account until 24-to 48 hours after we update it.
- You are still required to submit your 6-month validation reports and I-983 self-evaluations. This cannot be done in the Portal at this time. You need to upload the form using the Secure Document Upload tool.
- We will automatically print I-20's for changes in OPT/STEM employer information such as a new employer or a change of employer site address location.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I UPDATE MY INFORMATION IN THE SEVP PORTAL?

- It will automatically update your SEVIS record.
- Please note that any updates to your record done by an ISAO advisor will not be visible in the SEVP portal for 24 to 48 hours after the advisor has updated the information.

VERY IMPORTANT: Please be aware that any updates you make in the SEVP Portal will only update SEVIS and it will **NOT** update your Pathway/UMKC records. **Therefore, if you choose to use the Portal to update your information, you will be responsible for retaining ALL of your own employment records/information.**