OPT

A step-by-step guide

What is OPT?

- **Optional Practical Training**

- Work permission for **1 year** (with option to **extend 2 years** for **STEM** degrees)

- Purpose is to gain **experience in your field**

- One year of OPT **per degree level**
  - Must be progressively higher (i.e. bachelor → master → doctoral)

OPT Application Process

OPT Work-shop → Learn about OPT and ask any questions → Prepare App → Gather ALL required docs and forms → IES review → Get new I-20 and mail app!

Don't I need a job to apply for OPT?

NO!

- Why not??

- USCIS can take more than **three months** to review your OPT application

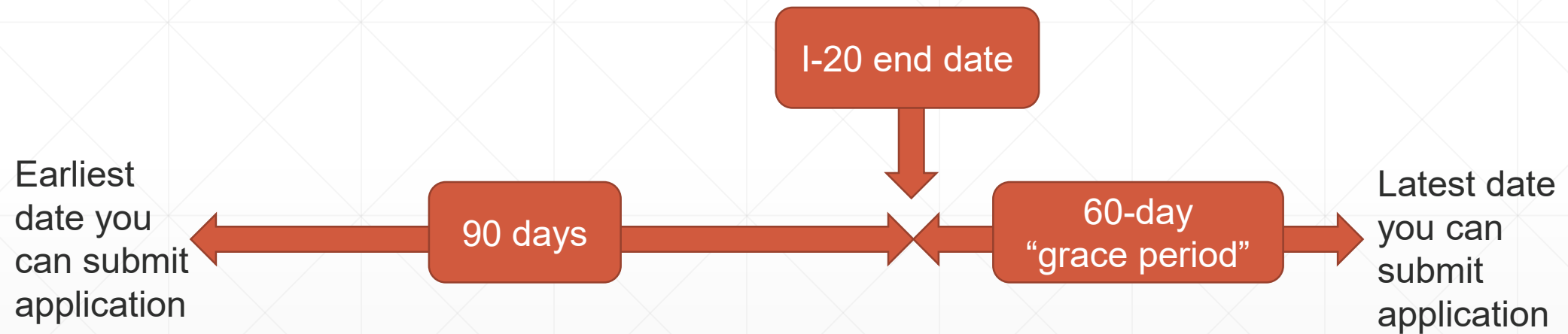- It would be **WAY TOO LATE** to apply if you waited to find a job first

When can I apply?

- Apply for OPT during your **last** semester at UMBC

- The **earliest** you can apply for OPT is **90 days** before your I-20 end date

- The **latest** you can apply for OPT is **60 days** after your I-20 end date

Approximate OPT timeline by grad term

	Spring grads	Fall grads
Earliest date	Feb 25	Sept 25
I-20 end date	**May 25**	**Dec 23**
Latest date	July 24	Feb 20

Another way to think about it

I-20 end date

90 days

60-day "grace period"
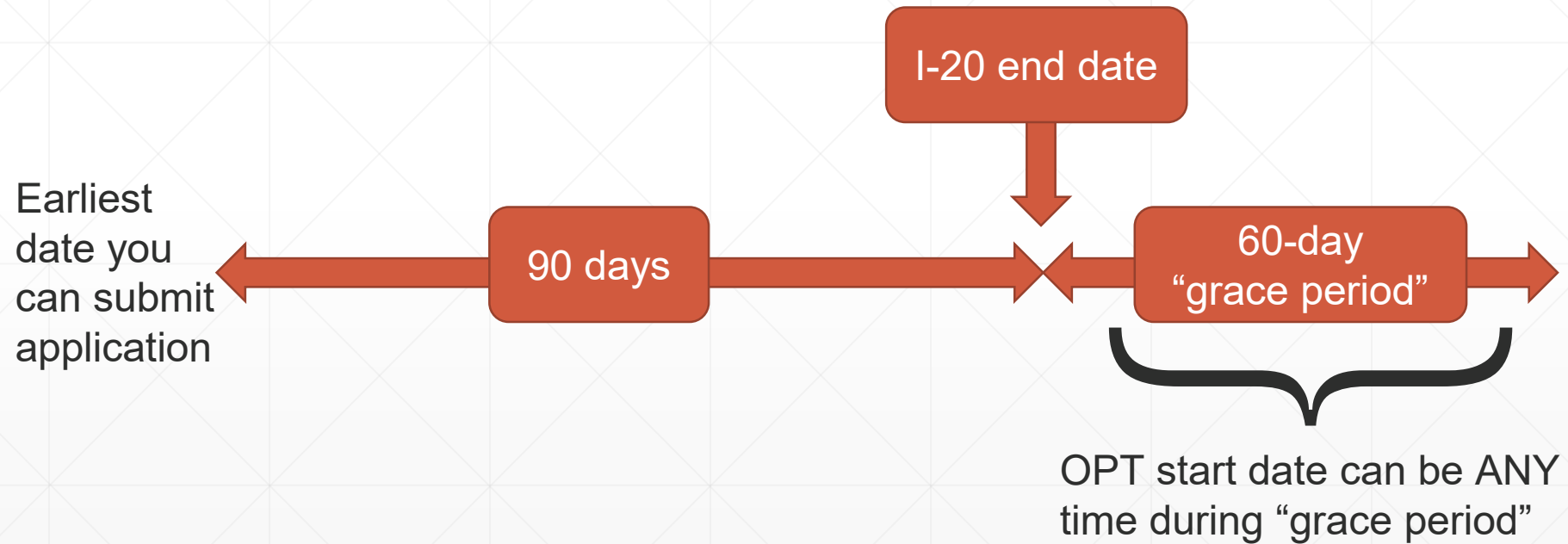
Earliest date you can submit application

Latest date you can submit application

Don't wait until it's too late!

- Remember that many other students will want to apply for OPT around the same time you do

- **OPT applications cannot be rushed**

- We process applications as they come in, **not based on your OPT start date**

- USCIS can take **more than 90 days** to review your OPT application

Choosing a start date

I-20 end date

Earliest date you can submit application

90 days

60-day "grace period"

OPT start date can be ANY time during "grace period"

If I don't have a job, how do I pick a start date?

- Based on the job market or how much job hunting you've done so far

- Allow time for **application processing** – this can take **more than 90 days**

- Consider travel and what you might do during break from school

- There is no way to guarantee uninterrupted work permission– be open and honest with employers!

- **Remember: you do not have to have a job on your OPT start date**

OK, I've chosen a start date. Now what?

1. Review the IES website for application instructions and prepare your draft Form I-765.

2. Complete and submit OPT Application through the **IES Portal**

3. Invite your academic adviser to approve your application through the **IES Portal**

4. Receive scanned OPT I-20 in your **IES Portal** account, print and sign

5. Mail application to USCIS (with tracking!)

6. Wait (patiently!) for approval

After you apply, you receive:

1. Receipt
    - Usually arrives between 2 weeks and a month after submission
    - *Since Fall 2020, receipts have been taking over 2 months to arrive*
    - <u>PAY FOR TRACKING</u> when you ship your application to USCIS so you know it arrives

2. Approval notice
    - Usually arrives after 3 - 4 months

3. EAD card
    - Usually arrives about 1 week after approval notice

    If you submit form G-1145 you should also receive email and text updates

I'm approved!

Way to go, you!

What are the rules governing my OPT time?

- You **must** be **working!**

- The expectation is that you will be working during your year of OPT

- You also have up to **90 days** of **unemployment** time, meaning it is OK not to have a job in your SEVIS record for up to 3 of your 12 months of OPT

- All jobs during OPT must be **directly related** to your UMBC **degree program**

- Part-time (< 20 hrs) or Full-time, paid or unpaid — all OK during OPT
  - You must be working at least 20 hours per week (combined) to meet these requirements

What are the rules governing my OPT time?

- Unlike CPT, you are allowed to change jobs at any time

- However, you **must** update your SEVP Portal account whenever you:
  - change jobs
  - get a new job
  - end an earlier job
  - change your address

- SEVP Portal: https://sevp.ice.gov/opt/

SEVP Portal

SEVP Portal | Student and Exchange Visitor Program Portal

Sign In

Attention: Only students who have OPT approved may use the SEVP Portal. You must create an account and set a password before using this log in page. Go to Portal Help for more information.

Email

Password

Login   Reset Password

This system supports the following browsers: IE11 and above, Mozilla 38 and above, Google Chrome Version 53.0.2785.116 m and above, Safari OS X and above

Department of Homeland Security Consent

You are about to access a Department of Homeland Security computer system. This computer system and data therein are property of the U.S. Government and provided for official U.S. Government information and use. There is no expectation of privacy when you use this computer system. The use of a password or any other security measure does not establish an expectation of privacy. By using this system, you consent to the terms set forth in this notice. You may not process classified national security information on this computer system. Access to this system is restricted to authorized users only. Unauthorized access, use, or modification of this system or of data contained herein, or in transit to/from this system, may constitute a violation of section 1030 of title 18 of the U.S. Code and other criminal laws. Anyone who accesses a Federal computer system without authorization or exceeds access authority, or obtains, alters, damages, destroys, or discloses information, or prevents authorized use of information on the computer system, may be subject to penalties, fines or imprisonment. This computer system and any related equipment is subject to monitoring for administrative oversight, law enforcement, criminal investigative purposes, inquiries into alleged wrongdoing or misuse, and to ensure proper performance of applicable security features and procedures. DHS may conduct monitoring activities without further notice.

SEVP Portal

Employer #:	Employer Name	Date	Errors
722631	Finmec…	7/1/2017 - 6/14/2018	—

☐ Self Employed

Employer Name: Required

Enter the legal name of the company that hired you.

Finmeccanica

Employer Address: Required

Address:

Enter the address where you work. Enter the street address in the top line. Use Address 2 line for the name of the building, if it is normally part of the address. See https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov for more details.

320 23rd St S

Health insurance

This is **VERY serious:**

- You will no longer be automatically enrolled in UMBC's health insurance

- You can choose to remain on UMBC's plan by contacting uhs@umbc.edu

- You **need** to think about this! It is extremely dangerous to be in the US without health insurance. See about options your employer might have, or consider the Healthcare Marketplaces established through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)

Continuing education

- You are free to take classes during OPT

- But you may **not** begin a new **degree program**, or your OPT ends automatically

- Register for courses as a "non degree-seeking" or "visiting student"

- Degree-seeking programs would require you to transfer your SEVIS record or change your Education Level, which **automatically ends** your **OPT** approval

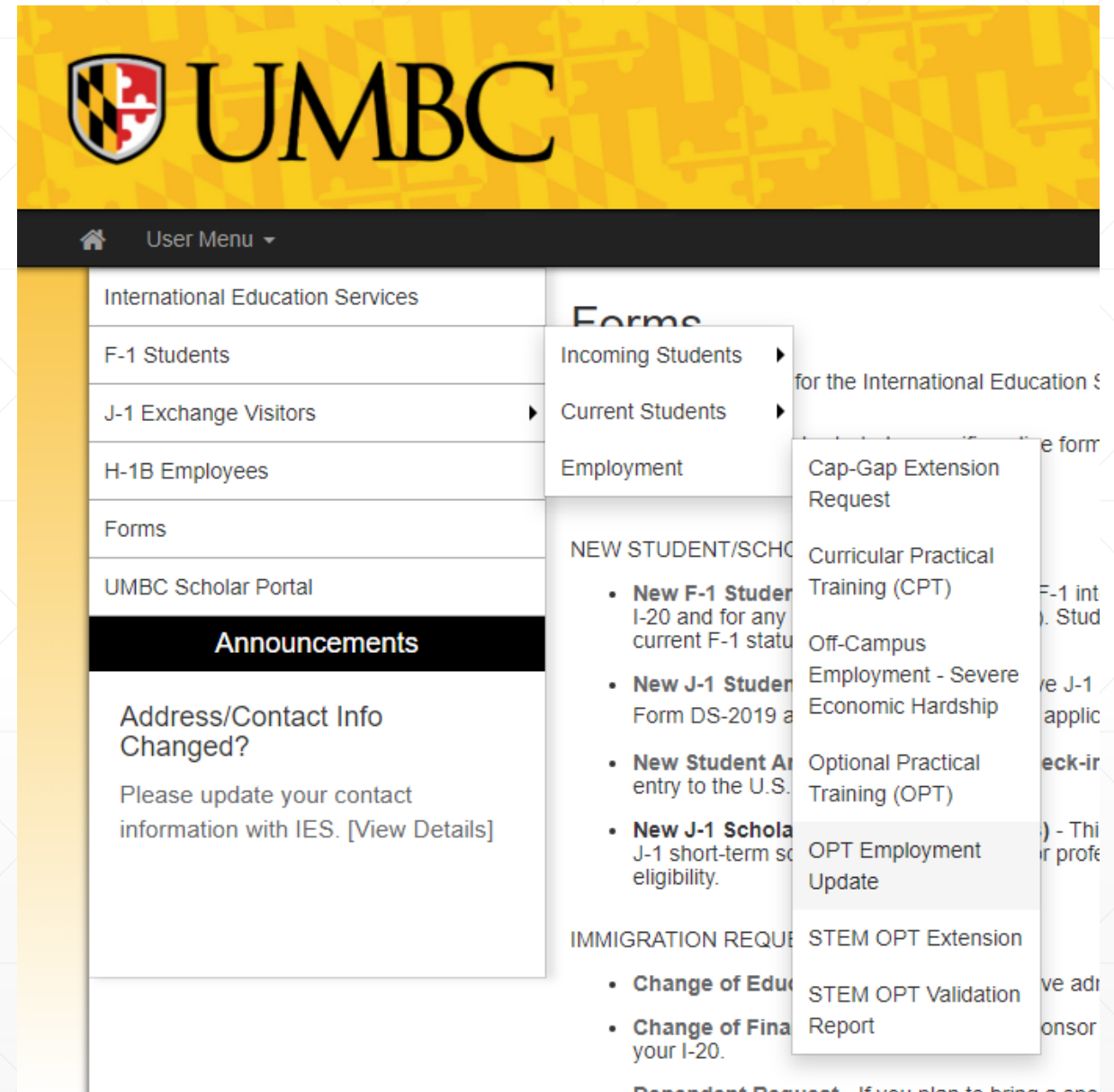# Got it. Let's do this.

Ready to complete the OPT application?

Optional Practical Training application

Visit the **IES Portal** website

ies-portal.umbc.edu

Click the [Search Forms] button on your user account, or from the **IES Portal** homepage, find the OPT application under:

F-1 Students > Employment > Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training application

You must complete ALL sections of the application before clicking "Submit."

Upload draft Form I-765
(no need to sign yet)

David M Anguish

Request:	Optional Practical Training (OPT) (F-M)
Term/Year:	Request, 2019
Dates:	TBA

Instructions

Please review and click on ALL sections of this page to confirm if each is applicable to you.

Upload a draft copy of your **Form I-765**.   Please use the **I-765 Guidelines** to help you complete the form correctly.
Address: use an address where you can receive mail over the next 3 months.
For question #16: enter the category (c)(3)(B)

Note: the OPT: Academic Adviser recommendation must also be requested from your academic/department adviser.

Once you have completed ALL sections, click the **Submit** button at the top of this page to have this record reviewed by IES staff.

Optional Practical Training application

Read and digitally sign the "Signature Documents"

Complete the OPT Student Request Form

Signature Documents

Click the following to view and digitally sign important documents to indicate your agreement and understanding.

Title	Completed
OPT Statement of Understanding	☐

Questionnaire(s)

Click the following to view and complete the following online questionnaire(s). You may begin a questionnaire and save it for later completion, but note that you must click Submit in order for the questionnaire to be logged as complete and ready for review.

Title	Completed
OPT Student Request Form	☐

Optional Practical Training application

You must send an electronic request to your academic/department adviser through the **IES Portal.**

Your adviser will verify your eligibility for OPT.
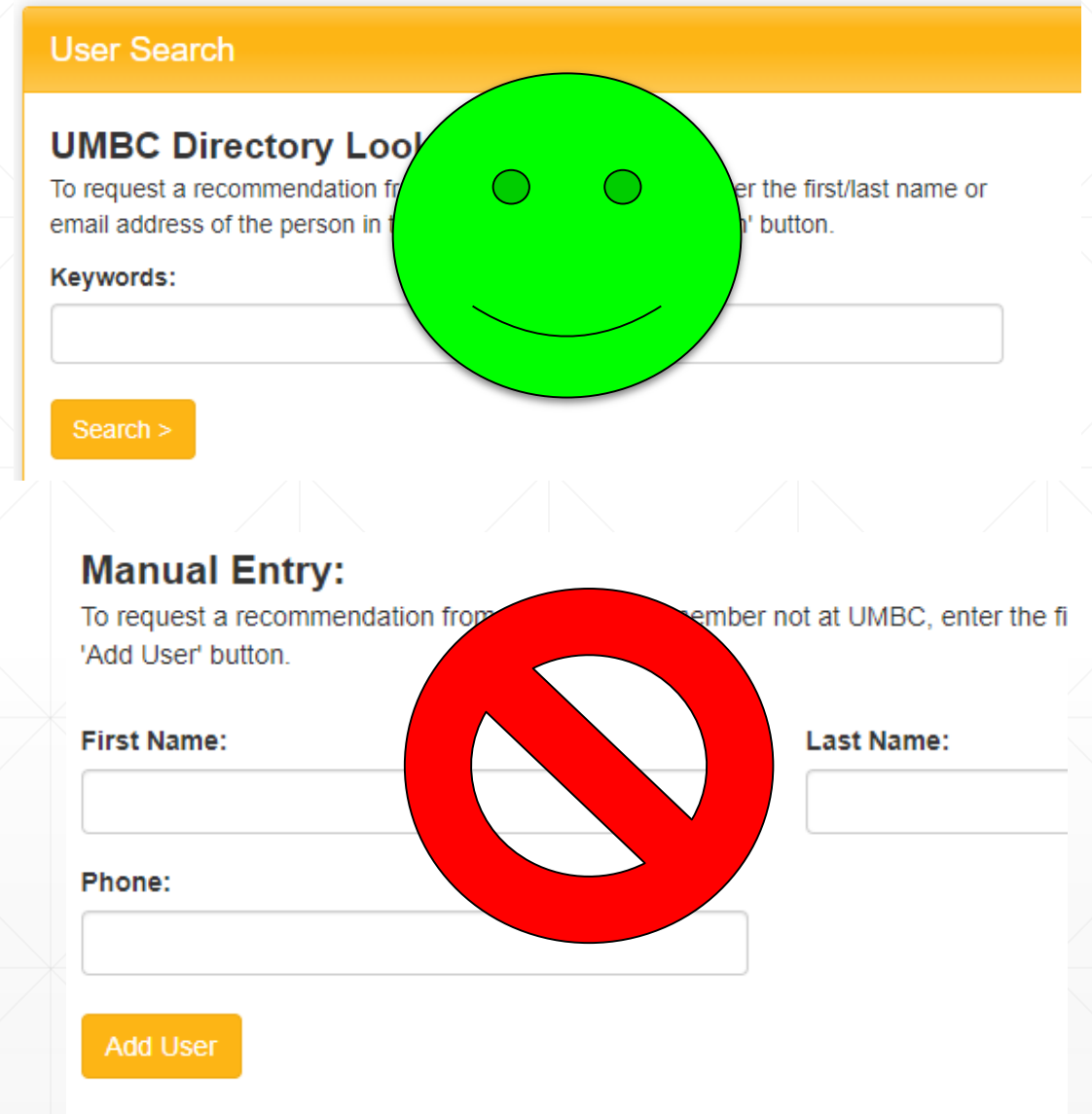
Click "Request Electronic Recommendation"

Recommendations

Requests	Completed
OPT: Academic Advisor (1 required) To apply for OPT, your academic/department advisor must verify your academic eligibility. Please click the link below to request this confirmation from your academic advisor in the directory search. - **Request Electronic Recommendation**	
1 or more required recommendations have not yet been requested.	☐

Optional Practical Training application

Use the UMBC Directory Lookup section on the next page to look up your academic adviser.

You should *only* enter your adviser's details manually if you cannot find them through the Directory Lookup.

Try NOT to use the Manual Entry feature.

OPT Document Review by IES

- If you have detailed questions or doubts about OPT– contact IES ahead of time, *before* submitting all your OPT application through the **IES Portal**.

- You are not required to visit the IES office to apply for OPT, everything can be handled through the **IES Portal**. *Our offices are closed due to COVID-19.*

- If you would like IES to review your complete assembled OPT application package, you can upload the entire application as a single PDF to the *OPT Application Review* request in the **IES Portal**.

Optional Practical Training application

Once IES has reviewed your application, the data will be sent overnight to SEVIS.

Once processed through SEVIS, we will upload your new, signed OPT I-20 to the "Attached Documents" section of your OPT application.

Attached Documents

The following files have been attached. Click the filename to download the attached document.

Form I-20
(1670_001 (1).pdf)

Form I-765
(6 May 2018 e-Statement .pdf)

You can attach documents to this record by choosing the file from your drive, selecting the type of document you are attaching, and clicking on the 'Upload' button.

[Choose File] No file chosen   - select document type - ▼

[Upload]

Assembling your OPT application package

Once you receive your signed OPT I-20 in your **IES Portal** account, you can print, sign, and include that I-20 in the OPT application package you sent to USCIS.

On the IES website, you will find a list of all the other application requirements.

In brief….

G-1145

- Fill this form out so you will receive email and text updates when USCIS takes action on your application

- We recommend that you use an email address **other than** your UMBC email address

- Make sure to use a **mobile/cell phone number** for the SMS text updates

---

Complete this form and clip it on top of the first page of your immigration form(s).

Applicant/Petitioner Full Last Name	Applicant/Petitioner Full First Name	Applicant/Petitioner Full Middle Name

Email Address	Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)

Form G-1145 09/26/14 Y

Page 1 of 1

Form I-765

- This is the primary form in your OPT application, the application for employment authorization.

- Be sure to always download the latest edition of the Form I-765 from USCIS's website: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

- **NEVER** use a form that a friend sends you or that you found on the website of an international student office or message board. These are often out of date.

- It's best to fill out the form in your browser or in Adobe Acrobat. It is *not* recommended to fill out the form by hand.

I-94

- Available online
  Search for "I-94" – choose **.gov** site

- Enter name **exactly** as it appears on your F-1 student visa

- Copy passport number and issuing country from your passport

- Click next….

Enter Your Traveler Info

* First (Given) Name :

* Last (Family) Name/Surname :

* Birth Date :

Day   Month   Year

* Passport Number :

* Passport Country of Issuance :

-- Select --

Cancel

NEXT ›

Proceed to your most recent I-94

I-94

- Available online
  Search for "I-94," choose .gov site

- Enter name **exactly** as it appears on your F-1 student visa

- Copy passport number and issuing country from your passport

- Click next….

- This is your I-94 record!

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

I-94 Admission Record

Admission (I-94) Record Number :

Most Recent Date of Entry:
[redacted] January 16

Class of Admission :
F1

Admit Until Date :
D/S

Details provided on the I-94 Information form:

1. **Last/Surname :**

2. **First (Given) Name :**

3. **Birth Date :**
[redacted] July [redacted]

4. **Passport Number :**

5. **Country of Issuance :**

I-94

- The "Admission (I-94) Record Number" will be entered on the form I-765

- You can also view your **Travel History** through this site

- The most recent entry record will also be entered on the form I-765

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

I-94 Admission Record

Admission (I-94) Record Number :

Most Recent Date of Entry:

January 16

Class of Admission :

F1

Admit Until Date :

D/S

Details provided on the I-94 Information form:

1. Last/Surname :

2. First (Given) Name :

3. Birth Date :

July

4. Passport Number :

5. Country of Issuance :

Passport and visa

- Make photocopies of your current passport and F-1 student visa

- If your F-1 visa is in an older passport, include copies of **both** old and new passport in your application

- Your F-1 visa **can** be expired

- Your passport **cannot** be expired

Forms I-20

- You should make copies of **all** the I-20s you have ever been given

- Yes, **ALL** your old I-20s

- If you cannot find one or more of your old I-20s, you should include as many as you still have

- USCIS is most concerned with I-20s that show work authorization, but remember to include all available I-20s

It's <u>very</u> important to check the USCIS website for the proper mailing address: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses

Now mail it away!

Once you have your new OPT I-20 from IES, you can submit your application

Be sure to use a courier service like FedEx, UPS, or DHL. It is NOT a good idea to use USPS currently.

Now mail it away!

Once you have your new OPT I-20 from IES, you can submit your application

After submitting your application…

- You might not receive your receipt for several months, which is why it's so important to use tracking on your OPT application shipment.

- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), a Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID), or your application is returned to you, you **MUST notify IES** as soon as possible so that we can help you to understand the response from USCIS and help you to resolve or refile, if necessary.

- There are **very tight deadlines**, so be sure to notify IES as soon as possible

- Whatever you do, do not put a denied OPT application back in the mail without talking to IES first!

Special topics

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates

- **Before** your OPT start date, the same rules apply to international travel as when you were a full-time student. You must carry your valid passport, visa, and I-20 with a travel signature not older than 1 year.

- **After** your OPT start date, you must **ALSO** carry your EAD card, a job offer letter or proof of employment, and your I-20 signature cannot be older than **six months**.

- **After** your I-20 end date but **before** your OPT start date, no US Embassy or Consulate will renew your visa

- So be sure to consult with IES regarding any travel if you do not hold a valid F-1 visa

Special topics

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates

- It can be difficult to renew your driver's license or State ID Card while your OPT application is **pending**

- When your I-20 end date has passed but your OPT start date has not yet arrived, you may have difficulty renewing your license

- Be sure to complete the **SAVE verification** online **before** you go to the MVA

- There is a link to the SAVE verification form from IES's website

Special topics

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates

- Doctoral students have some flexibility in their I-20 end dates, as many students conduct ongoing dissertation research during their OPT period

- There is a type of OPT called **pre-completion**, which, as the name suggests, is OPT authorization **before** your academic program is complete and your I-20 end date arrives

- IES generally discourages this option when **full-time CPT** is available, but we are more than happy to discuss your options of you are an eligible Ph.D. student

Special topics

1. International travel

2. MVA/DMV

3. Ph.D. end dates

After OPT

Post-practical training options

After OPT

1. STEM OPT

2. I-20 transfer

3. Change of Ed Level

4. Leave US

- Students in **approved STEM disciplines** have the option of **extending** their year of OPT an additional **two years**

- You must submit another OPT application to USCIS **before** the end date of your post-completion OPT and **no earlier** than **90 days** before that end date

- Must show you have **earned your degree** OR that you have a thesis pending (IES cannot prove this)

- Can only work for employers enrolled in E-Verify

- Must submit **I-983 Training Plan** for each and every employer you work for during STEM OPT

- See IES's website for further information about STEM OPT

After OPT

1. STEM OPT

2. I-20 transfer

3. Change of Ed Level

4. Leave US

An important note to STEM OPT applicants:

- The very long delays for STEM OPT receipts is making many students nervous.

- We have tips on our website for documents you can present to your employer to demonstrate continuing OPT work authorization while your STEM OPT application is pending and you await your receipt from USCIS.

After OPT

1. STEM OPT

2. I-20 transfer

3. Change of Ed Level

4. Leave US

- When your OPT ends (or your STEM OPT ends, if you are eligible and apply), you have **another 60-day grace period**, during which you **cannot work** but can **legally remain** in the US

- You can choose to begin a new degree program, either at UMBC through a Change of Education Level, or at another school through an I-20 transfer

- If you do not wish to begin a new program, your F-1 status requires that you leave the US within the 60-day grace period

- Instructions on changing your education level or transferring your I-20 to another school are available on IES's website

After OPT

1. STEM OPT

2. I-20 transfer

3. Change of Ed Level

4. Leave US

Questions?

Now's the time to ask!