Optional Practical Training Workshop

Office of International Services
Fall 2026

Missouri State
INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Updated October 12, 2026

Missouri State | INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Roadmap of Workshop

1. Overview of OPT
2. Timelines*
3. Determining Eligibility
4. Form I-765 & Form I-539*
5. Eligible Employment & the Job Search
6. Requirements After Approval
7. After OPT – What comes next?

Missouri State | INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Disclaimer *

You will see many asterisks * throughout this presentation. This is due to constantly changing government rules and regulations. Much information remains hypothetical until the new rule is fully implemented and further federal guidance is provided.

This workshop presentation was last updated October 12, 2026.

What is Optional Practical Training?

THREE TYPES

- **Pre-Completion OPT – prior to graduation (uncommon)**
  - Form I-765 category (C03A)
- **Post-Completion OPT – apply for this first**
  - Form I-765 category (C03B)
- **STEM OPT Extension – eligible students apply later**
  - 24-month extension of already approved OPT
  - Form I-765 Category (C03C)

What is Post-Completion OPT?

POST-COMPLETION OPT (CATEGORY C03B)

- Temporary (12-months maximum) off-campus employment authorization for eligible students in F-1 status
  - Post-graduation benefit of degree completion
  - Does not change your visa status
  - Does not require work visa sponsorship
- Allows you to gain real-world experience in your major field of study
- Designated School Official (DSO) recommends you for OPT
- Student files to and is approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Timelines

WHEN TO APPLY: 90 DAYS BEFORE GRADUATION & 60* DAYS AFTER

Sept. 12, 2026
First day to apply to USCIS

→

Dec. 11, 2026
Graduation & Program End Date

→

Feb. 9, 2027
*End of Grace Period & Last day to apply

- Applying prior to graduation is strongly recommended
- Decisions from USCIS can take 4 to 5 months on average
- Only apply if you are confident you will complete degree
- Delays should be expected – do not work until fully approved!

Timelines

SELECTING A *REQUESTED* START DATE – NOT GUARANTEED

*Range of allowable *requested* start dates

Dec. 11, 2026
Graduation & Program End Date

Dec. 12, 2026
*60-day grace period begins

→

Feb. 9, 2027
*End of grace period & Last day to apply

- For start date, consider business days and avoid holidays
- Consider personal needs (rest, relocation) and your confidence in securing employment/training
- Requested end date is one year later, minus one day
- Dates cannot be modified once application is submitted

Eligibility Requirements

12-MONTH POST-COMPLETION OPT

- ✓On track to complete a degree program in valid F-1 status
  - ✓Exception for thesis-based graduate students
- ✓Must be physically present in the U.S.
- ✓Fully enrolled in U.S. for at least 1 academic year before beginning OPT
- ✓If you have done Curricular Practical Training/CPT:
  - ✓Cannot exceed 364 days of full-time CPT at current degree level
- ✓Cannot be previously approved for OPT at current degree level

- ➢*Offer of employment not required before applying*
- ➢*SSN application no longer included within the Form I-765*
- ➢*New travel bans and *<u>USCIS memorandum</u> may affect adjudication*

**Implementation of the new rule was paused on Sept. 14, 2026. Previous F-1 regulations remain in effect currently.

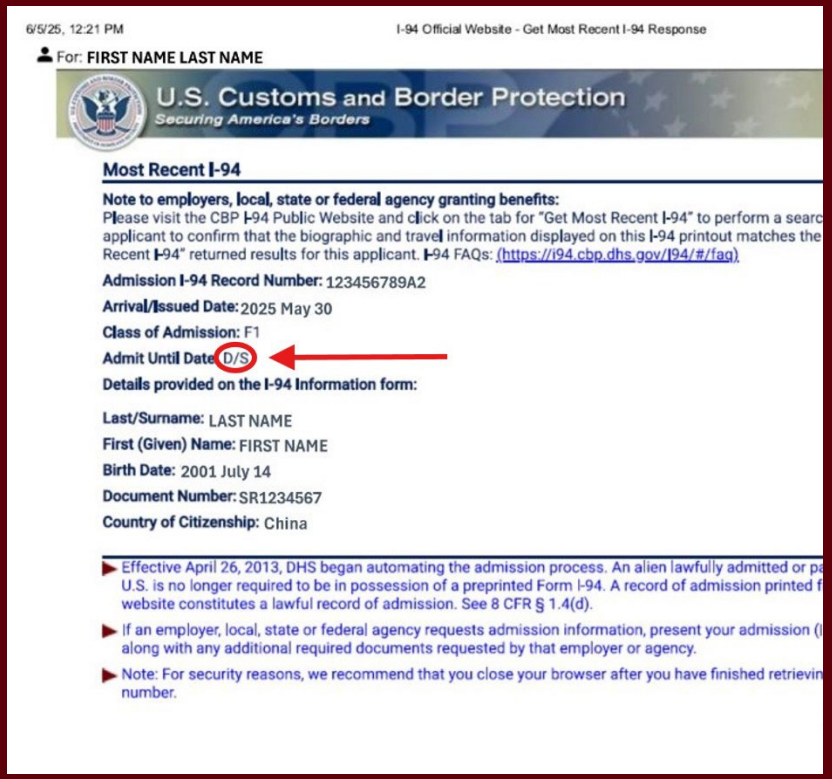
*Form I-539 Extension of Stay (EOS)

- New federal rule goes into effect on Sept. 15, 2026:
  - *Final Rule: Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedure*
- In addition to the OPT application, will also require some students to file the Form I-539, Application to Extend Nonimmigrant Status, and pay the associated $420 filing fee.
- A short-term exception to the EOS application exists within the transition provisions:
  - "For current F students admitted under duration of status and present in the United States on Sept. 15, 2026, and who timely file for post-completion OPT or STEM OPT by March 18, 2027: These students do not need to apply for an EOS."
- Check I-94 Record to determine if transition provision applies to you. (Look for "D/S" versus a fixed "admit until date.")

**Implementation of the new rule was paused on Sept. 14, 2026. Previous F-1 regulations remain in effect currently.

Reviewing the I-94 Record

- Arrival date
  - Before or after Sept. 15?
- Class of admission
  - Always F1
- Admit Until Date
  - D/S or fixed end date?



6/5/25, 12:21 PM I-94 Official Website - Get Most Recent I-94 Response

For: FIRST NAME LAST NAME

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Securing America's Borders

Most Recent I-94

Note to employers, local, state or federal agency granting benefits:
Please visit the CBP I-94 Public Website and click on the tab for "Get Most Recent I-94" to perform a searc applicant to confirm that the biographic and travel information displayed on this I-94 printout matches the Recent I-94" returned results for this applicant. I-94 FAQs: (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/faq)

Admission I-94 Record Number: 123456789A2
Arrival/Issued Date: 2025 May 30
Class of Admission: F1
Admit Until Date: D/S
Details provided on the I-94 Information form:

Last/Surname: LAST NAME
First (Given) Name: FIRST NAME
Birth Date: 2001 July 14
Document Number: SR1234567
Country of Citizenship: China

- Effective April 26, 2013, DHS began automating the admission process. An alien lawfully admitted or pa U.S. is no longer required to be in possession of a preprinted Form I-94. A record of admission printed f website constitutes a lawful record of admission. See 8 CFR § 1.4(d).
- If an employer, local, state or federal agency requests admission information, present your admission (along with any additional required documents requested by that employer or agency.
- Note: For security reasons, we recommend that you close your browser after you have finished retrievin number.

**Implementation of the new rule was paused on Sept. 14, 2026. Previous F-1 regulations remain in effect currently.

*Form I-539 Extension of Stay (EOS), continued

- Determine if the transition provision applies to you.

Admitted with D/S and applying before March 18, 2027:

No I-539 required.

Admitted with a fixed end date:

Applying after March 18, 2027:

You must also submit the I-539.

How to Apply for OPT

STEP 1: REQUEST OPT I-20

- Complete the electronic **OPT I-20 Request** through the International Student Portal.
  1. Choose full-time (more than 20 hrs/wk) or part-time
  2. Choose a requested start date in *60-day grace period
  3. List academic advisor as the "Approver" to confirm program information and graduation eligibility
  4. Pay $75 non-refundable OPT I-20 processing fee
  5. Apply for graduation (Office of the Registrar)

STEP 2: CREATE USCIS ACCOUNT AND FILE I-765

- Create online USCIS account . File Form I-765.

1. Category: Post-Completion OPT (**C 3 B**)
2. Reason: "Initial permission to accept employment"
3. Continue answering questions in application
4. Importance of the Mailing Address – USPS Address Tool

STEP 3: UPLOAD REQUIRED EVIDENCE

1. *U.S. Style **Passport Photo**
   - New USCIS Photo Policy – Biometrics Appointment required
2. *Most recent **I-94 Arrival Record**
   - Class of Admission should be F-1
3. Employment Authorization Document OR **Government ID**
   - Valid passport ID page with name, expiration, and photo; and/or previous EAD card if applicable
4. Previously Authorized CPT (from current degree level) or OPT
   - Use CPT I-20s and/or previous OPT I-20s + previous EAD cards
5. Form I-20 with OPT Recommendation
   - sign in blue ink and upload all 3 pages
   - **OPT I-20 only valid for 30 days after issuance by DSO**

***Note: a valid F-1 visa is not required evidence in the OPT application.**

STEP 3, CONTINUED: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Optional "Additional Information" Section not required but can be helpful to add context, if you have:

1. Previous CPT (indicate dates, degree level, full/part-time, etc.)
2. Previous OPT (indicate dates, degree level, full/part-time, etc.)
3. Changes to your name, SEVIS ID, passport, etc.
   - indicate previous SEVIS IDs you have had
   - indicate if you have renewed your passport and provide old number and expiration date

STEP 4: REVIEW & SUBMIT

- **Review** application for accuracy, pay filing fee(s), and submit.
  - Required and nonrefundable fee: **$470** (online) or **$520** (paper)
    - Optional $1,780 Premium Processing fee for expedited processing/decision (30 business days)
    - Note that Premium Processing is not an option for the Form I-539.

**Fees correspond to current version of USCIS Form G-1055 Fee Schedule*

**Implementation of the new rule was paused on Sept. 14, 2026. Previous F-1 regulations remain in effect currently.

STEP 5: SUBMIT *FORM I-539 EXTENSION OF STAY APPLICATION

- Review your I-94 to confirm if you are also expected to submit the Form I-539 EOS application.
- More information will be provided later, including:
  - The filing process and timeline
  - Required documentation
  - DSO responsibilities
- Application can be filed online and currently costs $420.
  - No Premium Processing option.
- USCIS has stated that it will adjudicate the Form I-765 and Form I-539 simultaneously.

Applying for OPT

STEP-BY-STEP SUMMARY:

Step 1	Submit OPT I-20 Request and pay processing fee.
Step 2	Create myUSCIS account and file Form I-765 application.
Step 3	Answer questions, upload evidence, and review.
Step 4	Submit application and pay filing fee(s).
(Step 5)	(If required, file *Form I-539 EOS application and pay filing fee.)

After Submission of I-765

- Online applicants automatically receive an electronic Receipt Notice in Documents tab.
  - Later, you will receive a Form I-797C paper Receipt Notice at your mailing address.
- USCIS lists estimated processing time on website.
- Do not leave the U.S. and do not start working.

Types of Employment

EMPLOYMENT/TRAINING MUST BE:

- **MORE THAN 20 HOURS PER WEEK**
- **DIRECTLY RELATED TO MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY**

- Paid full-time employment
  - Multiple employers (e.g., 2 part-time jobs)
  - Short-term multiple employers (performing artists)
  - Work for hire: contract employment
  - Employment through an agency
  - Self-employed business owner
- Unpaid employment: volunteers or unpaid interns; cannot violate any labor laws
- Unemployment: 90-day limit for Post-Completion OPT

After OPT Approval

- Standalone Approval Notice uploaded to USCIS account
  - Create SEVP portal account on/after approved start date
- I-797 Approval Notice sent to mailing address
  - EAD card will arrive approximately 1-2 business weeks later
- "Valid From" date on EAD is when employment can begin
  - Do not work until you have the physical EAD card in hand
  - The "unemployment clock" begins on the "Valid From" date
- Report Approval to International Services & provide EAD copy
- International Travel now possible – be cautious.

Reporting Requirements

TWO IMPORTANT PORTALS – MAINTAIN ACCESS WHILE ON OPT

- **SEVP Portal** – tool for reporting employer information directly to SEVIS Record

  ...and...

- **MSU International Student Portal** – report approval, upload EAD card, request updated Form I-20, etc.

Reporting Requirements

WHAT TO REPORT:	→	WHEN TO REPORT:
Any changes to address and phone number		
How the employment relates to field of study		Per regulations, all changes must be reported within **10 calendar days**.
Employer's name, address, and taxpayer ID (EIN)		
Job title, start and end dates of employment		
Full-time (must work more than 20 hours/week)		
Supervisor's name, phone #, and email address		

Special Situations

TALK TO A DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (DSO) IF…

- OPT is Approved but you do not graduate
- OPT is Denied (or *Extension of Stay is denied)
  - Review Denial Notice for reasoning
  - Can re-apply with new I-20 if within application window
- EAD Card is lost, incorrect, or not delivered
  - Apply for replacement EAD
- Withdrawing OPT application

Ending OPT Early

CONTACT A DSO FOR ADVISEMENT

Change of immigration status (H-1B)

Abandon OPT and F-1 status and depart U.S.

Begin a new program or transfer before OPT ends

After OPT Ends

AFTER COMPLETION OF APPROVED PERIOD FOR OPT

- The *60-day grace period begins after the “Valid Until” date on EAD. During that time you can:
  - Begin STEM OPT, if eligible (apply **BEFORE** OPT ends); or
  - Depart the U.S.; or
  - Begin new program within 5 months to continue F-1 status at MSU; or
  - Transfer SEVIS Record to another school that begins within 5 months
- *Note that all these actions will require a new I-539 EOS application. You are encouraged to submit that before your EAD card expires.

What is STEM OPT?

STEM OPT EXTENSION BASICS

- 24-month extension of authorized Post-Completion OPT
  - Must apply before Post-Completion OPT ends – can apply up to 90 days before and will require an I-539 EOS application.
- Degree must be in an approved STEM field.
- "Employer Specific" – one at a time; must be E-Verify.
- Vitally important that job position and responsibilities show a **clear** and **robust** connection to your **major field of study**
- Employer must help student complete a formal training plan (Form I-983) and learning objectives.
  - Must be submitted to DSO for review before applying and after any changes are made during STEM period.

International Services

Contact International Services:

- Phone: 417-836-6618
- Email: internationalservices@missouristate.edu
- Website: international.MissouriState.edu/services
- Contact MasonGaspard@MissouriState.edu to schedule appointment for case-specific advisement

Helpful Links:

- MSU Graduation Checklist
- U.S. Passport Photos
- How to create a USCIS account
- Tips for filing online forms with USCIS