



**Homeland
Security**

Engagement Readout

The CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series: USCIS Introduces Online Filing for Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, for F-1 Students Seeking Optional Practical Training

On May 5, 2021, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) [Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman \(CIS Ombudsman\)](#) hosted a webinar about U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) online filing for [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#).

During this webinar, CIS Ombudsman staff engaged with USCIS subject matter experts to provide an overview of online account features and shared instructions on how eligible applicants can [file Form I-765 online](#). Currently, the option to file Form I-765 online is only available to F-1 nonimmigrants who fall into one of the following categories:

- (c)(3)(A) – Pre-completion optional practical training (OPT);
- (c)(3)(B) – Post-completion OPT; and
- (c)(3)(C) – 24-month extension for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students

If an applicant's basis for employment authorization does not fall within one of the above-referenced categories, regardless of which category is checked, USCIS has stated that it will deny the application if filed on or after April 15, 2021, and the fee will not be refunded.

USCIS emphasized that biometrics are not required for Form I-765 applicants requesting optional practical training [(c)(3)(A), (c)(3)(B), and (c)(3)(C)] regardless of whether the application is filed online or by mail.

USCIS shared that even though processing times for applications filed online are generally the same as paper cases, there are many benefits to filing online. These benefits include:

- The convenience of having all notices available in one electronic account.
- Fewer rejections because using the online form ensures the application is signed electronically and the correct fee is paid.

- The ability to upload a response to a request for evidence (RFE) quickly.
- The ability to send secure messages to USCIS.

During the CIS Ombudsman’s webinar, USCIS highlighted the required evidence associated with each eligible employment category and what happens if an applicant forgets to upload supporting documents.

Category	Required Evidence
Pre-completion OPT (c)(3)(A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of enrollment at a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school. • All prior Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) numbers. • Proof of previously authorized curricular practical training (CPT) or OPT and corresponding academic level. • Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status, endorsed by the Designated School Official (DSO) before filing Form I-765.
Post-completion OPT (c)(3)(B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All prior SEVIS numbers. • Proof of previously authorized CPT or OPT and corresponding academic level. <p>Note: The DSO must enter the OPT recommendation in SEVIS within 30 days before submitting Form I-765. If not, USCIS will deny the OPT request.</p>
24-month STEM OPT (c)(3)(C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of a degree that is the basis for STEM OPT and is listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List. • Form I-20, endorsed by the DSO within 60 days before filing Form I-765. • If the STEM OPT extension is based on a previously earned STEM degree, applicants must also provide evidence that the school is currently accredited by the U.S. Department of Education and certified by SEVP.

If an applicant files Form I-765 online, but forgets to upload any supporting documents, USCIS will issue an RFE, post it to the applicant’s online account, and mail a hard copy to the applicant’s mailing address. The applicant can respond to the RFE and scan and upload any requested evidence through the online account.

For more information on evidence requirements, visit the [USCIS Checklist of Required Initial Evidence for Form I-765](#).

Nearly 1,000 stakeholders joined this webinar (attorneys/legal representatives – 11%, government workers – 9%, employers – 7%, petitioners/applicants – 6%, advocacy groups – 3%, and others – 64%). Participants submitted 261 written questions and the speakers answered as many as they could during the engagement. Below is a sample of the questions received:

- Can F-1 students apply for OPT or STEM OPT from outside the United States using either the paper or online process?
- If a student notices a mistake in an online application how can it be corrected? Can an applicant go back and upload an explanation or additional documents in the unsolicited evidence section to hopefully avoid receiving an RFE?
- How has USCIS prepared through staffing and process improvements for an increase in Form I-765 online filings to ensure these applications are processed efficiently?
- If an OPT application is filed online, are receipt notices, RFEs, notices of intent to deny, approvals, and denials only issued electronically?

The CIS Ombudsman will share a full list of questions with USCIS to give the agency an opportunity to address the public's concerns. Additionally, the CIS Ombudsman will post the presentation used during the webinar on its website.

Speakers

Nathan Stiefel, Deputy Ombudsman at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Bertha Anderson, Chief of Public Engagement at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Michael Onka, Senior Advisor at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Janna Evans, Community Relations Officer at USCIS