



International Student  
& Scholar Services  
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



# Optional Practical Training Workshop (OPT)

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A woman with glasses is sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The background is a solid orange color.

## IMPORTANT

**DO NOT** apply online Pre-OPT, Post-OPT or STEM Extension with USCIS until you have received the Form I-20 with the DSO recommendation. Filing without an endorsed I-20 may get your application denied.

**OPT is recommended by ISSS but authorization is granted through USCIS. Official authorization comes in the form of an ID card known as an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).**

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### **How to earn OPT:**

If you complete a Bachelors, Masters or PhD, and have been enrolled full time for two semesters, you are eligible for OPT.

F-1 students earn one year of OPT for each progressing degree level-

Bachelor's = OPT  
Master's = OPT  
PhD = OPT

### **How to use OPT:**

Students on OPT may only take jobs directly related to the degree listed on their I-20 when they file for OPT.

OPT approval is based on the major listed on your I-20- all employment under OPT must be related to your current degree.

FOR EXAMPLE: if you apply for OPT after your MBA but you already have a Bachelor's degree in computer science, you may only accept in jobs related to business and will not be eligible to take a job related only to computer science).

# There are two types of OPT

## **PRE-COMPLETION OPT**

Limited to part-time (20 hours/week or less) during the academic year unless you are a graduate student completing thesis or dissertation credits only. You may work full-time during the summer semester.

## **POST-COMPLETION OPT**

Eligible to work part-time or full-time for the duration of the authorization period. The 12 months of OPT must be completed within a 14-month period following completion of your degree.

## PRE-COMPLETION OPT

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- Graduate students completing thesis or dissertation may only apply for full-time Pre-Completion OPT with permission from University Graduate School.
  - You are not eligible for Pre-Completion OPT if you are receiving funding from the school in the form of a graduate assistantship.
  - Any full time Pre- OPT used before finishing your degree will be deducted from the 12-month total; if you use 3 months full time PRE- OPT, you will have 9 months remaining for POST-Completion OPT.
  - •Part-time Pre-Completion OPT will deduct time from the 12-month total at a half-time rate; if you use 6 months of part-time PRE- OPT you will have 9 months remaining for POST-OPT.
  - Your work authorization for Pre-Completion OPT stops when you finish your program; if you wish to use any remaining OPT after graduation, you will need to submit a second OPT application to USCIS to get authorization for Post-Completion OPT.
  - You must continue to maintain F-1 status, including full-time enrollment in the fall and spring semesters. Failure to do so automatically invalidates OPT authorization.
- Once you have met the eligibility requirements, you may apply at any time; there is no specific deadline (however, you should consider that it may take USCIS anywhere from 30 to 120 days to process your application).

## POST-COMPLETION OPT

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- You will be eligible to work part-time or full-time for the duration of the authorization period. The 12 months of OPT must be completed within a 14-month period following completion of your degree.
- OPT will NOT be recommended by ISSS advisors if you have outstanding or incomplete courses (e.g. courses with “IF”, “IP” or “NR” grades) from previous semesters.
- Students enrolled less than full-time in their last term MUST have an “Academic Advisor’s Certification of Completion of Degree Requirements for Reduced Course Load Approval” or “Advancement to Thesis or Dissertation Segment” approved by ISSS and retained in their files PRIOR to any OPT application.
- Upon submission of your OPT application, your program information in SEVIS will be updated.

- You must apply during or after your final semester and submit your application by a specific deadline posted by ISSS.

# Application period for POST- Completion OPT

The official deadline set by USCIS is the end of the 60-day grace period after the student's program end date. ISSS recommends submitting Post-Completion OPT applications no later than the last day of the semester in which they complete degree requirements. **Students may apply during the 60-day grace period, provided they have not left the USA.**

Applications must be received by USCIS before the end of the 60-day grace period; therefore, students must submit their applications no later than two weeks before the end of the 60-day grace period.

**Check with the ISSS Office for the official application deadline each semester.**



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- You must apply for OPT within a 150-day period beginning 90 days before the end of the semester in which you will complete your degree and ending 60 days after.
- Your completion term is the semester in which you complete all degree requirements and finish all academic work, regardless of whether you officially graduate in that term.
- When you apply for OPT, your I-20 will be updated to show the program end date, corresponding to the end date of your completion term.
- Your completion term is not necessarily the term in which you will participate in a graduation ceremony.
- It is your responsibility to monitor your progress toward graduation and ensure you will graduate this semester. If this requirement has not been met, your new OPT I-20 will not be processed.

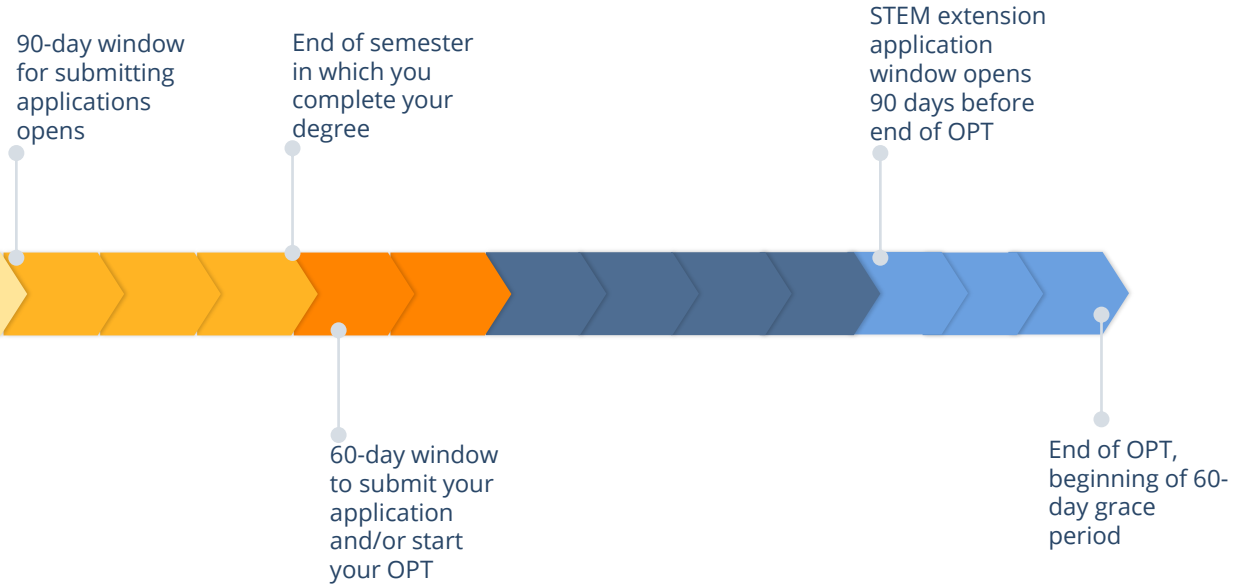


# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Summer A Completion: If you will take your last class during the Summer A term, your OPT application period will be based on a June program end date, although you will not officially graduate until August.
- OPT applications for students completing Summer A will be accepted starting in March and should be submitted no later than the middle of August
- If you do not complete all degree requirements in your completion term as expected or if you do not graduate due to a failed class, unfinished thesis, or dissertation see an ISSS advisor immediately to apply for a program extension and to discuss your options.
- You may or may not be able to cancel your OPT application.

## DURATION OF OPT

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USCIS processing times may vary during the year. Students usually receive the EAD (OPT card) between 60 and 90 days after the application is received by USCIS. However, during peak periods, processing may take up to 120 business days.

**There is NO WAY to expedite USCIS approval of OPT applications. Students must plan ahead.**

The OPT and STEM OPT sections of the ISSS Website will provide the most updated information- check those sections periodically!

## DURATION OF OPT

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- Once the EAD (OPT card) is issued, your OPT may not be canceled or rescinded, and you will not be able to have the OPT period changed.
- Employment is limited only to the dates specified on the EAD and to jobs directly related to student's primary degree of study/major.
- OPT is automatically terminated when a student begins a new educational program or transfers to another school.
- Once any period of OPT is granted, you must "use it or lose it"; any remaining time during the authorization period indicated on the EAD that is lost due to a school transfer, change of visa status or departure from the U.S. cannot be made up later or after a subsequent degree program.
- **OPT is once per degree level- if you have completed OPT once with a Bachelors degree, you cannot apply again unless you complete a Master's degree, etc.**

## OPT EXTENSIONS

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**There are only two ways to extend the OPT period:**

### **1.STEM Extension**

You may be eligible to extend your OPT for an additional 24 months if you have majored in one of the STEM areas of study (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). You can view the list of STEM fields by visiting the STEM OPT Extension section of the ISSS Website. You are eligible to apply for the extension only if your employer is participating in the USCIS E-Verify program. Your application must be received at the appropriate USCIS service center prior to the expiration of your original OPT period.

### **2.Cap-Gap Extension**

If your OPT expires between April 1 and October 1 and your employer properly files an H1B petition and change of status request before the expiration of your OPT, you may be eligible for a short extension of your OPT. If your H-1B petition is approved, your OPT will be automatically extended until September 30 (until your H-1B status becomes effective on October 1).



**You MUST NOT begin employment until you are in possession of the EAD from USCIS. Beginning your OPT without an EAD is unauthorized employment, which is a deportable offense.**

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Your OPT begins on the start date indicated on the EAD, regardless of when the OPT is approved and regardless of when you receive the card.

You will request a start date when you complete your application with USCIS. For students applying for POST-completion OPT, the requested start date can be any day within the 60-day grace period after the end date of your completion term. In most cases, this is the start date which will appear on your EAD.

Be sure to report any changes in name, address, employment, and dependent information (if applicable).

You will remain in F-1 status between your program end date and the start of your OPT, and for as long as your application is pending with USCIS (even if it takes more than 60 days after your program end date to receive approval).

You will remain in F-1 status while on OPT and during the 60-day grace period following your OPT end date (if you choose to stay in the US during this time). OPT approval and work authorization does not change your visa status. To maintain your status, you must continue to report employment information to the ISSS office to keep your SEVIS information up to date.

If you travel abroad with an expired F-1 visa, you will need to get your F-1 visa renewed to return to the US and continue working on OPT. Your EAD alone is not sufficient to enter in F-1 status. DO NOT enter under any other visa status if you plan to continue working on OPT.



# EMPLOYMENT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- ISSS recommends that you keep records of your job search as well as documentation for each job held – offer letter, job description, and contact information for your supervisor.
- Students on post-completion OPT must engage in practical training related to their degree program to maintain their F-1 status.
- Students on post- completion OPT are allowed a total of 90 days of unemployment within the authorized OPT period. If you exceed 90 days of unemployment, you are in violation of status and you are expected to depart the U.S. immediately.
- Employment while on OPT can be paid or unpaid.
- Student may engage in fulltime, part-time positions, volunteer positions with non-profit organizations and self-employment positions if the job responsibilities are directly related to their degree of study
- If the student is working at least 20 hours per week and the work performed can be viewed as giving the student practical training that is related to his or her field and commensurate with his or her degree level.

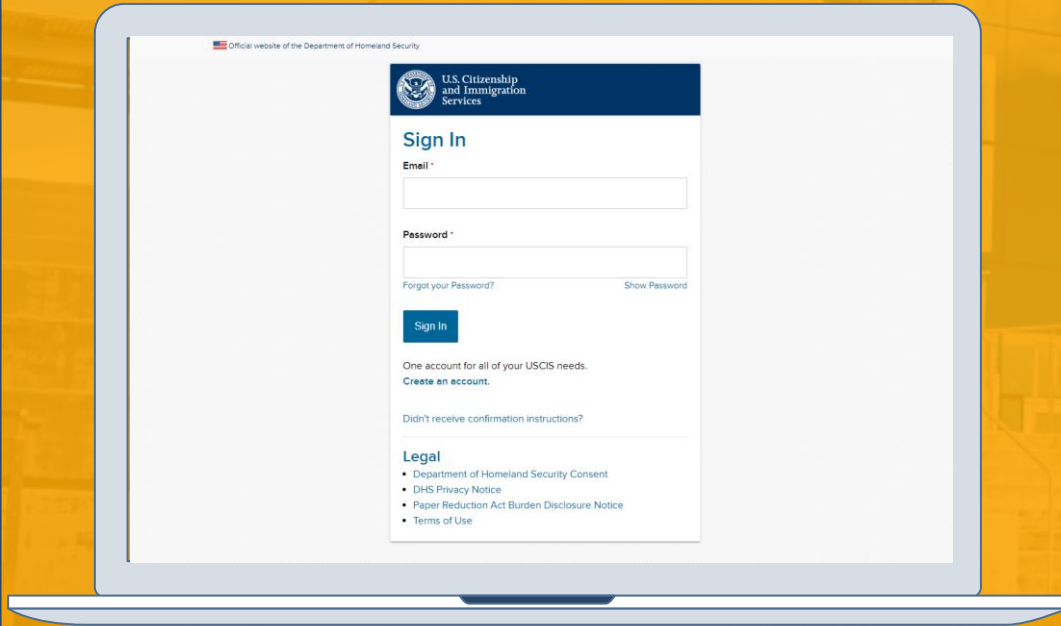
# EMPLOYMENT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

You MUST visit THE OPT and STEM OPT sections of the ISSS Website for instructions on how to report employment during your OPT or STEM OPT periods.

Once you begin working, you must report the name and address of the employer and the employment start date by using ISSS PORTAL and SEVP Portal

Report any periods of unemployment and any change of employer; include specific dates

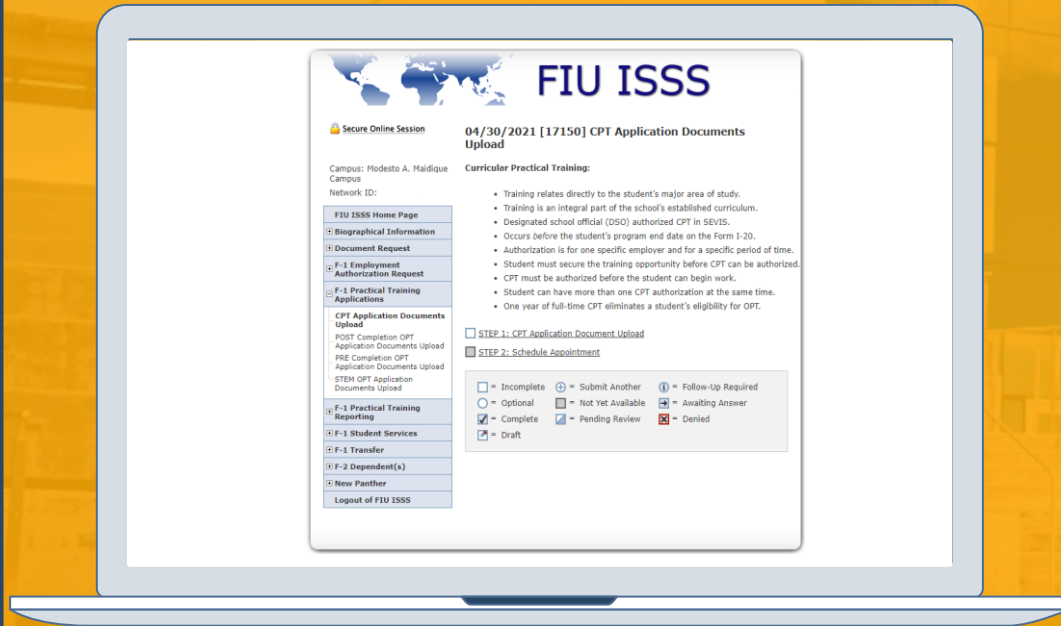
# USCIS Portal



Create your account with USCIS  
to apply for OPT at  
[myaccount.USCIS.gov](https://myaccount.USCIS.gov)

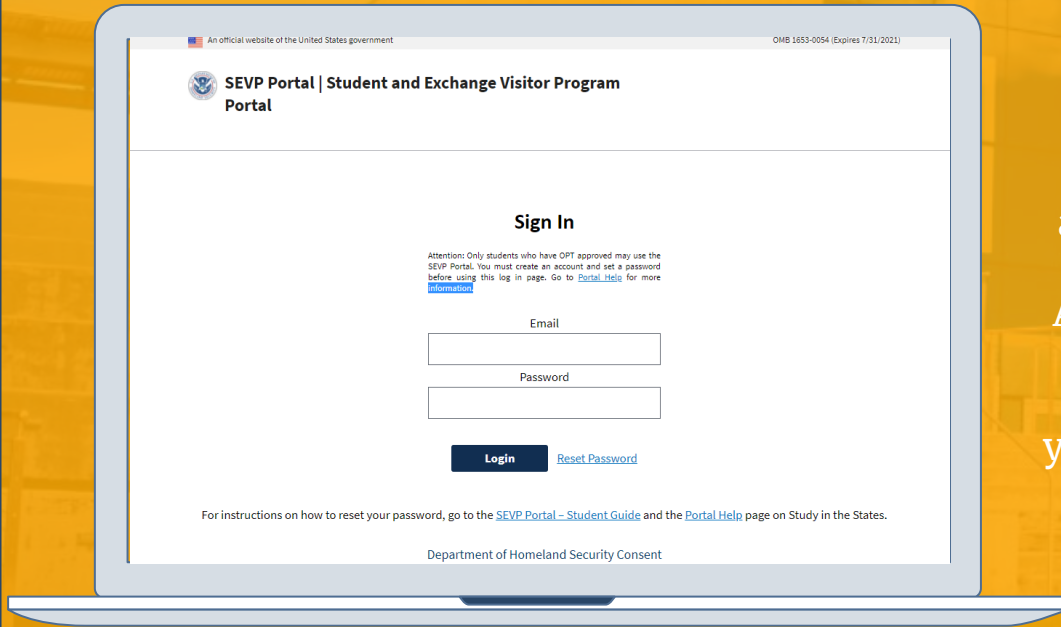
This is where you will submit  
your OPT application after  
receiving your updated OPT  
endorsed I-20 from ISSS

# ISSS Portal



Use the ISSS portal to report employment and new addresses while on OPT

# SEVP Portal



The image shows a laptop screen displaying the SEVP Portal login page. At the top left, it says "An official website of the United States government" and at the top right, "OMB 1653-0054 (Expires 7/31/2021)". The main heading is "SEVP Portal | Student and Exchange Visitor Program Portal". Below this is a "Sign In" section. A small attention notice reads: "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". There are two input fields: "Email" and "Password". Below the "Password" field is a dark blue "Login" button and a blue "Reset Password" link. At the bottom of the page, it says "For instructions on how to reset your password, go to the [SEVP Portal - Student Guide](#) and the [Portal Help](#) page on Study in the States." and "Department of Homeland Security Consent".

Use the SEVP portal to add/update employment information and your address/phone number while on OPT.

An email will be sent to your FIU email address from SEVP with the link to create your SEVP Portal account once your OPT gets processed and approved.

## TRAVEL DURING AUTHORIZED OPT

**To reenter the U.S. when traveling, a student must be in possession of the following:**

1. Unexpired EAD
2. SEVIS I-20 endorsed by ISSS Advisor with the OPT recommendation on page 3
3. A valid passport
4. Unexpired F-1 visa
5. Employer's letter or proof of job offer

If already working, the student should bring an employer's letter verifying employment for the period of authorized OPT and present such letter only if requested by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) Inspection Officer.

**A student on authorized Post-Completion OPT with an EXPIRED F-1 visa stamp who wishes to travel abroad must do the following:**

1. Have a SEVIS I-20 stating dates of OPT authorization.
2. Apply at a U.S. consulate in his/her country of citizenship (or permanent residence).

The consulate may still require financial documents to prove available funds for living expenses during the OPT period. If already employed, the student may bring an employer's letter which states the type of employment (related to the degree completed), that it is only for the period of authorized OPT, and the salary.



## UNEMPLOYMENT AND TRAVEL

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- SEVP has implemented a policy on F-1s traveling abroad and reentering during their Post-Completion OPT period: Citing 8 CFR 214.2(f)(13)(ii)
- **SEVP's new policy makes F1s on Post-Completion OPT who are unemployed or do not have a job offer ineligible for readmission/reentry into the U.S.**
- ISSS recommends that F-1s on approved Post-Completion OPT travel with an employer's letter verifying employment that is (1) related to degree just completed and (2) valid for the period granted on EAD.
- **Traveling without this letter poses a great risk.** If you are actively in the job search stage, you should document your employment applications, especially those submitted online.

# Applying for OPT

## IMPORTANT:

If applying for Post-Completion OPT, you must apply for graduation before submitting your request with ISSS. Application for graduation will be verified in your university record by an ISSS advisor and if this requirement has not been met, your OPT I-20 request will NOT be processed.

# Applying for OPT

YOU MUST FOLLOW THE APPLICATION  
INSTRUCTIONS ON THE OPT SECTION OF  
OUR WEBSITE:

**[iss.fiu.edu](https://iss.fiu.edu)**

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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- It is your responsibility to monitor your progress toward graduation and ensure you will graduate this semester. If you suspect that you may not graduate, you **MUST** contact ISSS immediately and take action to request an extension of stay before program end date.
- You **MUST** follow the instructions always listed on our ISSS Website while on OPT in order to comply with all the ISSS and Governmental Reporting requirements and obligations.
- You **MUST** comply with OPT reporting requirements while actively engaged in OPT. It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** as an F-1 student to report employment in the SEVP Portal and FIU ISSS Portal.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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- Failure to report employment or failure to acquire employment within 90 days of the start date of your OPT will be deemed a violation of your F-1 status and will result in USCIS terminating your legal status in the U.S. Visit ISSS Website for more information.
- USCIS is the agency that will be processing your application. It is your responsibility to comply with all the application requirements. I understand that unforeseen consequences are beyond the administrative scope of ISSS



## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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**USCIS processing takes 3 to 5 months- be patient and prepared to wait!**

2. Contact USPS to confirm receipt of your certified mail
3. USCIS will send your receipt confirmation via email (Form G-1145)
4. You will receive a form called I797 Notice of Action – within 2-3 weeks of USCIS email receipt. Make sure this form:
  - Has your case number on it
  - Has your name spelled correctly

**If there are errors, contact USCIS customer service – number will be provided on your I797**

5. Follow up on your application status via [uscis.gov](https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do) website. You can access <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do> (Please do not call ISSS- we have no control).
6. After 90 days – if you have not received your card- you may submit an e-request here: <https://egov.uscis.gov/e-request/Intro.do>



## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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- All correspondence from USCIS including the OPT card will be sent to the address listed on the Form I-765. Be sure to list an address at which you will be able to receive mail for at least three to four more months.
- If you want to list an address that is not in Florida, check the Form I-765 instructions or speak with an ISSS advisor before mailing to make sure the application is sent to the correct lockbox facility.
- At the time you apply for OPT, if you will be moving off campus or changing addresses where you live within the following 3-5 months, you must decide what address you want your OPT card mailed to. ISSS is not responsible for lost or undelivered USCIS materials. The address you choose must be stated on Form I-765.
- When Form I-797 (Notice of Action: Receipt Notice) is obtained, you must keep it in a safe place as it contains the reference number for the application. Submit a copy of Form I-797 to ISSS as soon as possible.
- Once you receive the EAD, you must check the personal information on it. If there are any errors, notify ISSS immediately.

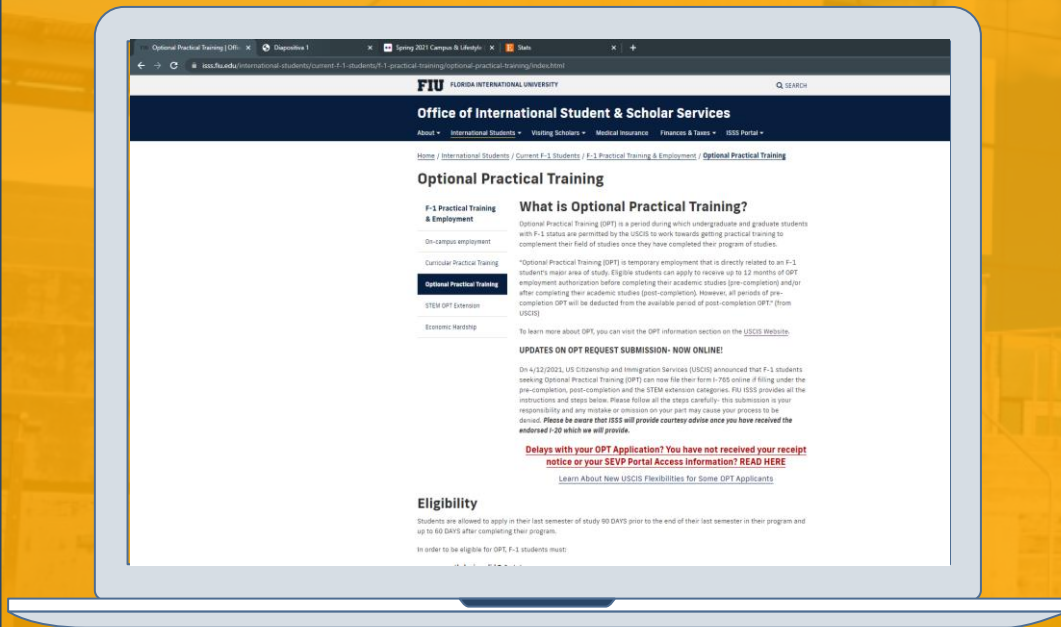
**You must also submit a copy of the EAD to ISSS following instructions on the OPT Section of the ISSS Website.**



**CLICK HERE**

**Take the OPT quiz.**

**The confirmation email you receive upon completion of this quiz is one of the required documents to submit to ISSS.**



Want to stay informed?  
Follow the OPT guidelines and  
support information on our  
website.