DePaul University

Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 international students

International Student and Scholar Services (ISS)

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iss.depaul.edu

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- OPT is off-campus employment authorization for F-1 students that may be obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to lawfully pursue employment in your academic field of study.

- You are eligible to apply for OPT once you have maintained your F-1 status (full-time enrollment) for a minimum of one academic year. At DePaul University this is equivalent to at least three (3) consecutive quarters.

- F-1 students may apply for a total of 12 months of OPT to be used before completion of studies (pre-completion OPT) and/or after completion of studies (post-completion OPT).

- F-1 students are eligible to apply for 12 months of OPT at each educational/academic level (i.e. Bachelor's, Master's, PhD). Students who complete two degrees at the same educational/academic level (e.g. two Master's degrees) are not eligible for additional OPT time after completion of the second degree.

- Some students in an eligible STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) degree program may be eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their OPT authorization. Please review separate OPT STEM tutorial on ISS website for details.

Types of Available OPT

Pre-completion OPT

Earliest you can apply is 90 days before desired start-date. Very few students use pre-completion OPT. If you are considering Pre-completion OPT please speak to your ISS advisor.

Post-completion OPT

USCIS must receive your application no earlier than 90 days prior to your degree program completion date and no later than 60 days following your degree program completion date.

In most cases, we recommend that you apply as early as possible to avoid unexpected delays.

When employment occurs	Hours per week allowed to work	Comments
Annual vacations or school breaks (Pre-completion)	Employment authorization may be part-time (20 or fewer hours per week) or full-time (more than 20 hours per week).	Authorized pre-completion OPT will be deducted from your 12-month allowance. Part-time OPT is deducted from the 12 month allowance at a half-time rate. For example, if you work part-time for 4 months, only 2 months will be deducted. You will have a remaining balance of 10 months of OPT.
Regular academic year (fall, winter, spring quarters) (Pre-completion)	Employment authorization can only be part-time (20 or fewer hours per week) and you must continue to maintain full-time enrollment. The 20 hours per week maximum includes all employment, both on and off-campus.	Students on pre-completion OPT are not eligible for the 24 month OPT extension or the H1B cap gap extension If available to you, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) may be a better option for working prior to your degree completion.
After degree completion (Post-completion)	Employment authorization is full-time. Students must work a minimum average of 20 hours per week during post-completion OPT in order to maintain lawful F-1 student status.	No more than 90 days of unemployment are allowed during the 12-month post-completion OPT authorization period.

Which OPT Should I request?

Pre-Completion OPT

Have you been in F-1 student status for one academic year? At DePaul University, one academic year means full-time enrollment for at least three (3) consecutive quarters. This begins when you first entered the United States in F-1 status – time spent studying abroad prior to entry will not count toward one academic year. You may be able to count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs as long as your SEVIS record was transferred directly to DePaul University. Enrollment in English language programs cannot be counted toward meeting this requirement.

Have you considered using Curricular Practical Training (CPT) instead? For many students, CPT can be a better option. It allows you to get work experience in your field of study without using any of your 12-month OPT allowance. It is also free to apply to. Please see the ISS website for a detailed description of Curricular Practical Training.

Will your job offer still be valid three months from now? OPT processing can take 60 to 90 days and you may not begin employment before receiving authorization. If your employer is not willing to wait for your authorization approval, OPT may not be the best option for you.

Do you plan on applying for the 24-month OPT STEM extension or the H-1B cap gap extension in the future? Only eligible post-completion OPT students may apply for these two extensions. If you plan on applying for either of these extensions in the future, you must have at least part of your original 12-month OPT allowance remaining to use as post-completion OPT.

Are you willing to use some of your 12-month OPT allowance? You will not have a full year of post-completion OPT time after degree program completion if you are authorized for any pre-completion OPT.

Post-Completion OPT

Have you been in F-1 status for one academic year? At DePaul University, one academic year means full-time enrollment for at least three (3) consecutive quarters. You may be able to count the time you spent at other U.S. schools in degree programs as long as your SEVIS record was transferred directly to DePaul University. Enrollment in English language programs cannot be counted toward meeting this requirement.

Will you be completing your program of study at DePaul University within the next 90 days? Your application for OPT cannot be submitted to USCIS any earlier than 90 days before your degree program completion date.

Are you enrolled full-time this quarter or authorized by ISS to have a reduced course load? If eligible, you must receive a reduced course load authorization from ISS before enrolling less than full-time.

How to Request / Apply for OPT

Step 1: Submit OPT request form to ISS to obtain OPT I-20 form.
This form must be submitted online – you can find the link here: https://intlportal.depaul.edu/_portal/
Please be sure to indicate your **academic advisor** on this form. Be sure to submit this form to the correct **academic advisor** and **ISS advisor** or else the form will not be processed**.**

Please allow **5-7 business days** for review/processing. If your request is incomplete, it will require more time.

Step 2: Prepare your OPT application forms and supporting documentation.

Step 3. Submit your complete OPT application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) through their online application.

Be sure to file within 30 days of your OPT I-20 issue date and before the expiration of your grace period.

ISS strongly recommends that you carefully review this entire OPT tutorial for detailed instructions and important information about your OPT authorization requirements and responsibilities.

Step 1: The online OPT I-20 Request Form

Complete the online OPT I-20 Request Form: https://intlportal.depaul.edu/_portal/

Choosing Authorization Dates

On the OPT recommendation form, you must indicate what dates you would ideally want your employment authorization to begin and end before submitting it to ISS. Your recommended OPT dates are subject to change based on USCIS processing times.

Your recommended OPT dates will be printed on your new OPT I-20 and cannot be easily changed after processing. If approved by USCIS, your OPT dates cannot be changed and will be printed on your EAD card.

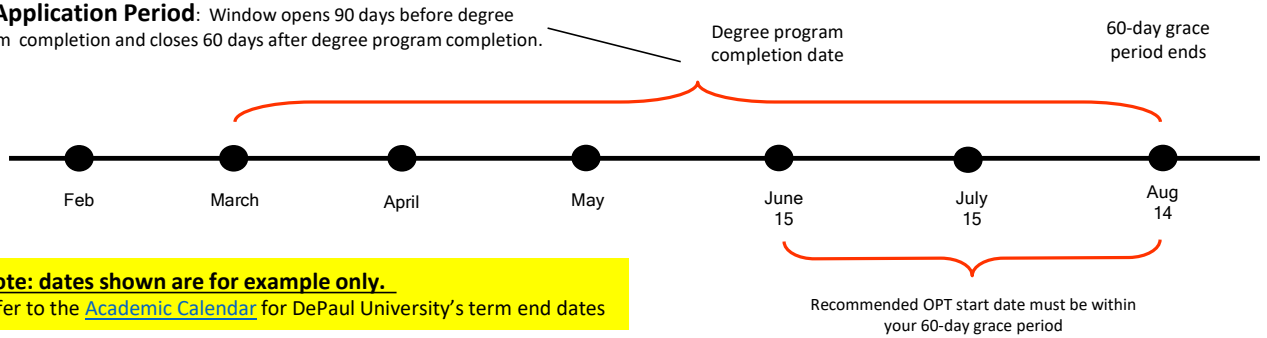
- Your recommended OPT start date is the day you would ideally like your EAD card to become valid and when you would ideally like to begin off-campus employment.
- Your recommended OPT end date is usually 12 months later minus one (1) day unless you request a shorter period of time.

If you change your mind about your authorization dates

You will **NOT** be able to adjust your recommended OPT dates once you have submitted your application to USCIS without withdrawing your application completely. Consider the authorization dates carefully before submitting your OPT recommendation form to ISS.

OPT Filing Timeline

OPT Application Period: Window opens 90 days before degree program completion and closes 60 days after degree program completion.



Please note: dates shown are for example only.
Please refer to the Academic Calendar for DePaul University's term end dates

Points to Consider

- USCIS can receive your OPT application up to 90 days before your degree program completion date and no later than 60 days following your degree program completion date
- If you leave the United States during your 60-day grace period and you haven't applied for OPT, **you will lose your opportunity to apply for OPT.**
- **USCIS must receive your OPT application no later than 30 days after your OPT has been requested in SEVIS by your ISS Advisor** or your application may be denied
- It can take 2 to 4 months (sometimes more, rarely less) for an OPT application to be reviewed and (hopefully) approved by USCIS. Check Case Processing Times here.
- Your recommended OPT start date must be within your 60-day grace period
- If you will graduate in winter term and want to take advantage of the **H-1B cap gap benefit**: https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-and-fashion-models/extension-post-completion-optional-practical-training-opt-and-f-1-status-eligible-students-under-h-1b-cap-gap-regulations, select an OPT start date closer to the end of your 60-day grace period. Note, if your OPT authorization ends before your employer files the H-1B COS petition with USCIS, you will **not** qualify for the H-1B cap gap benefit
- You cannot begin employment until you have received your EAD card and the start date on the EAD card is valid/current
- You cannot change your recommended OPT start date once your OPT application has been mailed to USCIS without withdrawing your application completely
- As long as you have submitted a timely application for OPT to USCIS, your F-1 status remains active and you can continue to stay in the United States while your OPT application is pending
- Travel outside of the United States while your OPT application is pending and once it has been approved can be risky; please schedule an appointment with your ISS advisor for more information as far in advance as possible

Important Reminders

OPT Application Filing :

- If you miss this deadline, USCIS will reject/deny your application! If you have international travel plans, be sure USCIS receives your post-completion OPT application before you leave the country and contact your ISS advisor before making travel arrangements. If you timely file your post-completion OPT application with USCIS, you may remain inside the U.S. until USCIS makes a decision on your case.
- If you receive a **"Request for Evidence (RFE)"** from USCIS, schedule an appointment with your ISS advisor right away. If there is a problem with your application or if USCIS needs additional information/documents to make a decision on your case, USCIS will send you an RFE notice by mail or through the online portal. You may track status of your OPT application on USCIS website: https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/ by entering your I-765 receipt notice number.
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OPT Employment:

- If/when USCIS approves your OPT application, USCIS will issue an employment authorization document (EAD) card. You **cannot start working** until you receive this EAD card and the start date on that EAD card has passed. You will not accrue any unemployment time while USCIS reviews your OPT application. Your unemployment clock will start as of the start date showing on your EAD card. F-1 students on post-completion OPT are limited to a total of **90 days of unemployment** for their entire post-completion OPT period. If you exceed 90 days of unemployment while on post-completion OPT, this is considered a violation of your F-1 status. It may result in denial of future immigration benefits and can have long-term negative consequences for your immigration record and status in the U.S. Note, this unemployment limit does not apply to students on pre-completion OPT.
- In order not to accrue unemployment time while on OPT, you must be employed in a position that **directly relates to your degree level and major field of study** showing on your I-20 form **for at least 20 hours per week**. You can have multiple employers while on OPT as long as each job fits this criteria and you report your employment information to ISS. Employment while on OPT does not need to be paid, however, unpaid or volunteer work should also not violate any labor laws. In other words, if the law dictates that you should be getting paid for a particular position, then you should be getting paid for that position. Volunteering for a non-profit organization could be a valid form of employment while on OPT, but it depends on the particular position. Please contact ISS advisor for additional information.
- ISS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recommend that **students keep clear written/electronic records** of all periods of employment and unemployment while on OPT. This information should include: job title; proof of employment duration (start and end dates); number of hours worked per week; location; contact information for supervisor/manager; description of work responsibilities; and, evidence that work performed is/was related to your field of study. Additional evidence may include: pay-stubs; W-2 forms; copies of contracts; offer letters; and, employment verification letters.
- If you transfer to another school/college or start new degree program while on post-completion OPT, your OPT work authorization will no longer be valid.
- If you **witness fraudulent activity** by an OPT recruiter or company, you should contact the ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) tip line immediately at 1-866-DHS-2ICE or www.ICE.gov/tips and make a report. If you rely on recruitment agencies to obtain OPT placements, please ensure these agencies are trustworthy and reputable. For example, reputable recruiters will not modify your resume or academic background to secure OPT placement.

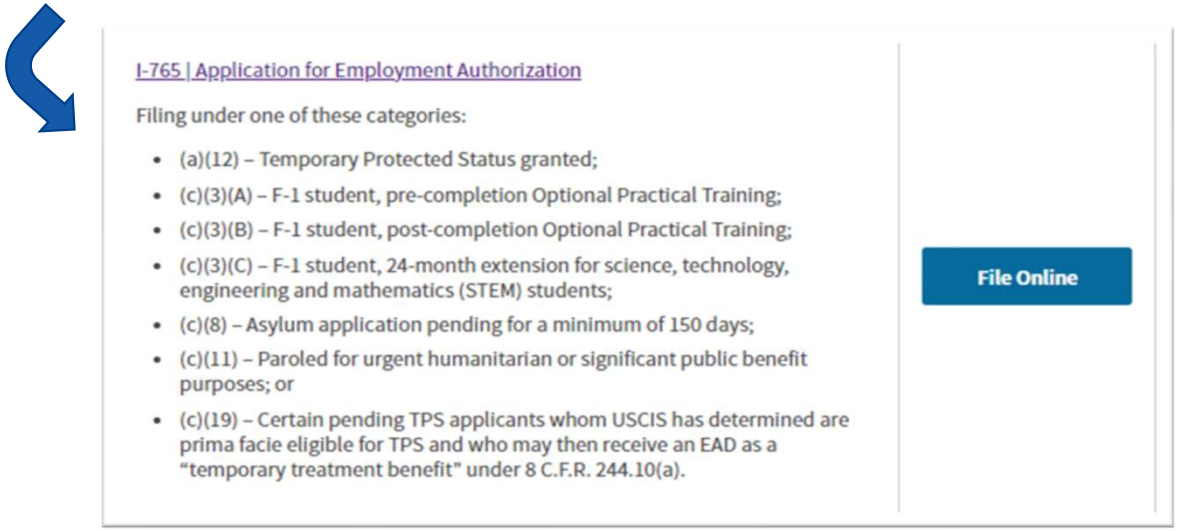
Step 2. Prepare your OPT materials

- Passport-style photograph – see travel.state.gov page for full guidance
- Electronic I-94
- Copy of information page in passport
- Proof of enrollment at SEVP-Certified school (transcript)
  - Not needed for the online application, **but** recommended to have in case of RFE
- I-20 showing OPT Request **that is less than 30 days old**
- Payment method – see https://www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees for full guidance
- *All previously used SEVIS numbers to be submitted in 'additional information' section of application (if applicable)*
- *Evidence (I-20s) of any previously issued CPT or OPT and the academic level for which each was authorized (if applicable)*
- *Most recent EAD (if applicable)*

3. Submit your I-765 application online

Instructions for the USCIS Online System

1. Go to https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
2. Click “File Online”
3. Choose the “File Online” button for the I-765



Tips for filing online can be found here!

How to Use USCIS Online System

For full instructions regarding the USCIS Online System, please view USCIS 'How to File a Form Online' page here.

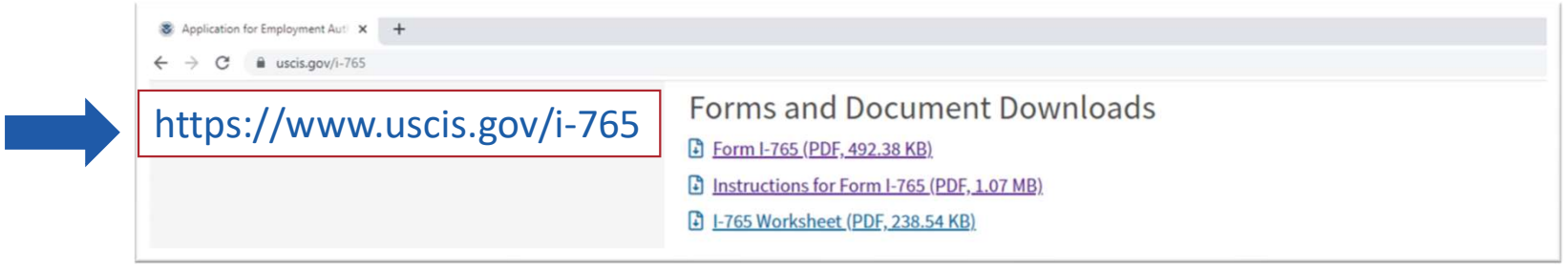
This page includes how to:

- Create a USCIS online account
- Upload evidence and evidence file requirements
- Digitally sign your form
- Pay the filing fee
- Respond to Requests for Evidence
- Check the status of your case
- Receive a decision
- Troubleshoot browser errors
- Reset/change password

IF you are going to apply via the mail…

Note: We *do not* advise you to apply via mail!

Always download the current Form I-765 **directly** from the USCIS website.



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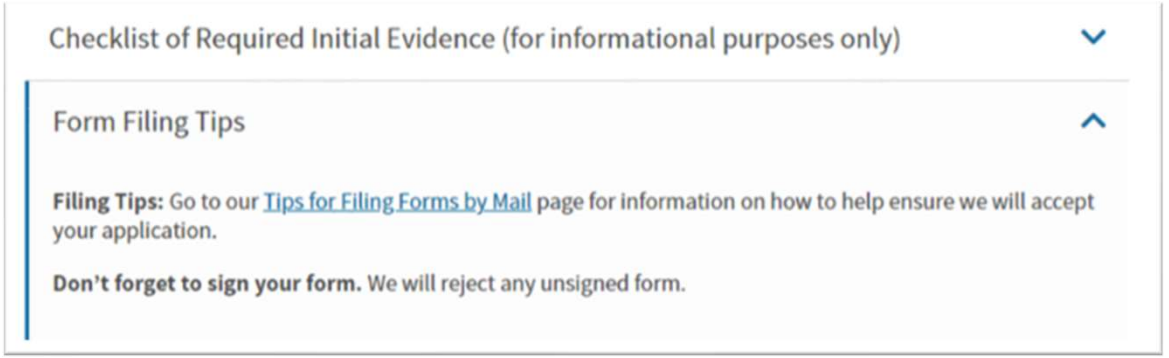
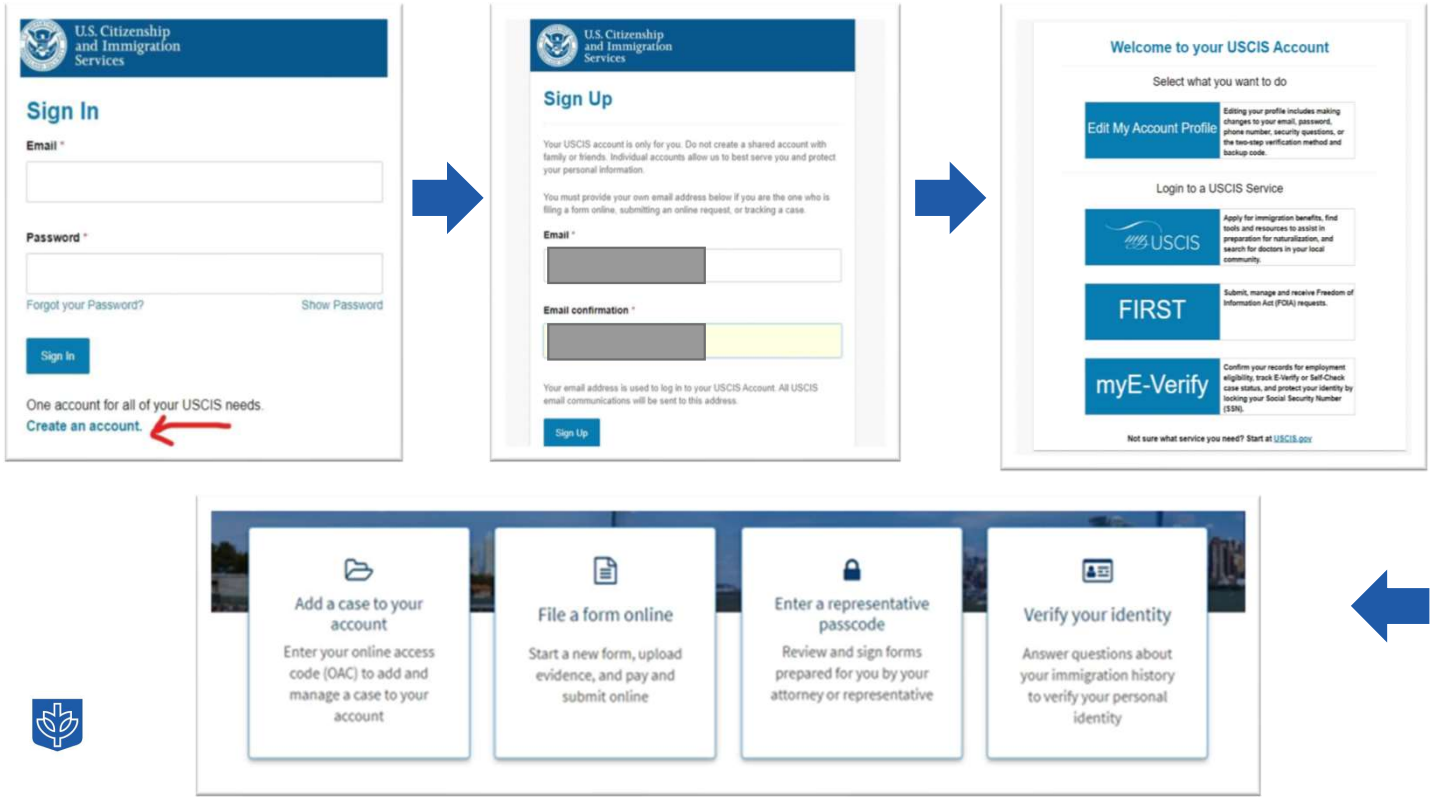


Completing the I-765: USCIS Account Setup



If you do not yet have an account, select "Create an Account" on the Sign In page and follow the steps to create a USCIS account. At the welcome screen, select "My USCIS" and select "I am an applicant, petitioner, or requestor" as your account type. Finally, select "File a form online" and use the drop-down menu to select the I-765 as the form; click "Start form."

Completing the I-765: USCIS Account Setup

Completing the I-765: Required Information

Basis of eligibility: Select the appropriate choice from the drop-down menu

(c)(3)(A) Pre-Completion OPT

(c)(3)(B) Post-Completion OPT

If you are unsure of your reason for applying, contact your ISS Advisor!

Answer the questions about your degree, your employer's E-Verify information, and premium processing.

Reason for applying: Select "Permission to accept employment."

Preparer and interpreter information: A preparer is an attorney who can help you with the I-765 application. An interpreter is someone who helps translate the form into a language you understand better than English. If you used a preparer or interpreter, answer "yes" and include their information; otherwise answer "no."

Your Name: Please list your full legal name as it appears on your passport (the spelling and order should match). It's best to list your family (last) name in ALL CAPS. If you have several given names and do not have space to list all of them, that is okay.

Other Names Used: You only need to complete this item if you have had a legal name change while studying in the U.S.

Phone Number and Email: Enter a U.S. phone number and email address that you check often. If the email you use here is different from the email(s) listed in Campus Connect, please add it to your Campus Connect profile.

Mailing address: The U.S. mailing address you list here is where your new EAD card will be mailed. This address needs to be valid for at least the next 3 months. If you think you may move in the months after you mail the application, use a reliable friend or family member's address to receive your EAD. You may also rent and use a P.O. Box (see USPS.com for more information). **Do not use the ISS address**. If you are using an address other than your own, use "c/o" to indicate that your mail is being delivered "in care of" the resident of that address. For example, c/o Friend's Street Name, Apt #, Chicago, IL, 60604. Otherwise , USCIS will think that is your new address, and it will conflict with the address showing in SEVIS (database).

Note, USCIS does not forward mail when applicants move. USPS will simply return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable. If your name does not appear on the c/o address you list, USPS may also return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable. Starting April 2, 2018, USCIS will destroy EAD cards returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service after 60 business days if USCIS is not contacted by the document's intended recipient to provide the correct address.

U.S. Physical Address: If your mailing address is different from your physical address (the address where you currently reside/sleep), select "no" and list your physical address. This address should also match your U.S. home address in Campus Connect (so ISS can link it to your SEVIS record). If the U.S. mailing address you listed is the same as your U.S. physical address, then answer "yes."

Completing the I-765: Required Information

Gender and marital status: Answer according to what best describes you.

Birth information: Answer according to what best describes you.

Country of citizenship: Select the country or countries of which you are a citizen. If you are a citizen of multiple countries, use the "+Add Country" button.

Form I-94 Arrival/ Departure Record Number: Use your current I-94 number. This is the 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your paper I-94 card or on your electronic I-94 record: https:// i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search

Date of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your paper I-94 card, noted in your electronic I-94 record, and in your passport admission stamp (if you have one).

Place of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is found on your passport admission stamp (usually as a code like "CHI" for Chicago). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, enter the name and the city where you entered the U.S.

Status of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the status you held when you last entered the U.S. Most students entered in F 1 status,however, you may have initially entered the U.S. with a different visa/status e.g.as a B 1 visitor or H 1B work visa and later changed your status to F 1 student with USCIS.

Passport and Travel Document Information: Enter your passport number and expiration date when prompted. Leave the travel document number and travel document expiration fields blank.

Country that issued your passport: The country that issued your passport is the same as the country that issued your citizenship. Note, if you happened to renew your passport at a Consulate/Embassy in a different country, this does not change the country of issuance.

Current Immigration Status: Your current immigration status should be F1 student. **If not, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.**

A-Number: Provide the USCIS number on the front of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) *if you have one*.

USCIS Online Account Number: If this is your first time completing a USCIS form using the e-File format, check the box for "I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number." If you have filed a USCIS form using the e-File format, find your account number on your USCIS profile page.

Completing the I-765: Evidence and Additional Information Sections

Social Security Number (SSN) Related Questions: If you do not have an SSN, then this is your opportunity to request it. If, however, you already have an SSN, then it is yours for life and you should inform USCIS that you do not want the SSA to issue you the SS card.

2 x 2 photo of you: Carefully read the detailed instructions provided on this page before uploading your photo. Be sure to follow the link provided to the Department of State's photo composition tools if you need to edit the photo in any way (i.e. cropping, rotating, resizing, etc.). **Do not skip this section.**

Form I-94 or Passport: Carefully follow the detailed instructions provided on this page.

Employment Authorization Document AND Government ID: If you already have an employment authorization document (also called an EAD card), upload it AND your passport on this page. If you do not have an EAD card yet, simply upload your passport. As stated on this page, your picture, name, and date of birth must be clearly visible.

Form I-20: Carefully follow the detailed instructions on this page to properly upload your I-20. **The I-20 MUST be signed by you and your advisor on the first page and have a OPT endorsement on the second page.** **If you do not have an OPT endorsement on the second page, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.**

College Degree: Upload your official transcripts showing your STEM degree conferral. Your official transcript must be requested from DePaul Central here: https://offices.depaul.edu/depaul-central/records/transcripts/Pages/default.aspx

Institution Accreditation: You only need to complete this part if you are applying for STEM OPT based on a previous degree you received. This is very rare--please consult your ISS advisor immediately if this applies to you.

Additional Information: You only need to complete this section if you have had other SEVIS ID numbers before. If this applies to you, click "add a response" and select the below drop-down options.

In the additional information text box, type the following with information that is relevant to you:

> "Previous SEVIS ID: SEVIS ID: NXXXXXXXXXX
> Program Start Date –Program End Date
> Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD, etc.)"

Important Reminders

- Application must be **RECEIVED** by USCIS by last day of grace period or it will be denied
  - 12:00 pm Coordinated Universal Time (around 6 hours ahead of CST)
- If you receive a “Request for Evidence” (RFE), **contact your ISS advisor immediately to assist you**
- **You may not begin working until your OPT application is approved and the start date has passed**

OPT Reporting Requirements: How to Report

- If/when USCIS approves your OPT application, the government will create an **SEVP Portal** account for you so you can access/review/edit your information directly in SEVIS. You should receive an email notification regarding the SEVP portal from the government shortly after your OPT start-date.
- This e-mail will go to the *preferred e-mail address* you have listed in Campus Connect, likely this will be your DPU e-mail account.
- Students must make the SEVP Portal Account within 30 days of their OPT start-date.
- For detailed information on using your SEVP Portal and troubleshooting assistance, please review the SEVP Portal Help page.
- Failure to report employment within 90 days of your OPT start-date may lead to automatic status termination in SEVIS.
- If you would like an updated I-20 showing this new information, you can request a I-20 reprint from ISS.

SEVP Portal Common Questions:

I did not receive an e-mail from SEVP.

- Please check your spam/junk inbox for an e-mail from do-not-reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov. This e-mail will go the e-mail address listed in SEVIS; which will match your preferred e-mail address in Campus Connect.

My OPT is approved but I did not receive an e-mail.

- This e-mail is generated on your OPT Start-date. In the event that your OPT application is approved prior to the start-date, you will need to wait for the start-date to receive the e-mail.

What information do I need to report?

- Students on active OPT must report any changes to their personal or employment information to the SEVP Portal within ten days of the change.

What do I do if I am locked out of my SEVP account?

- Please review this video for assistance.

Maintaining F-1 status on Active OPT

- You are required to report changes to your personal and employment information **within 10 days** of any change. This includes getting a new employer, if your site of activity changes, if your mailing address changes, and/or supervisor information changes.
- When **explaining how your employment relates** to your degree/major field of study showing on the I-20 form, list specific skills, knowledge, or theories you learned at DePaul that you will utilize on the job. Note, stating your job duties alone is not sufficient. Please explain **how** your duties relate to your degree/major field of study; you can relate them to the courses in your transcript. Stating your employer/company's nature of business is also not sufficient, since all organizations hire employees with various degrees and skill sets. Please visit this form for examples.
  - There is a 1,000 character limit for this answer.
- The **employer address** should be the address the student reports to for work. If working at a client site, which is different from the employer address, please report this in SEVP. If you work remotely, please update the address where you will be physically working.
  - Remote work is allowed as long as you continue to comply with the regulatory requirements seen in 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)
- Please **keep a good record** of your job offer letter(s); print-outs of your course syllabus; Department of Labor's description: https://www.onetonline.org/ that best matches your position; as well as job postings of similar or comparable positions showing the required/preferred education in case the government later questions the direct relationship between your OPT employment and your degree. The more documentation you have, the better.

Personal Information:

1. Legal Name
2. Email Address
3. Residential Address
4. Mailing Address
5. Email Address
6. Telephone Number

Employment Information:

1. Employer/company name
2. Employer/company address
3. Employment start date
4. Employment end date (when applicable)
5. EIN (Employer Identification Number)
6. Supervisor Name/phone number/email address
7. Explain how employment directly relates to degree/major field of study showing on I-20 form