

GORDON  CONWELL
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Application Process

- **First**, complete the “**Optional Practical Training (OPT) Request Form**,” and bring it to your International Student Advisor. Bring an offer letter from your employer if you have secured a job offer already (optional). For this meeting with your International Student Advisor, please bring all the necessary forms below for your advisor’s review. During this meeting, your advisor will update your I-20 in SEVIS with an OPT request and then print you a new, updated I-20 which notes that you are seeking OPT authorization. Your advisor will also review your complete application packet for USCIS.

- **Second**, prepare your **complete “Application Packet” for submission to USCIS** (the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services), and mail it to USCIS before the deadline. You need to submit to USCIS these items:
 - New I-20**: Issued by your International Student Advisor after you submit the OPT Request Form. This will include the updated OPT request on page 2. *MUST CONTAIN YOUR SIGNATURE.*
 - Completed I-765 Form (original)**: To complete this form, see “Tips for Successfully Completing the I-756.”
 - Payment**: Check or money order for \$410.00 payable to “Department of Homeland Security”
 - Photos**: Two passport photos. In pencil on the back of the photos, lightly write your LAST NAME (in CAPS) and First Name.
 - I-94**: Print your I-94 card. You may retrieve using the following link: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>
 - Passport**: Photocopy the identity page of your passport.
 - Previous I-20s**: Photocopy any previously issued I-20s, including I-20s from any other schools.
 - Previous EADs**: Photocopy any previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (EADs).

We recommend sending your application by certified mail. Mail your application to the following address:

By Mail:
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

By Express Mail or Courier Service:
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Highway 121
Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

IMPORTANT DEADLINE:

Your complete application for post-completion OPT must be received by USCIS before the end of your 60-day grace period, which comes after your program end date.

*Please note that you may submit your application for OPT to USCIS as early as **90 days** before your program end date. Once you receive the new I-20 with OPT recommended, you must submit within **30 days**.*

- **Third**, you should wait for USCIS to approve your application for OPT. In most cases, it will take the USCIS approximately **3 months to process your application**. Your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to the address on the I-765 (USPS will not forward this mail so please use an address that will not change). You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD from USCIS, even if the start date you requested has passed. Working before your OPT has been authorized by USCIS constitutes illegal employment and will jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

- **Fourth**, you may begin work only after receiving your EAD card.

Before you apply for OPT

Before you apply for OPT, you must have been enrolled in your degree program for **at least one full academic year** and must be in **valid F-1 status** at the time of application. While it is recommended that you secure a job or have a job offer before applying, you **can apply for OPT without a job or job offer**. However, it is important that you consider the job prospects you do have and whether you are confident you will be able to secure employment. It is always best either to have a job offer or a firm job prospect at the time of application because periods of OPT cannot be withdrawn once approved. Remember that the maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 OPT status is 12 months per degree level. For students with a secured position at the time of application, please ensure that you have **an offer letter** from your prospective employer stating the following:

1. Employer's name and address
2. Your name and position title
3. A brief description of what you will do in this position [This is used to make sure the job is related to your degree.]
4. That you will be working 20 or more hours per week ("full time") [This is a requirement for post-completion OPT.]
5. Your supervisor's name and signature
6. The date your employer issued the offer letter

Tips for successfully completing the I-765 Form (if you have never applied for OPT before):

- **First**, download the form here: <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>
- **Second**, complete the form, using the following tips.

Part 1: Put a check mark next to 1.a. "Initial permission to accept employment."

Part 2, section 1-2: In 1.a., write your family/last name in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. In 1.b., write your first name with only the first letter in caps. If applicable, write middle name with only the first letter in caps in 1.c. Section 2 is only for individuals who have legally changed their name.

Part 2, section 5: Use a mailing address that will not change. Many students are in transition when they apply for OPT. It is important to give the government an address that will not change anytime during next few months. This can be your address if it will not change. It can also be a friend or your church. You may also use the following address: 130 Essex Street – Box SLS, South Hamilton, MA 01982

Part 2, section 7: Fill out if your physical address is different than the mailing address in section 5.

Part 2, section 8: Leave this blank unless you have an A-number.

Part 2, section 9: Skip unless you have previously filed a petition through ELIS.

Part 2, section 13.a.: If you already have a SSN, then answer yes and write your number in 13.b. If you do not already have a SSN, then mark no and leave 9b blank and move to section 18.

Part 2, section 13.b.: Answer yes if you do not have a SSN and fill through 17.b.

Part 2, section 21.a.: This is your I-94 number. You may retrieve using the following link:

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>

Part 2, section 26: You can find this number on your I-20.

Part 2, section 27: Indicate whether you wish to pursue Pre or Post Completion Optional Practical Training

- "(C) (3) (A)"- Pre-completion practical training (this means OPT while you are also taking classes)
- "(C) (3) (B)"- Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (this means OPT after you graduate – most GCTS students)

Part 2, section 28: Skip to Part 3.

Part 3: Select 1.a. and fill 3-5 and 7.a.-b.