F-1 OPT Post-Application FAQ

1. When will I hear from USCIS about my application?
If you completed a Form G-1145, you’ll first get an email and/or text message to the contact information you listed on that form. This e-notification will confirm that USCIS received your application. It can take 2-3 weeks before you get this notification.

Then, USCIS will mail a printed I-797 Notice of Action (receipt notice) to the address on your OPT application (Form I-765). The mailed receipt notice typically is delivered within 2-3 weeks after USCIS receives your application. If USCIS has any questions about your case or needs more information (this is VERY rare), they will mail an RFE (request for further evidence). An ISS advisor will help you respond to this request.

2. How can I check the status of my case with USCIS?
If you want to check the status of your case, you can visit https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do and enter your case number (found on your I-797 receipt number). You may sign up for an account on that page to request email updates. Do not be alarmed if you cannot find your case online—that does NOT mean something is wrong with your case. You may send an email to myuscissupport@uscis.dhs.gov if your receipt number isn’t found online.

3. How long will it take for my case to be approved?
You should expect USCIS to take a minimum of 90 days (from the receipt date on your I-797 receipt notice) to approve your case. Once your case is approved, USCIS will create your EAD (Employment Authorization Document), and mail it to you at the address on the Form I-765. Allow time for this process, as it can extend your wait time for your card beyond the minimum 90 days. ISS has no control of the timing of how long it takes USCIS to create cards, or how long it takes the card to reach you in the U.S. mail system.

4. My job is starting soon and I don’t have my EAD card yet. Can I start work?
You may NOT begin working before you receive your EAD from USCIS and are within the authorized dates on the card. Working before your OPT has been authorized constitutes illegal employment that will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S. You must be patient, and you must wait until you have your EAD in hand to begin your work.

5. Can my OPT application be expedited?
No. Most OPT applicants are not eligible to request that USCIS expedite their case—those requests require that very specific, very strict criteria be met.

6. Can I travel while my OPT is pending?
ISS does not recommend travel outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending. After you graduate you will NOT be allowed to re-enter the U.S. without your OPT card in addition to your valid passport, current F-1 visa stamp and the I-20 signed within the past six months. Before you graduate, you should be able to return to the U.S without your OPT card as long as it is still long in advance of your graduation. If you need to travel before receiving your EAD card, please talk with an ISS advisor before leaving the U.S.

7. When do I do my first OPT reporting?
Please report your information on the SEVP portal within ten days of your employment start date. The portal provides students the opportunity to view and update certain information found in their SEVIS records, including their address,
telephone number, and OPT employment information. Within two weeks of your approved OPT start date you will receive an email from Do-Not-Reply.SEVP@ice.dhs.gov with instructions on how to create a portal account.

Submit a new report each time you have periods of unemployment, a change in employment information, residential address change, or a change in your name. You must report using the SEVP portal within 10 days of any change.

8. When do I need to contact ISS about my OPT application or EAD card?
   - If you notice any errors in your name (spelling, order, missing name) on your I-797 receipt notice
   - If you submitted a G-1145 and you have not received an e-notification (text message and/or email) within 3-4 weeks since your application was mailed, or you received an e-notification but have not received your mailed I-797 receipt notice and it’s been more than a month since your application was mailed.
   - If your plans about OPT change:
     o you want to leave the U.S. instead of working on OPT
     o you want to pursue another degree
     o you want to change your status from F-1 to something else
     o you need to return to RIT to take more credits (i.e. you will not be course-complete by your OPT start date)
   - If your application is still pending and you have truly unavoidable travel plans outside the U.S.
   - If you find out that you are no longer eligible for OPT

9. If I am unable to find paid employment, is it possible to work on-campus as a volunteer?
   While current regulations allow work as an unpaid volunteer or intern while on OPT, it is not an option to volunteer at RIT.

   We know the hardest part is waiting for your EAD, but please be patient!
   Most OPT applications are approved without issue, but they just take time.

Have a question this FAQ doesn’t address?
Please call 585-475-6943 or email iss@rit.edu