Step-by-Step Guide for Completing the Form I-765

Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

Important Reminders about your OPT Application

- All eligible F-1 students must receive an OPT Recommendation I-20 from ISSO **BEFORE** submitting their Form I-765 to USCIS.

- To request the OPT Recommendation I-20, you must first complete the Pre-Completion OPT Checklist in Cystart.

- Do not proceed with the online OPT application until you have received the OPT Recommendation I-20.

Create myUSCIS Account and File a Form Online

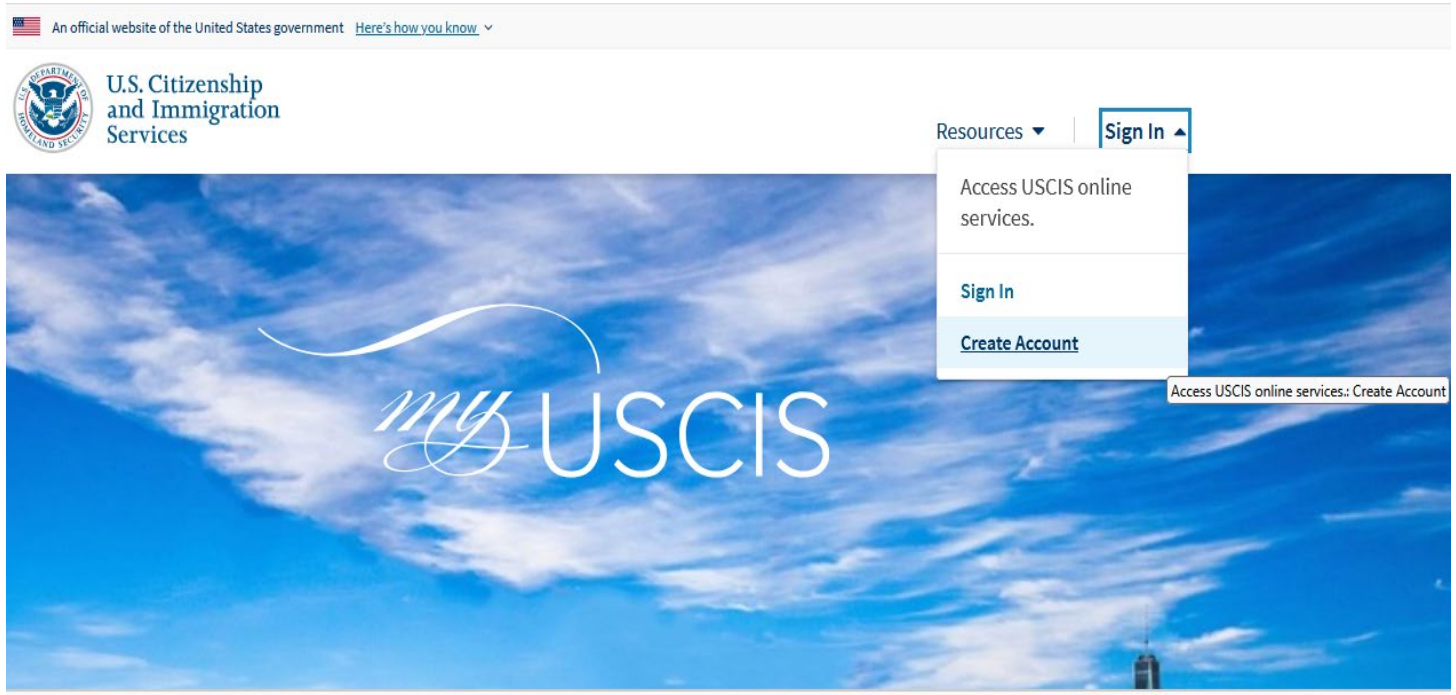
Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

Create Your myUSCIS Account

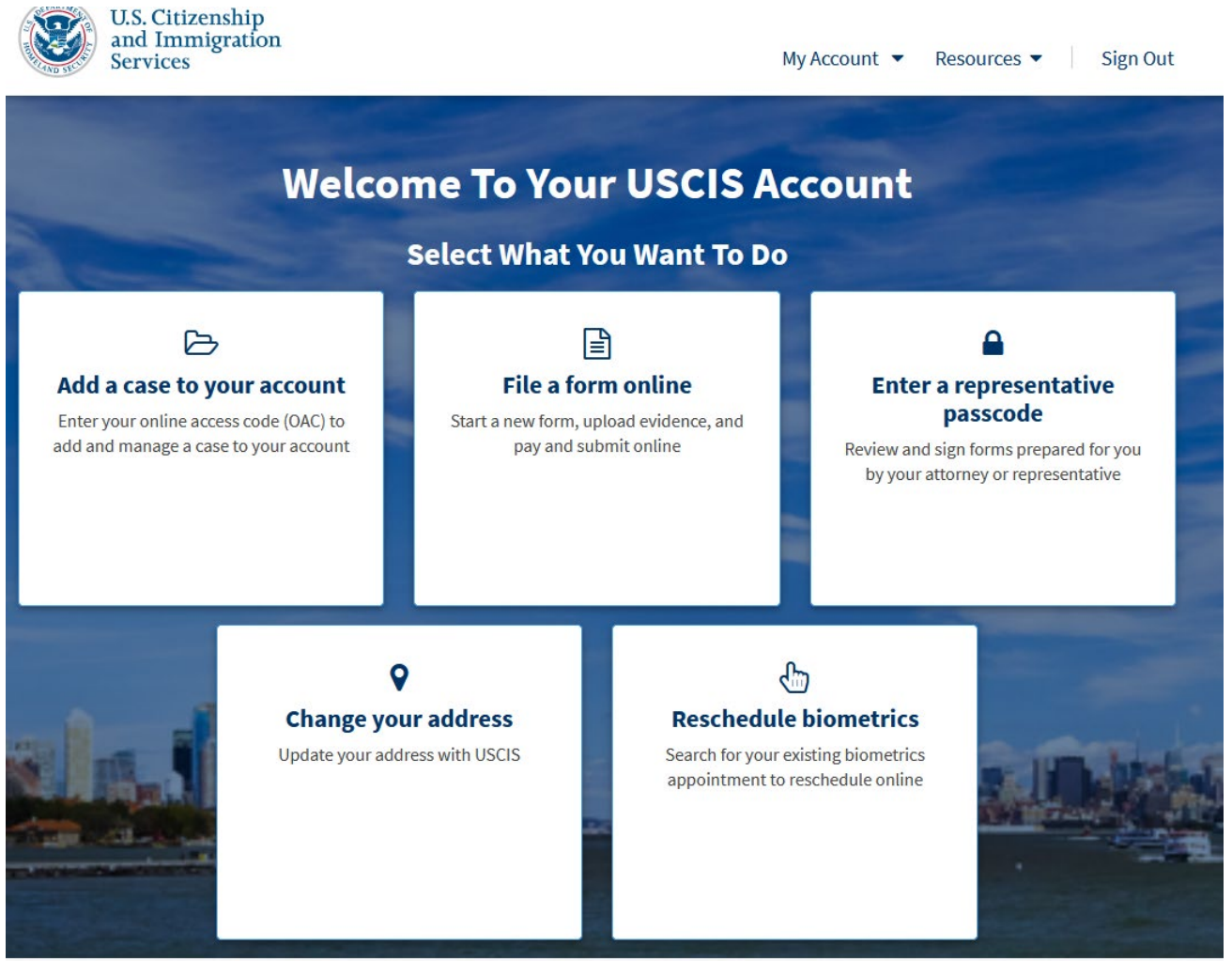
- Navigate to **my.uscis.gov**

- From the **Sign In** drop-down menu, select **Create Account**



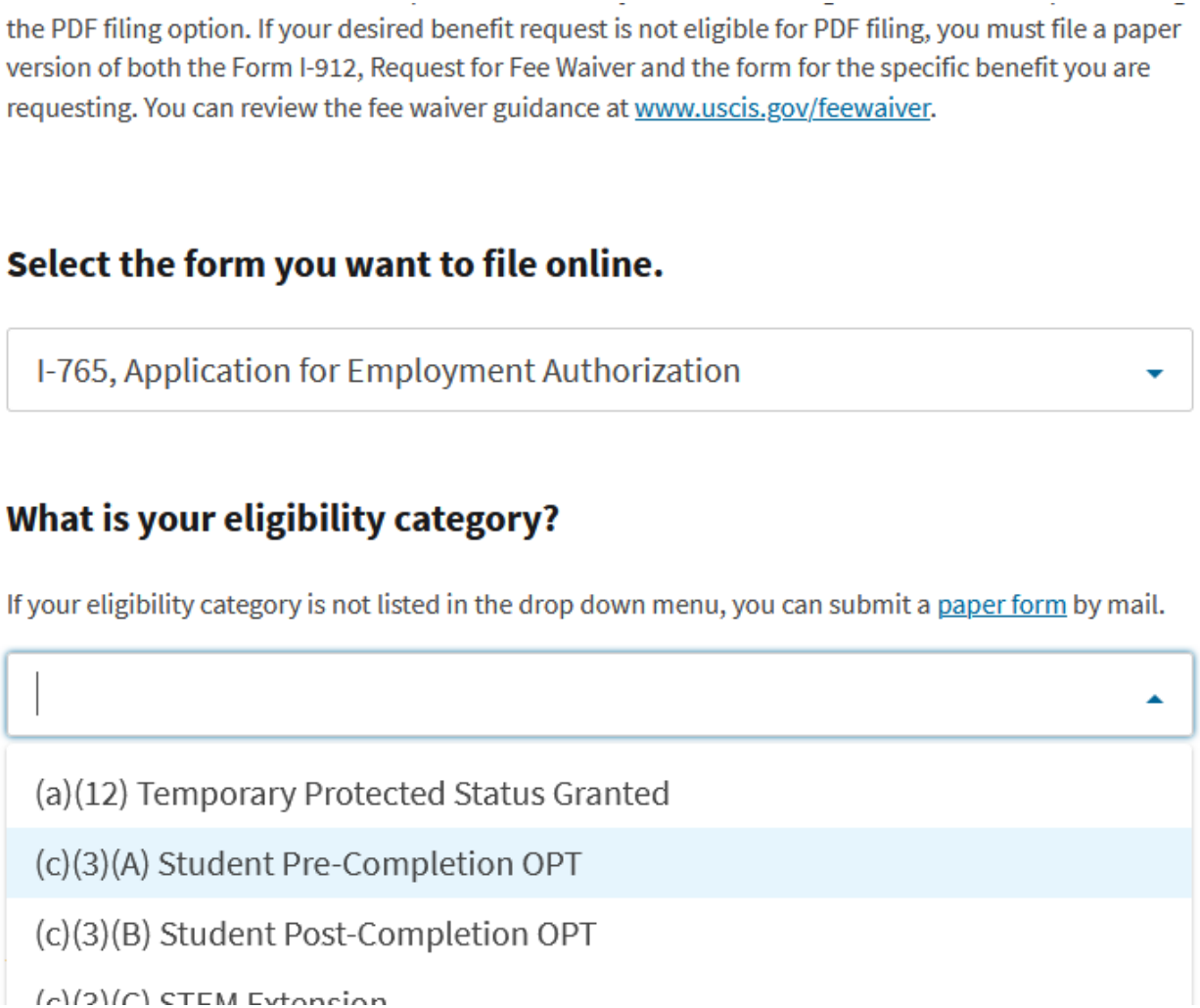
File a Form Online

- After creating an account or successfully logging in, select **File a form online**



Form Selection and Eligibility Category

- For option **Select the form you want to file online**, choose **Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization** from the drop-down menu
- For question **What is your eligibility category?**, choose **(c)(3)(A) Student Pre-Completion OPT**
- **IMPORTANT!** Selecting the incorrect eligibility category will likely lead to application denial. If you have questions or are uncertain about which option to select, contact ISSO before submitting your final application.



Biometric Services Appointment

- Applicants will likely be required to attend a **biometric appointment** at the nearest USCIS Application Support Center (ASC)
- If required, USCIS will notify you of your appointment date and location.
  - Your assigned location should be based on your **reported U.S. living address**
  - The closest location to Ames in located in **Des Moines**
- An option to **reschedule the biometric appointment** should be available through your USCIS account
- **Missing your appointment may lead to application denial!**

Biometric services appointment

USCIS may require that you appear for an interview or provide biometrics (fingerprints, photograph, and/or signature) at any time to verify your identity, obtain additional information, and conduct background and security checks, including a check of criminal history records maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), before making a decision on your application, petition, or request. After USCIS receives your application and ensures it is complete, we will inform you in writing if you need to attend a biometric services appointment. If an appointment is necessary, the notice will provide you the location of your local or designated USCIS Application Support Center (ASC) and the date and time of your appointment.

If you are required to provide biometrics, at your appointment you must sign an oath reaffirming that:

1. You provided or authorized all information in the application;
2. You reviewed and understood all of the information contained in, and submitted with, your application; and
3. All of the declared information was complete, true, and correct at the time of filing.

If you fail to attend your biometric services appointment, USCIS may deny your application.

Section 1: Getting Started

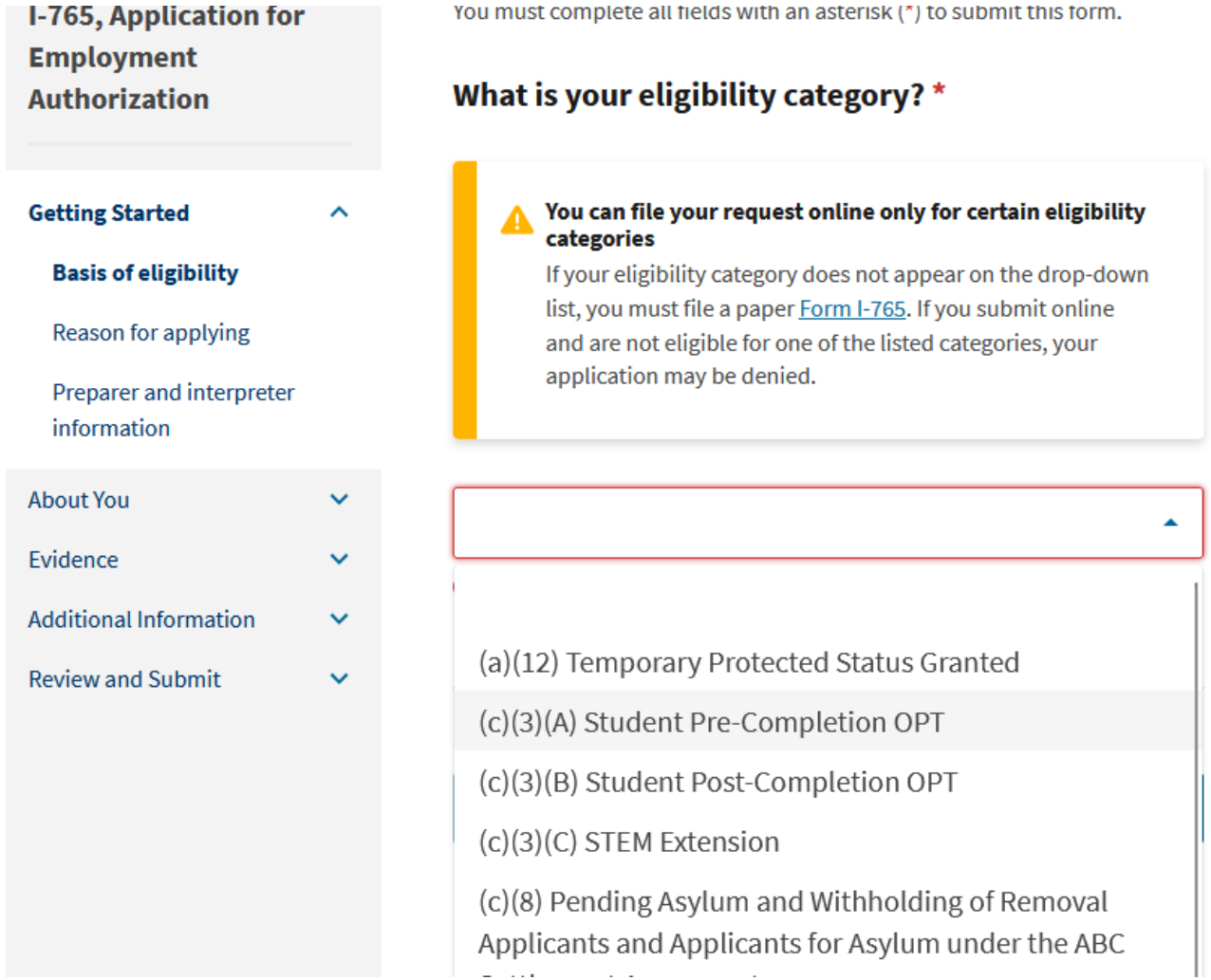
Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

Getting Started – Basis of Eligibility

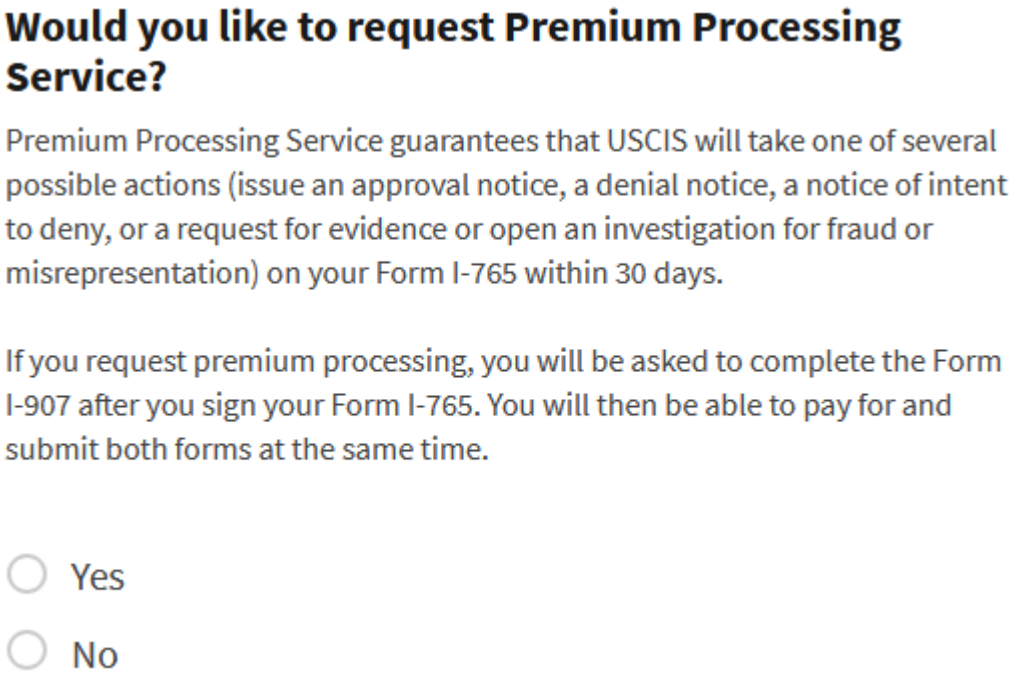
- For question **What is your eligibility category?**, choose **(c)(3)(A) Student Pre-Completion OPT**

- **IMPORTANT!** Selecting the incorrect eligibility category will likely lead to application denial. If you have questions or are uncertain about which option to select, contact ISSO before submitting your final application.



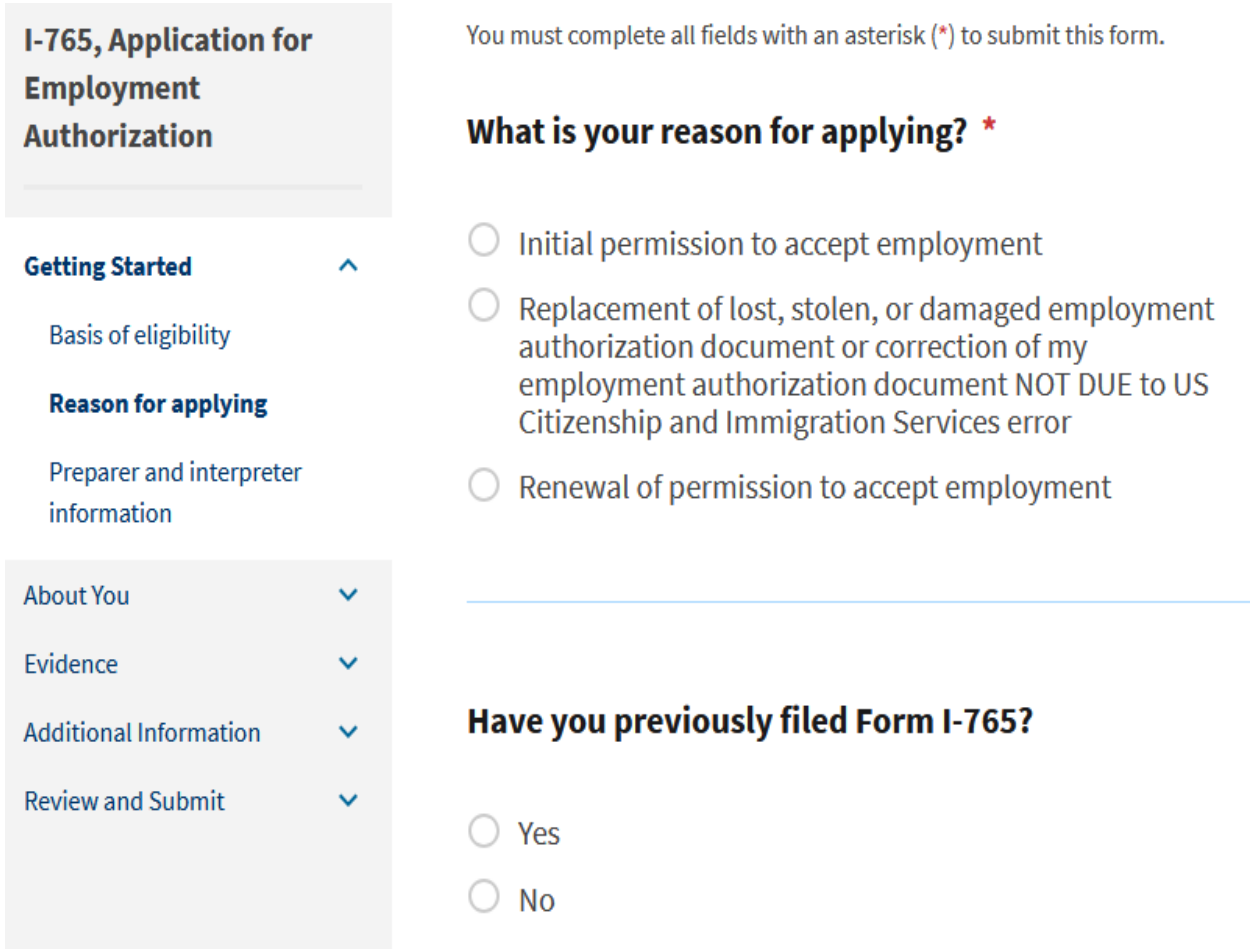
Requesting Premium Processing

- You may choose to add the Premium Processing service at the time you submit your initial application
  - You may also add the Premium Processing service at a later time
- Premium Processing offers adjudication within 30 business days (~6 weeks), unless USCIS determines additional information is required
- Given the uncertain processing times for OPT, if you have a job offer that starts within 2 months and the start date is inflexible, then the Premium Processing service is recommended
  - Current cost: **Additional $1,780**



Reason for Applying and Previously Filed Form I-765s

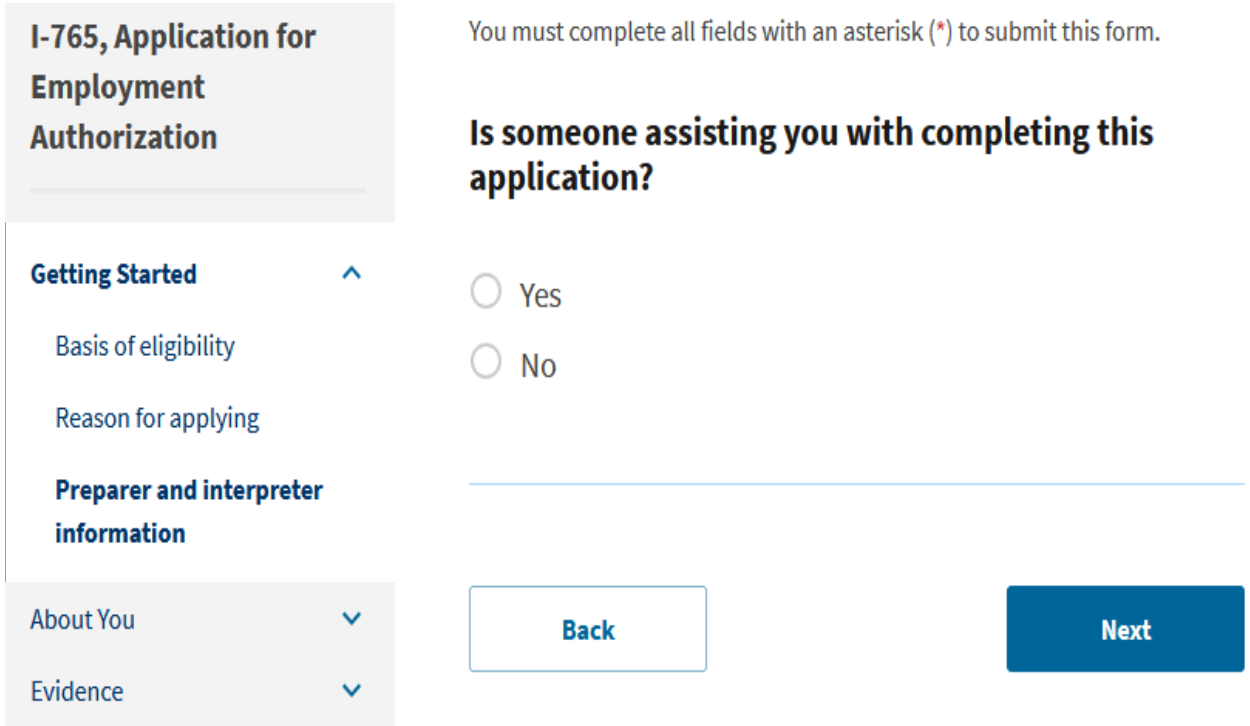
- For question **What is your reason for applying?**, choose **Initial permission to accept employment** from the drop-down menu
- For question **Have your previously filed Form I-765?:**
  - Select **Yes** if you have:
    - Applied for OPT at a past school or education level
    - Applied for OPT and later withdrew your application
    - Have filed a Form I-765 related to another immigration status (e.g., pending PR, TPS, etc.)
  - Select **No** if you have never filed an application for work authorization with USCIS before.
    - Most applicants will select No



Application Assistance

- For question **Is someone assisting you with completing this application?**:
  - Select **Yes** only if you are receiving professional legal advice (e.g., from an immigration attorney)
  - Most applicants will select **No**

- **Note**: ISSO does not provide formal assistance with the Form I-765. Resources and guides, including this one, are informational in nature. The Form I-765 is an individual application, and the petitioner will bear responsibility for the outcome of the application and its consequences.



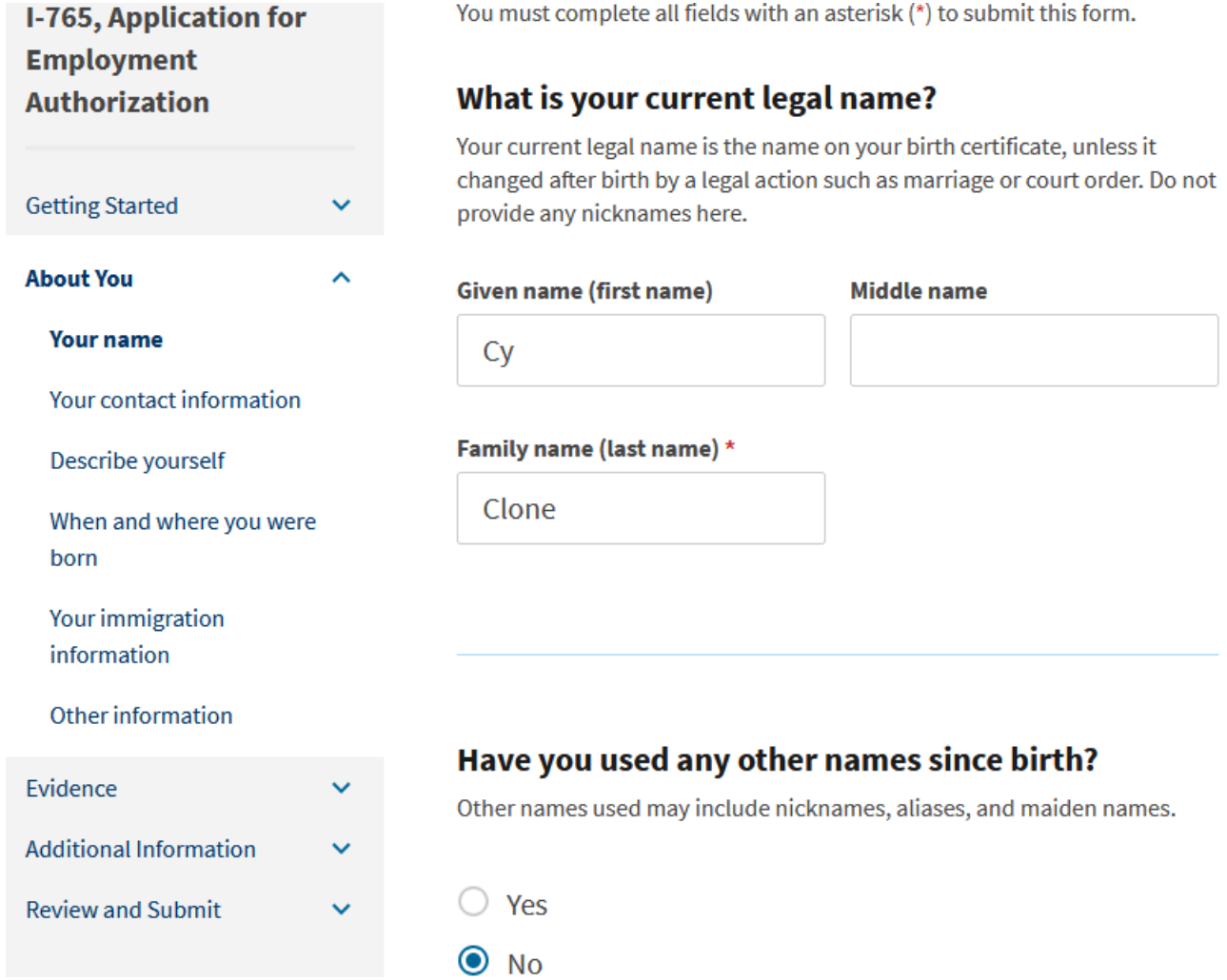
Section 2: About You

Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

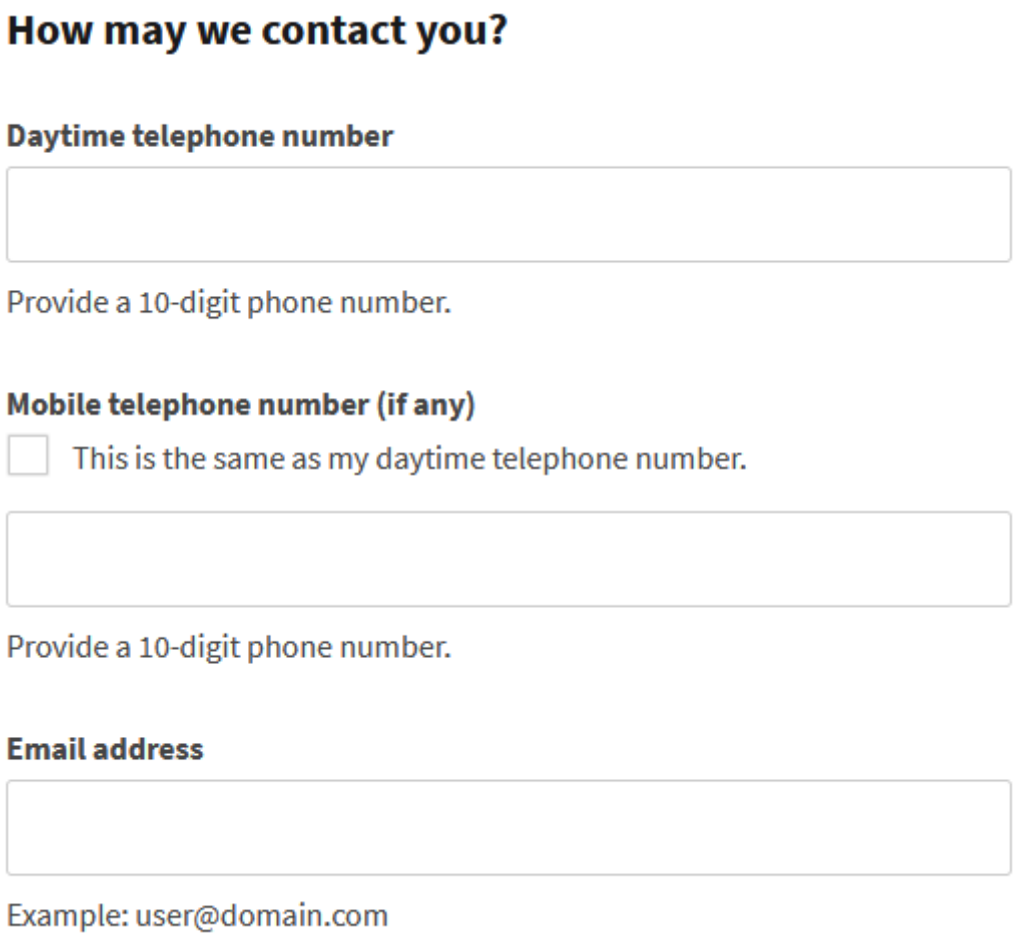
Legal Name and Other Names Used

- Enter your current name exactly as it appears on your passport, F-1 visa, or Form I-94 record
  - Since immigration documents do not include middle names, we would advise using only the given name and family name field (see your visa for reference)
- Double-check your name is entered correctly! An incorrect name could require an application resubmission (and new application fee!)
- For question **Have you used any other names since birth?**, we would advise answering Yes only if this other name was used in an official capacity
  - May include maiden name (name before marriage) or preferred name (if included on academic or identity documents)



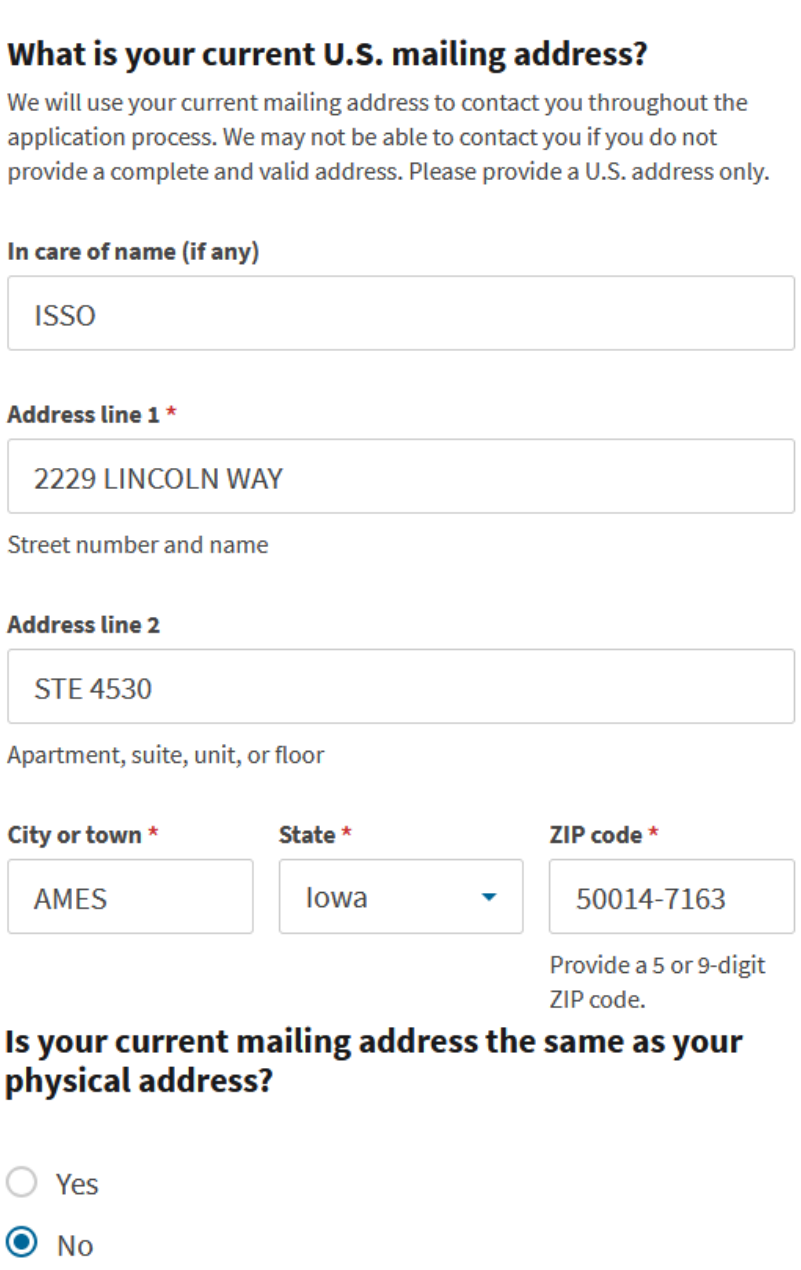
Your Contact Information

- We advise using the same phone number for Daytime and Mobile telephone number
- Email address can be either personal email account or your ISU email account



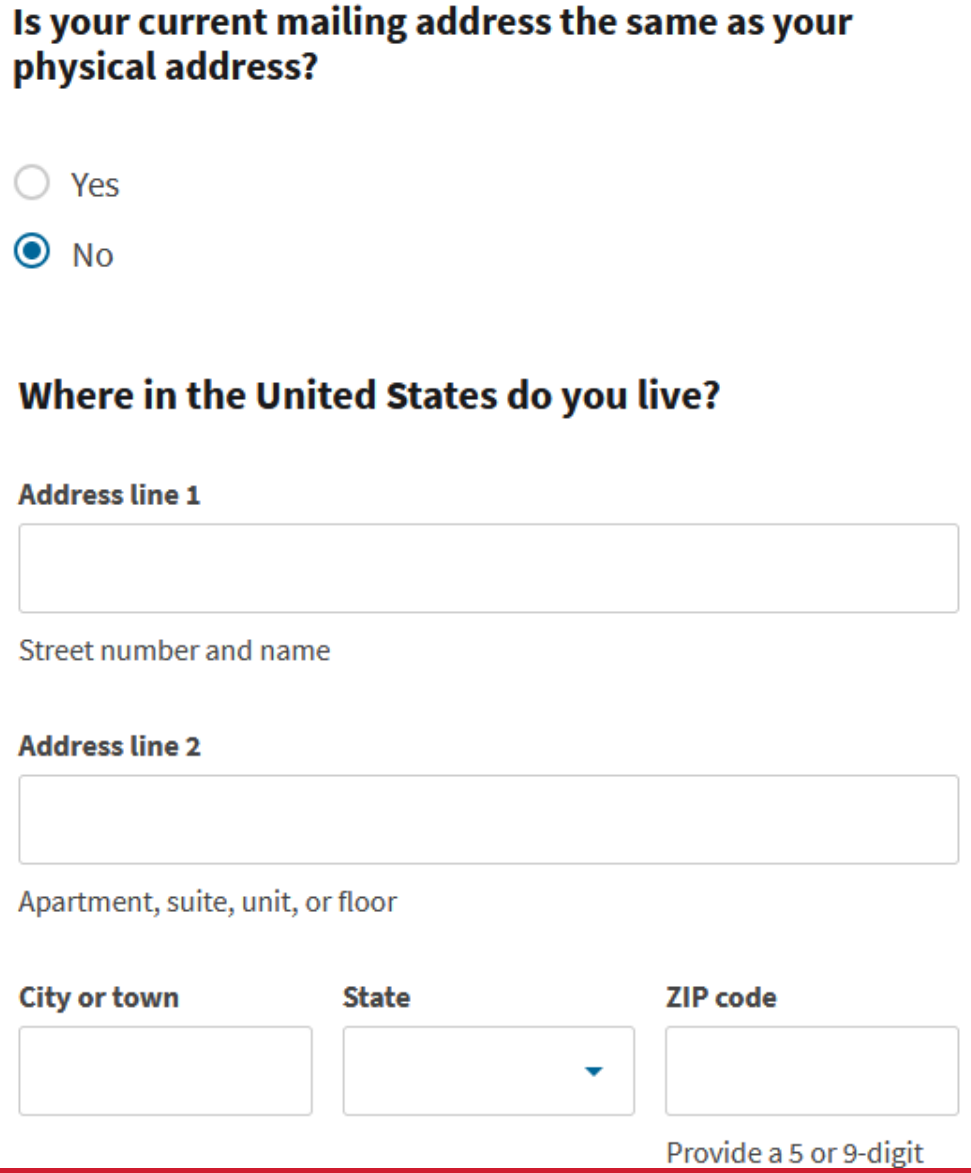
Your Contact Information

- U.S. Mailing Address – you can use any address that:
  - Is a safe and reliable place to receive mail
  - Will not change in the next 6 months
- You are welcome to use the ISSO as a mailing address for your application.
  - Note: If ISSO receives your EAD card on your behalf, then you must collect the card in person or pay (at your expense) for a FedEx mailing service to your current location.
- If you choose to use a mailing address that is not where you live, then select **No** to the question **Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?**



Your Contact Information

- If you choose to use a mailing address that is not where you live, then select **No** to the question **Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?**
- Provide your current living address.
- For future living address changes:
  - Once approved for OPT and your start date is reached, future living address changes can be self-reported through your **SEVP Portal** account
  - If your program has ended but OPT has not yet started, submit e-form **U.S. Living Address Reporting** in Cystart



Describe Yourself

- Select your sex as list on your passport or birth certificate
- Select your marital status

What is your sex?

Indicate whether you are male or female as provided on your birth certificate issued at the time of birth or issued closest to the time of birth or in secondary evidence you provided to USCIS, if applicable.

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

What is your marital status?

- ○ Single
- ○ Married
- ○ Divorced
- ○ Widowed

When and Where You Were Born

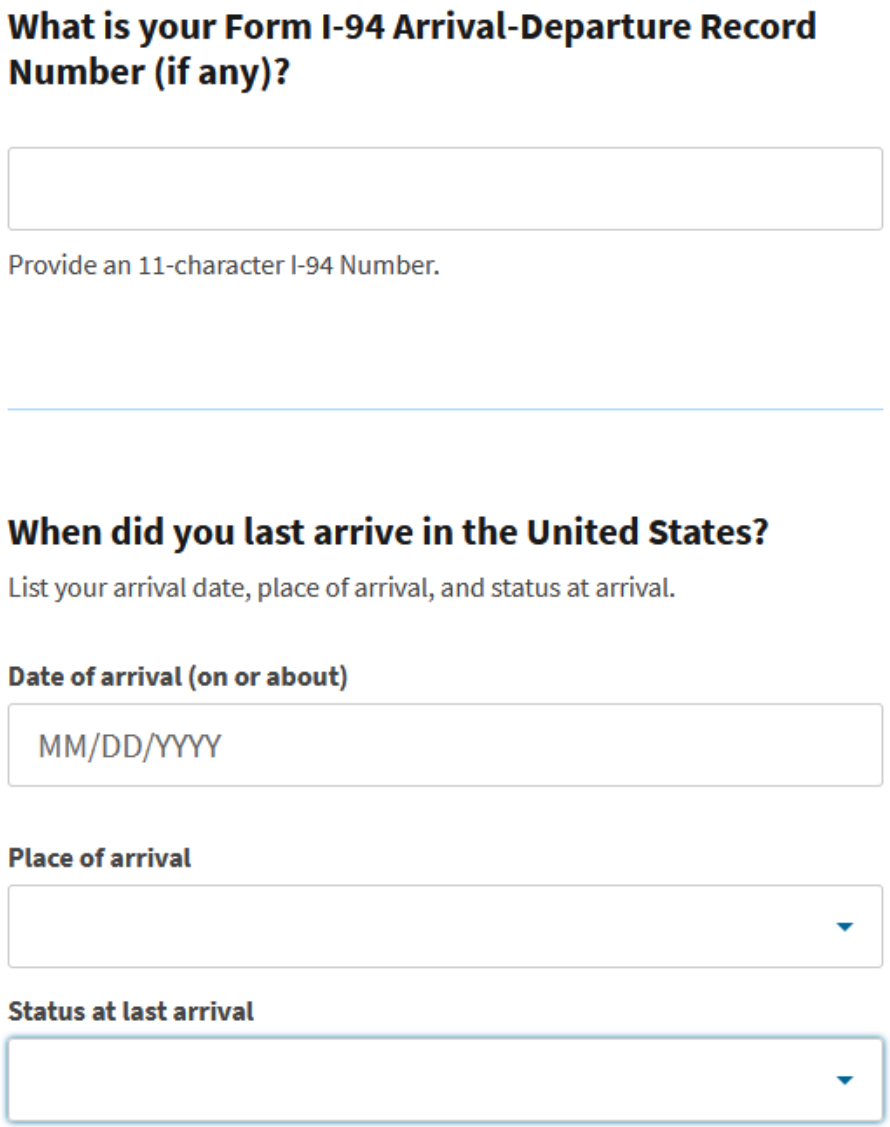
- Provide information about your place of birth. We recommend completing all fields, if possible.
- Date of birth: Be sure to use the American [month]/[day]/[year] format.

Your Immigration Information

- Provide all countries where you have citizenship or nationality.
- If you have citizenship or nationality in multiple countries, we advise listing the country that matches your Form I-20 first.

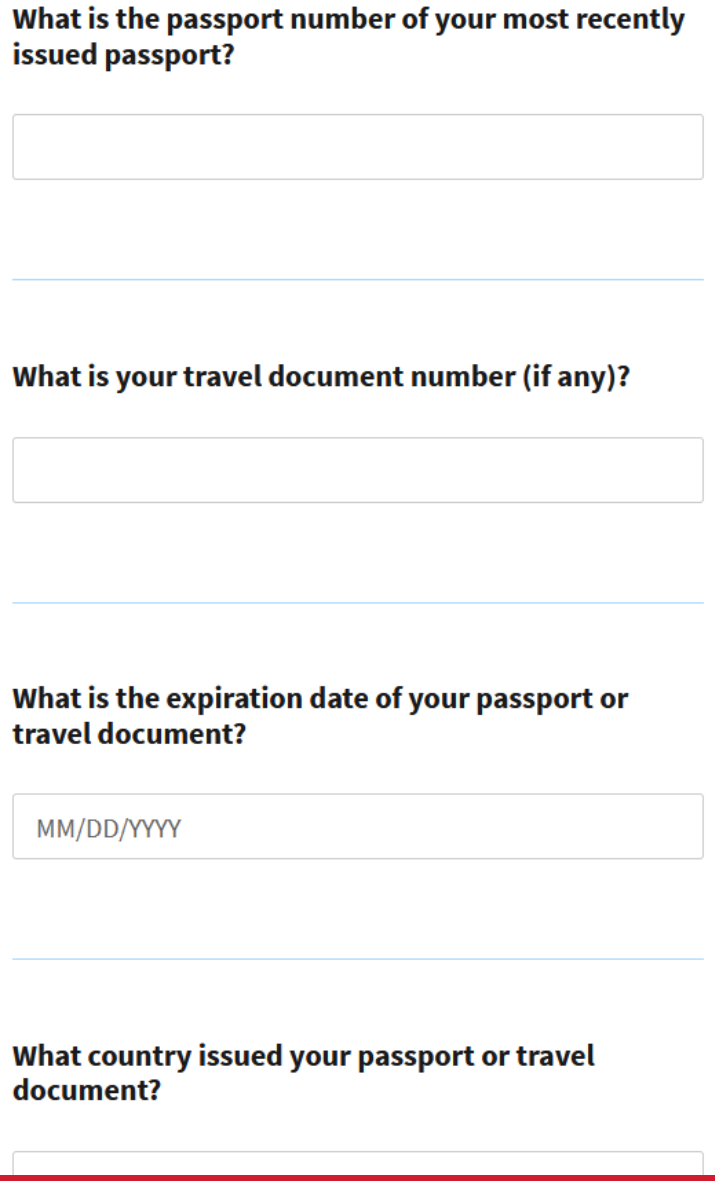
Your Immigration Information

- Your **Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number** should match the 11-character number at the top of your current Form I-94 record.
- **Date of arrival** should match your Form I-94 record.
- **Place of arrival** is where you most recently went through U.S. Customs
  - Usually a large international airport such as Chicago, New York, etc.
- **Status at last arrival** should match your Form I-94 record
  - This should be F1 unless you changed your immigration status to F1 from within the U.S.
- Is your Form I-94 incorrect? Contact ISSO with questions or submit the **I-94 Correction** e-form in Cystart.



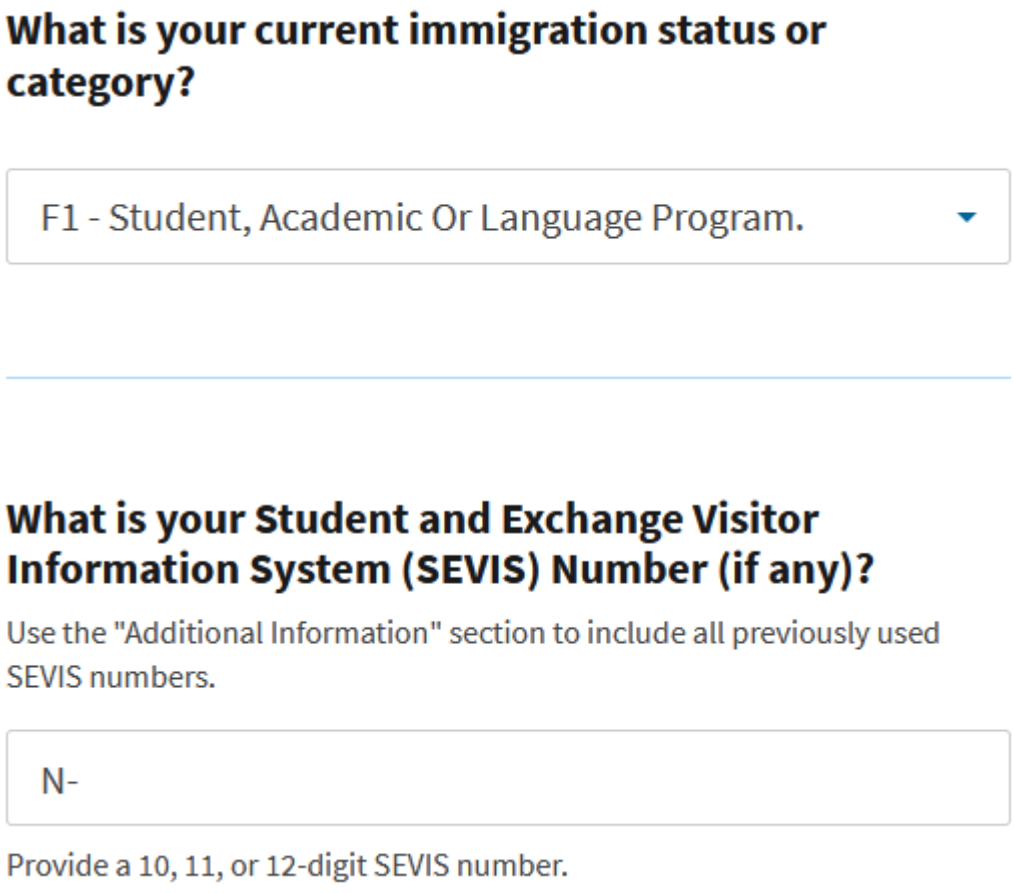
Your Immigration Information

- **Passport number** can be found in your currently valid passport
  - This may be different than the passport number on your I-94 record, if you have recently renewed your passport from within the U.S.
- **Travel document number** – leave this field blank
- **Expiration date of your passport** can be found in your currently valid passport
  - Be sure to use the American [month]/[day]/[year] format
- **Country that issued your passport** is your country of citizenship
  - Never list United States in this field



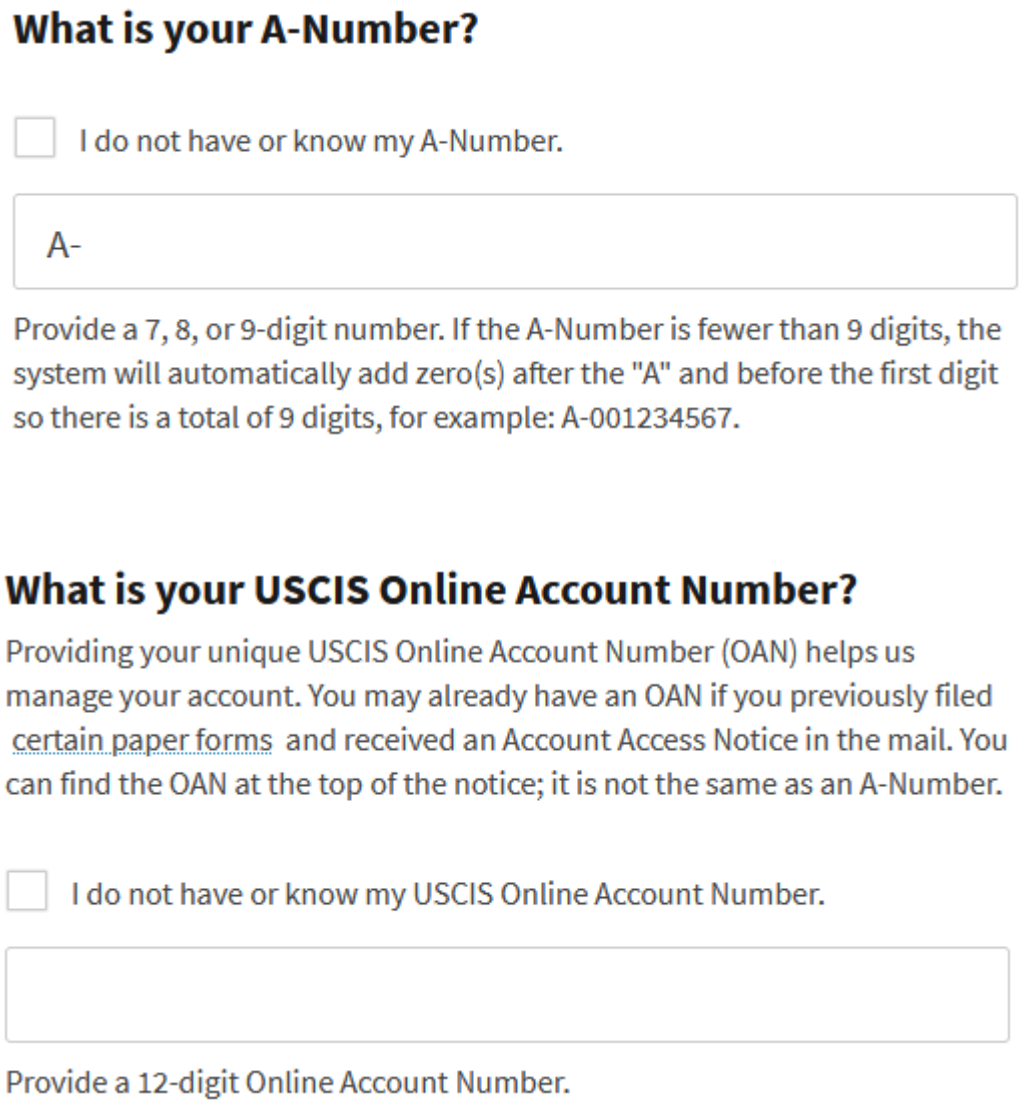
Your Immigration Information

- **Current immigration status** should be F1
- Your **SEVIS Number** can be found on the top of your OPT Recommendation I-20



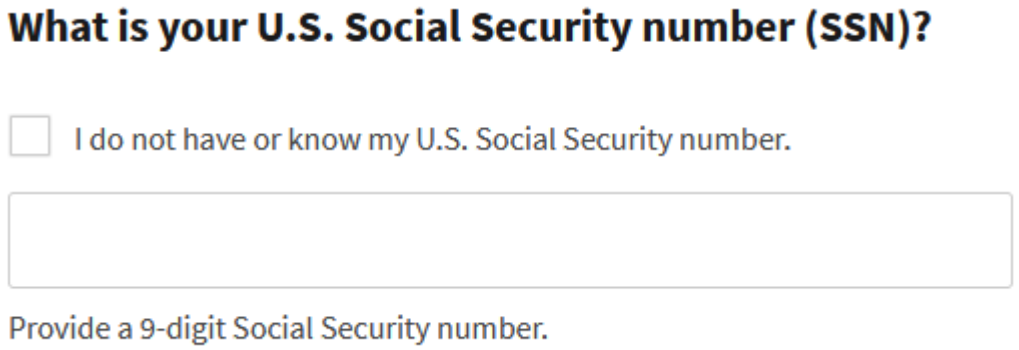
Your Immigration Information

- **A-Number** is also called **USCIS #**.
  - If you have previously filed an application with USCIS, you can find this 9-digit number on your past EAD card or approval notice
  - If you have never filed an application with USCIS previously, then select **I do not have or know my A-Number**
- **USCIS Online Account Number** should automatically populate if you have filed an online application with USCIS previously
  - If you have never filed an online application with USCIS previously, then select **I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number**



Your Immigration Information

- **Social Security number (SSN)**
  - If you have worked in the U.S. previously, then you will have an SSN. Provide this number.
- If you have never worked in the U.S. before this OPT application, then you will need to apply for a Social Security number at a Social Security Administration office.
  - This can only be done after OPT is approved and your EAD card is received.
  - Apply for an SSN does not need to delay your employment start date.
  - Contact ISSO for additional information about how to apply for an SSN.



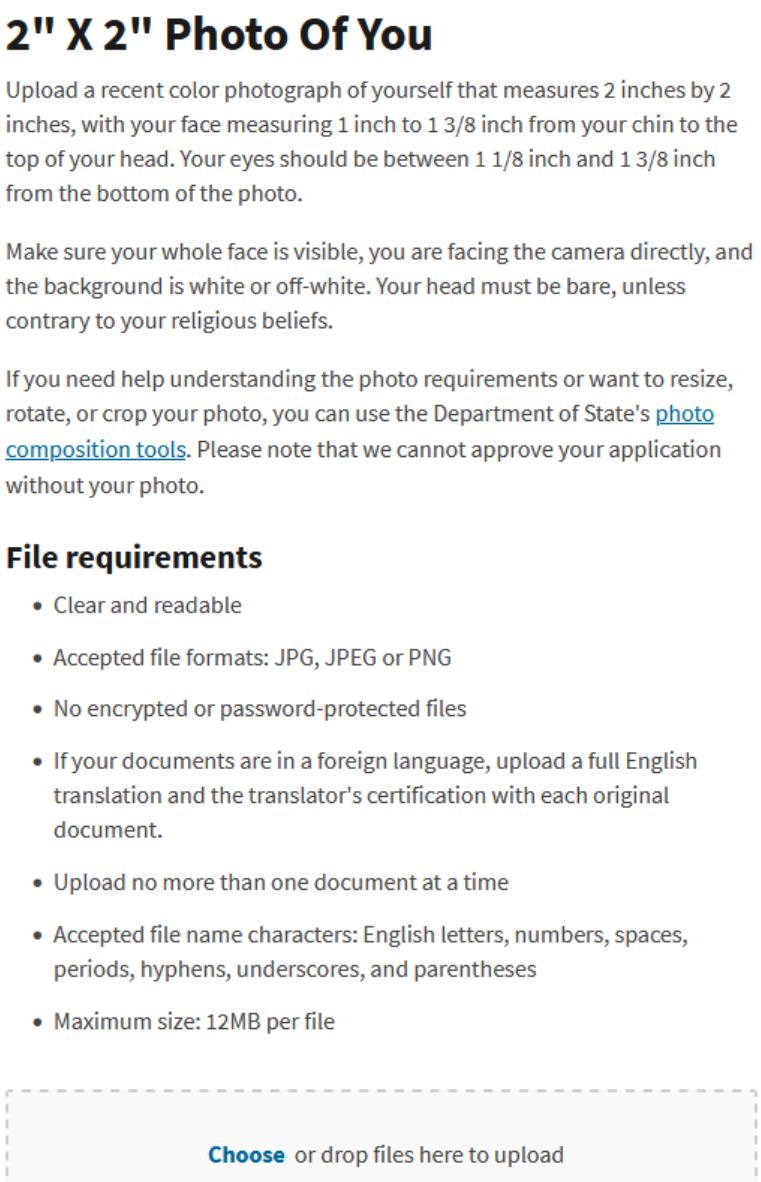
Section 3: Evidence

Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

2″ x 2″ Photo Of You

- You must upload a “passport-style” photo.
- Photo should be taken within the past 30 days.
- You can use a “passport photo service” (e.g., Walgreen’s) or you can take a photo with your phone on a plain white background.
- You can use the Department of State Photo Cropping Tool to resize your photo to the correct dimensions.
- ***NOTE:*** *As of December 2025, an in-person biometric appointment may be required after submitting your application.*



2" X 2" Photo Of You

Upload a recent color photograph of yourself that measures 2 inches by 2 inches, with your face measuring 1 inch to 1 3/8 inch from your chin to the top of your head. Your eyes should be between 1 1/8 inch and 1 3/8 inch from the bottom of the photo.

Make sure your whole face is visible, you are facing the camera directly, and the background is white or off-white. Your head must be bare, unless contrary to your religious beliefs.

If you need help understanding the photo requirements or want to resize, rotate, or crop your photo, you can use the Department of State's photo composition tools. Please note that we cannot approve your application without your photo.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG or PNG
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator's certification with each original document.
- Upload no more than one document at a time
- Accepted file name characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 12MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

Form I-94

- Upload a PDF copy of your current I-94 record.
  - Your Form I-94 can be retrieved from the **U.S. Customs and Border Protection website**.
- Contact ISSO if:
  - You cannot retrieve your I-94 online
  - Information on your I-94 is incorrect
- Additional item to upload:
  - If you most recently entered the U.S. in an immigration status other than F-1, then also upload a copy of your **F-1 Approval Notice (Form I-797A)**
- ***NOTE:*** *You should have a printed copy of your I-94 record with you at all times.*

Form I-94, Arrival And Departure Record Or Passport

Upload a copy of one of the following:

- Your Form I-94, Arrival-Departure Record (front and back);
- A printout of your electronic Form I-94 ; or
- Your passport or other travel document.

If you were admitted to the United States by CBP at an airport or seaport after April 30, 2013, CBP may have issued you an electronic Form I-94 instead of a paper Form I-94. You may visit the CBP website to obtain a paper version of an electronic Form I-94. CBP does not charge a fee for this service. Some travelers admitted to the United States at a land border, airport, or seaport, after April 30, 2013, with a passport or travel document, who were issued a paper Form I-94 by CBP, may also be able to obtain a replacement Form I-94 from the CBP website without charge.

Employment Authorization Or Government ID

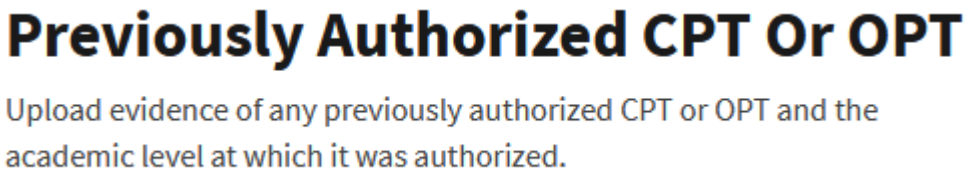
- Upload a PDF copy of:
  - Current passport
  - Most recently issued U.S. visa
- If you have previously applied for work authorization with USCIS, also provide a copy your previously issued EAD card.

Employment Authorization Document Or Government ID

Upload a copy of your last Employment Authorization document (EAD) (front and back). If you were not previously issued an EAD, you must upload a copy of a government-issued identity document (such as a passport) showing your picture, name, and date of birth; a birth certificate with photo ID; a visa issued by a foreign consulate; or a national ID document with photo and/or fingerprint. The identity document photocopy must clearly show your facial features and contain your biographical information.

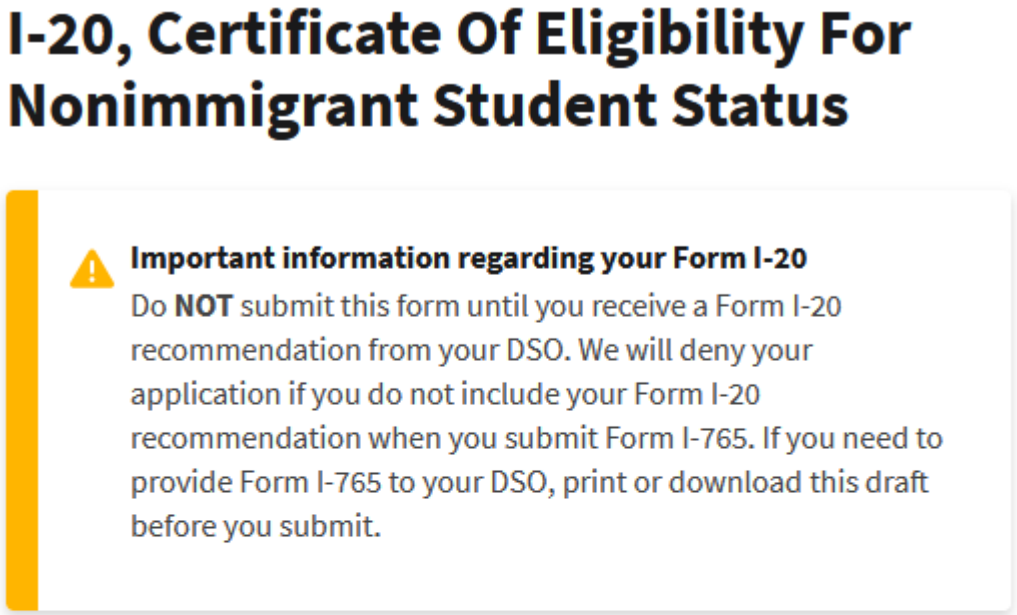
Previously Authorized CPT Or OPT

- All applicants include:
  - Copy of **Employment Information** page that was attached with your OPT Recommendation I-20
- If you have previously been authorized for CPT at another U.S. school:
  - Provide copy of Form I-20(s) with previous CPT authorization
- If you have previously been authorized for OPT:
  - Provide copy of previous OPT Recommendation I-20 (or any I-20 issued after OPT was approved)



Form I-20

- Upload your OPT Recommendation I-20 that was recently issued by ISSO
- **CHECK!**
  - Is your I-20 signed and dated by you in ink pen?
  - Has your I-20 been issued within the past 30 days?
  - Is your education level and major correct?
  - Is your pre-completion request correctly listed as either Part-Time or Full-Time?
  - Are your requested start and end dates correct?
  - Did you upload both pages of the I-20 (front and back)?
- *Contact ISSO before submitting your application if there are any errors.*



I-20, Certificate Of Eligibility For Nonimmigrant Student Status

Important information regarding your Form I-20

Do **NOT** submit this form until you receive a Form I-20 recommendation from your DSO. We will deny your application if you do not include your Form I-20 recommendation when you submit Form I-765. If you need to provide Form I-765 to your DSO, print or download this draft before you submit.

Upload a copy of the Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status endorsed by the Designated School Official (DSO). For the (c)(3)(B) eligibility category, your DSO must have entered the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record within 30 days of you submitting Form I-765. If you fail to do so, we will deny your OPT request. For the (c)(3)(C) eligibility category, the Form I-20 must have been endorsed by the DSO within 60 days of submitting Form I-765.

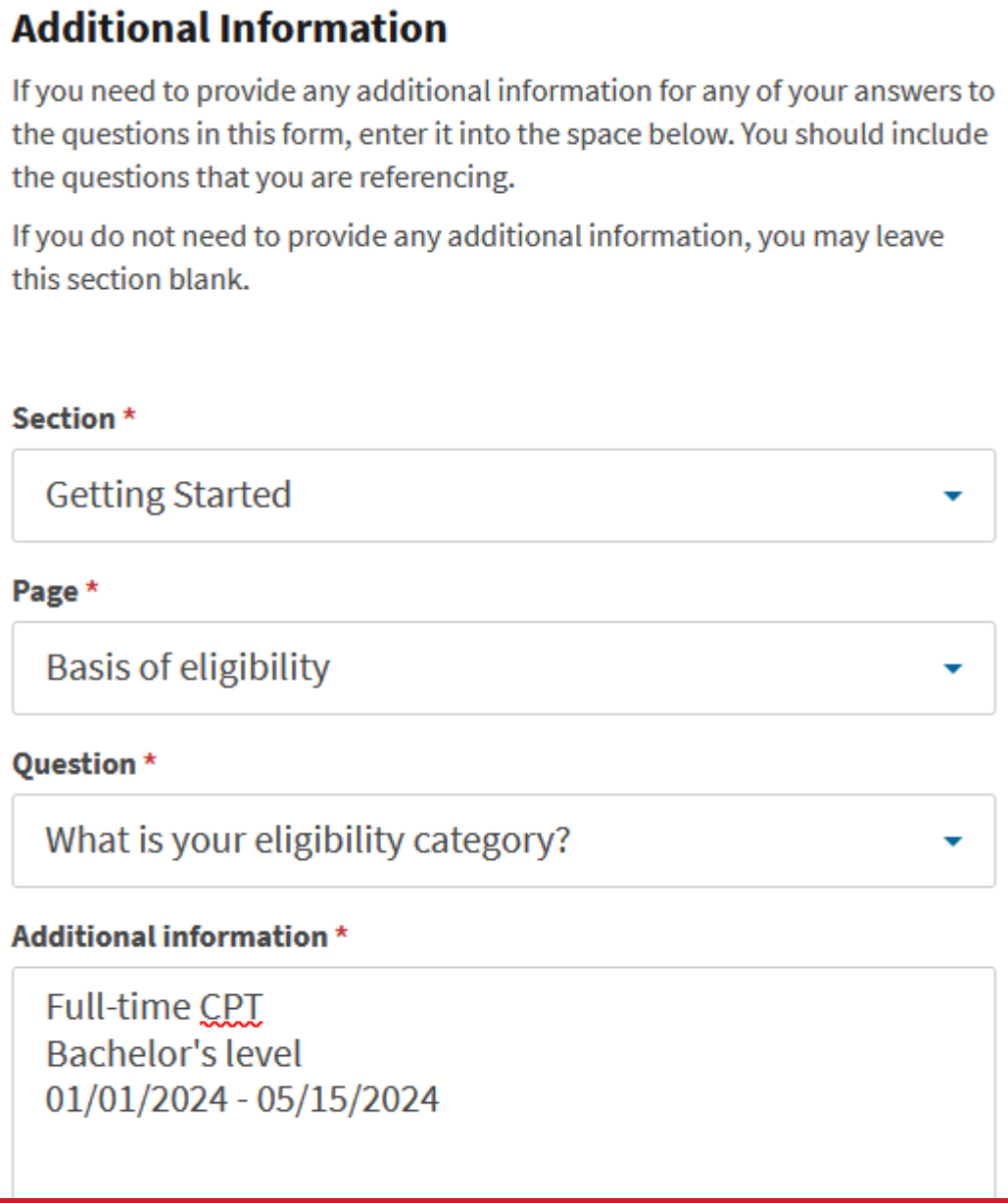
Section 4: Additional Information

Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

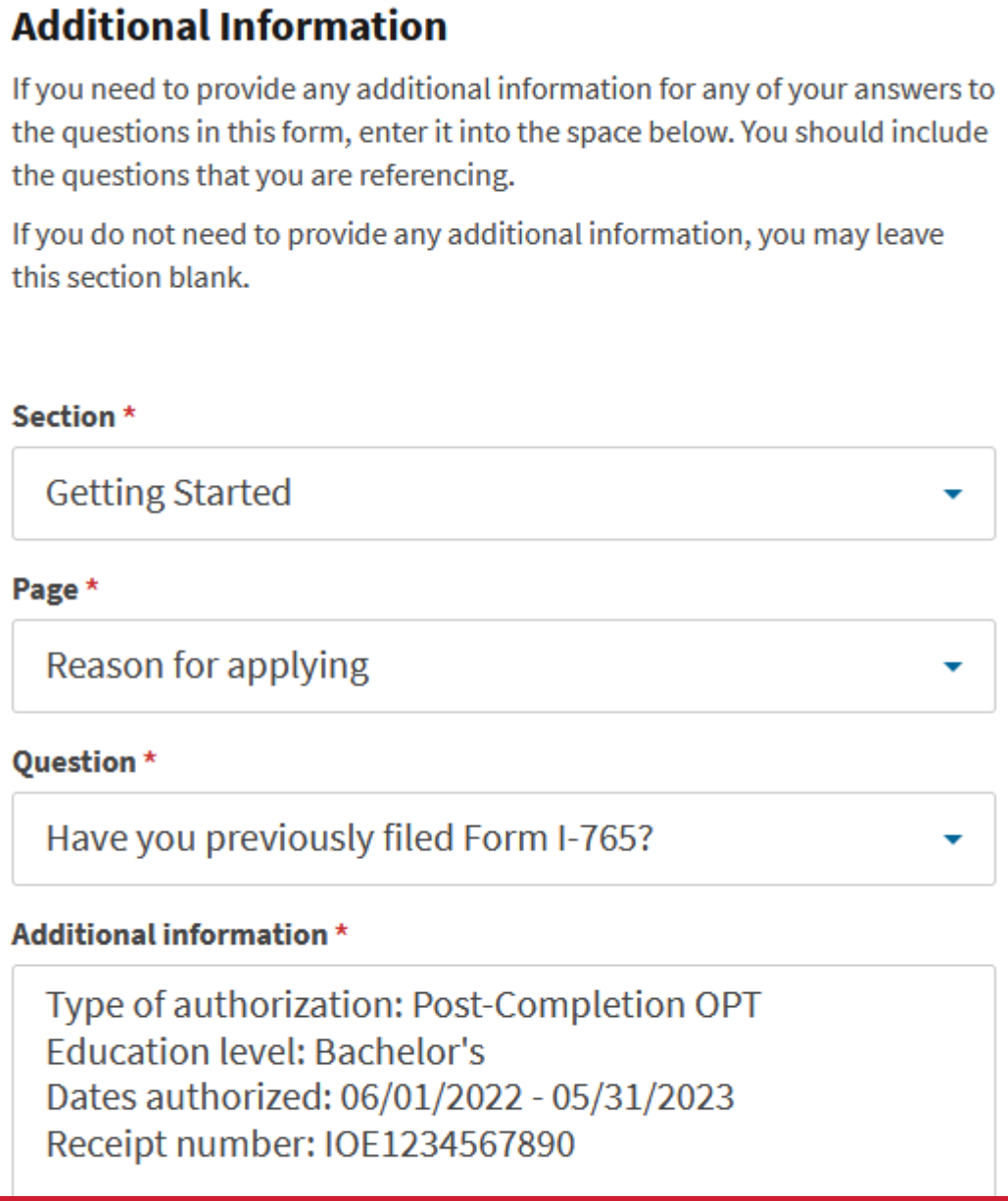
Additional Information: Previously Used CPT

- If you have had any CPT authorized, provide this information in the Additional Information section.
- Include:
  - Whether full-time or part-time
  - Education level CPT was authorized at
  - Dates of authorization
- *Repeat for all CPT authorization segments*



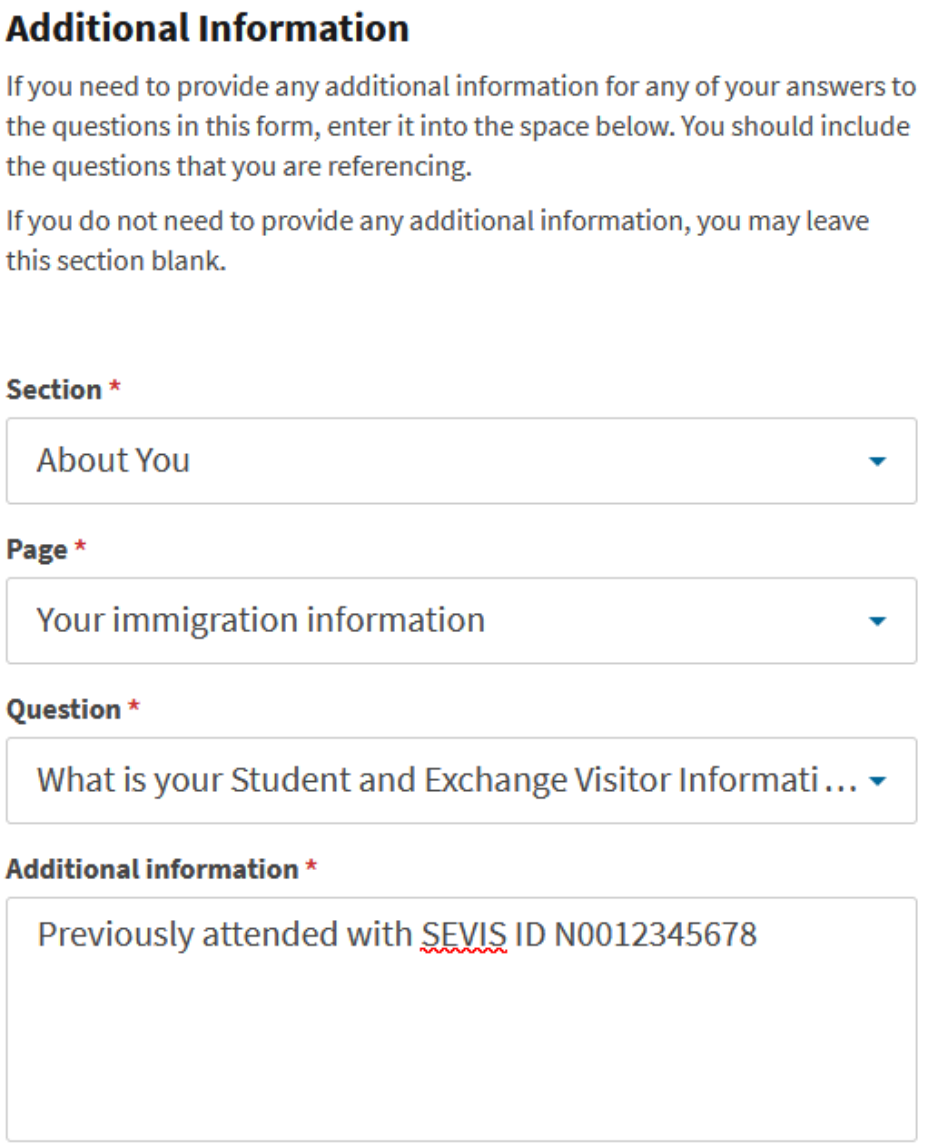
Additional Information: Previously Submitted Form I-765

- If you have previously filed the Form I-765, provide this information in the Additional Information section.
  - This may include past OPT applications, or other applications for an EAD card (pending green card, pending asylum, TPS, etc.)
- Include:
  - Type of authorization – reason for applying or category code you applied for
  - Education level – only for past OPT applications
  - Dates authorized – should match your previous EAD card
  - Receipt number – should be listed on your EAD as "Card #"



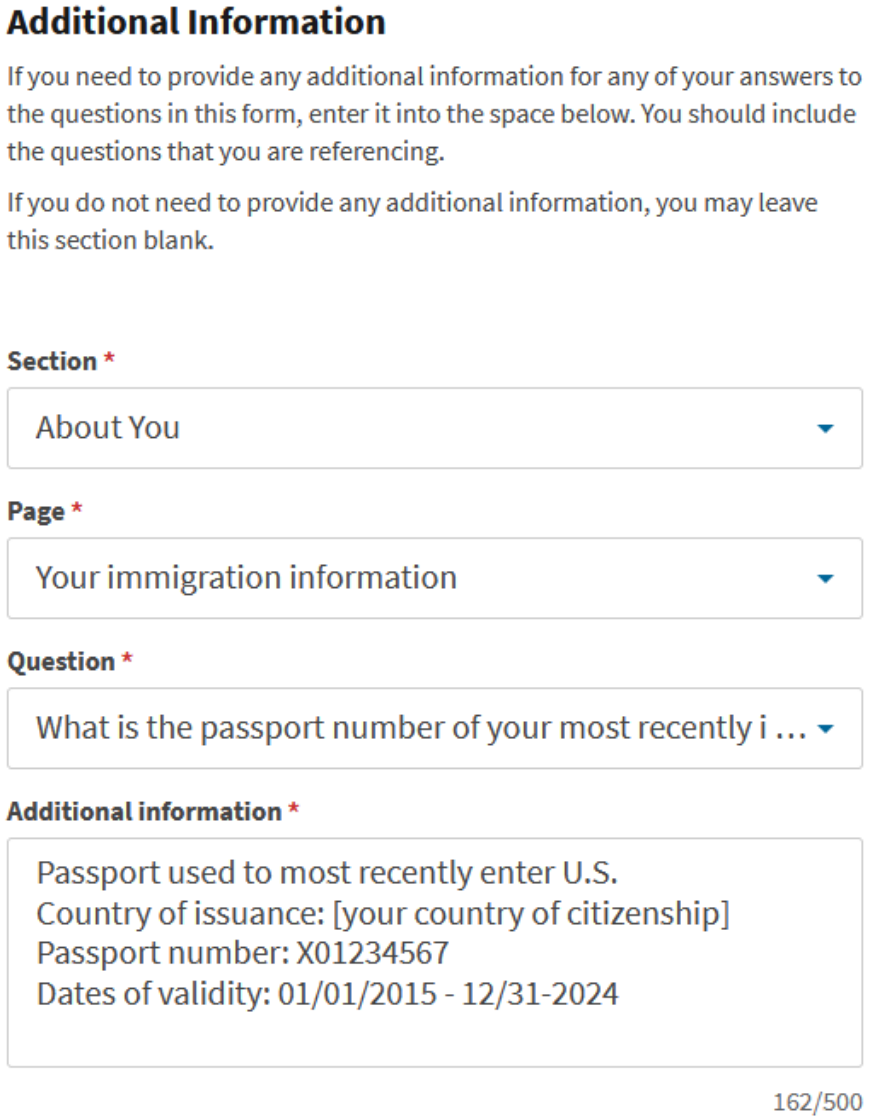
Additional Information: Previous SEVIS ID Number

- If you have previously had a ***different*** SEVIS ID number than your current SEVIS ID number, provide this information in the Additional Information section.
- This may include:
  - If you previously attended a different school in F-1 status and had a gap in enrollment before attending ISU (did not complete a SEVIS record transfer)
  - If you previously attended ISU and took a leave of absence (previous F-1 record terminated) before later returning to ISU
  - If you previously held a J-1 exchange visitor visa status



Additional Information: Most Recently Entered U.S. with Previous Passport

- If you most recently entered the United States with a ***different*** passport than your passport that is currently valid, provide this information in the Additional Information section.
- This should apply only if you have renewed your passport within the United States since your most recent date of entry.



Section 5: Review and Submit

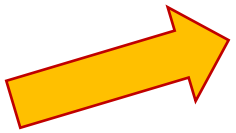
Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

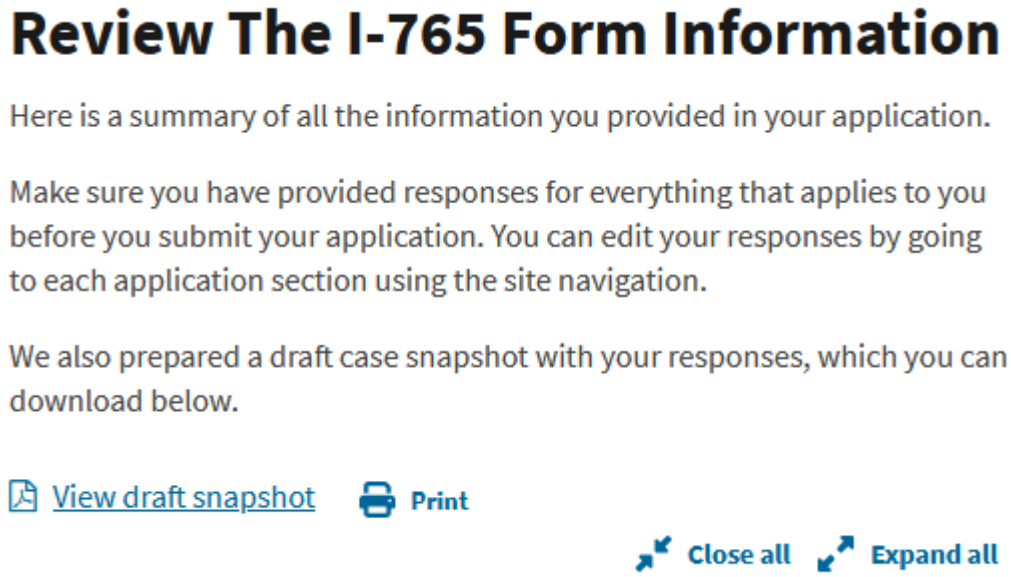
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

Stop for ISSO Review

- Once you reach the **Review your application** section, select the **View draft snapshot** button to download a copy of your application as a PDF.

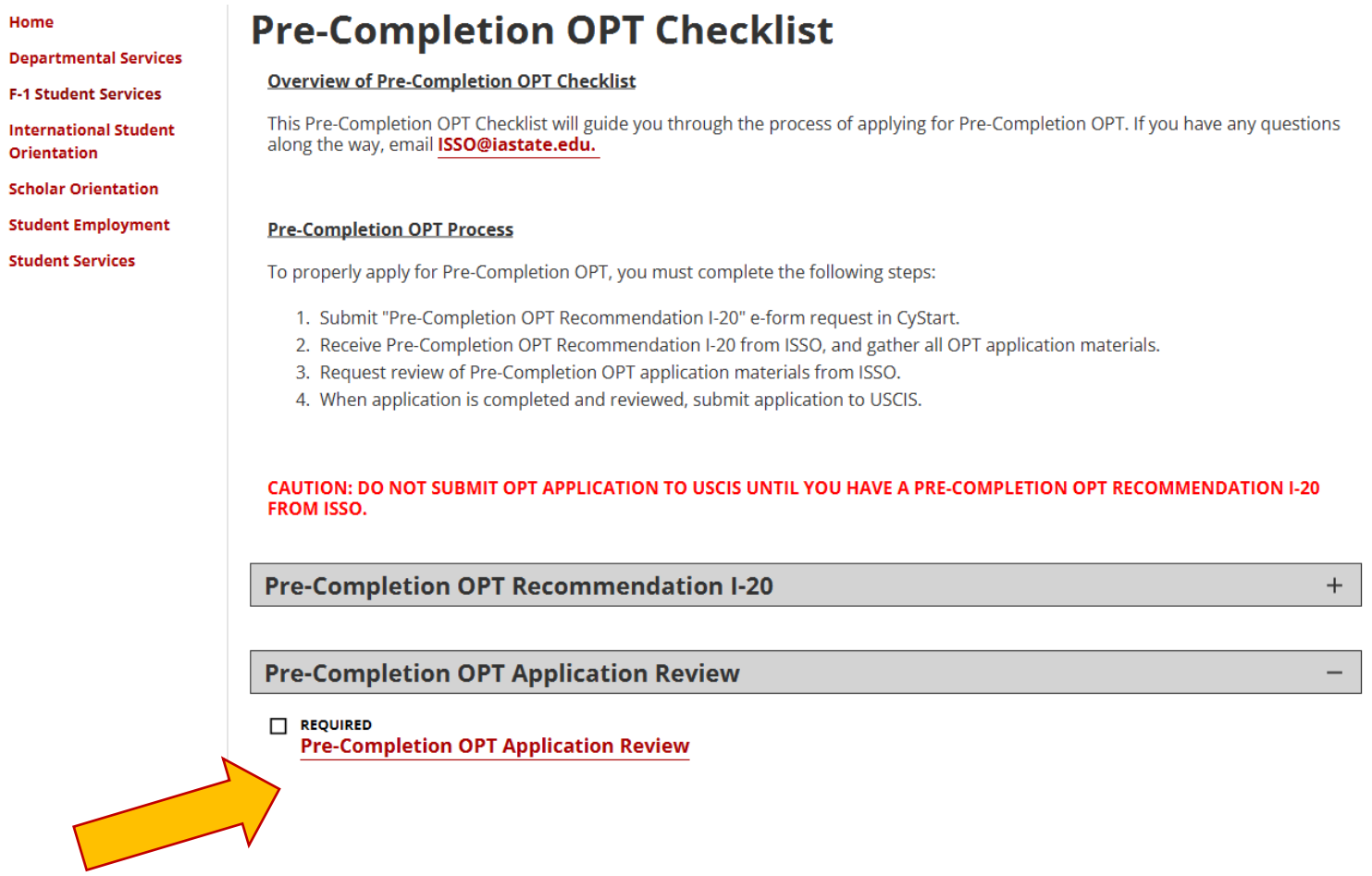
- ISSO strongly encourages submitting your application for review by an ISSO advisor before submitting your final application and paying the application fee.





Stop for ISSO Review

- To have your application reviewed, return to the **Pre-Completion OPT Checklist** in Cystart where you previously submitted your OPT I-20 request.
- Submit the final form, **Pre-Completion OPT Application Review**.
- In this form, you will upload:
  - "Draft Snapshot" that you downloaded from online application (see previous slide)
  - Copies of other documents required for your application
- You will receive feedback to your Pre-Completion OPT Application Review within 2 business days.



Submitting Your Final Application

- After receiving feedback, return to the draft application in your MyUSCIS account and correct any errors.

- If you received significant feedback, you may consider submitting your application for a second review.

- Once you have reviewed your updated application, submit your final application and pay the application fee.

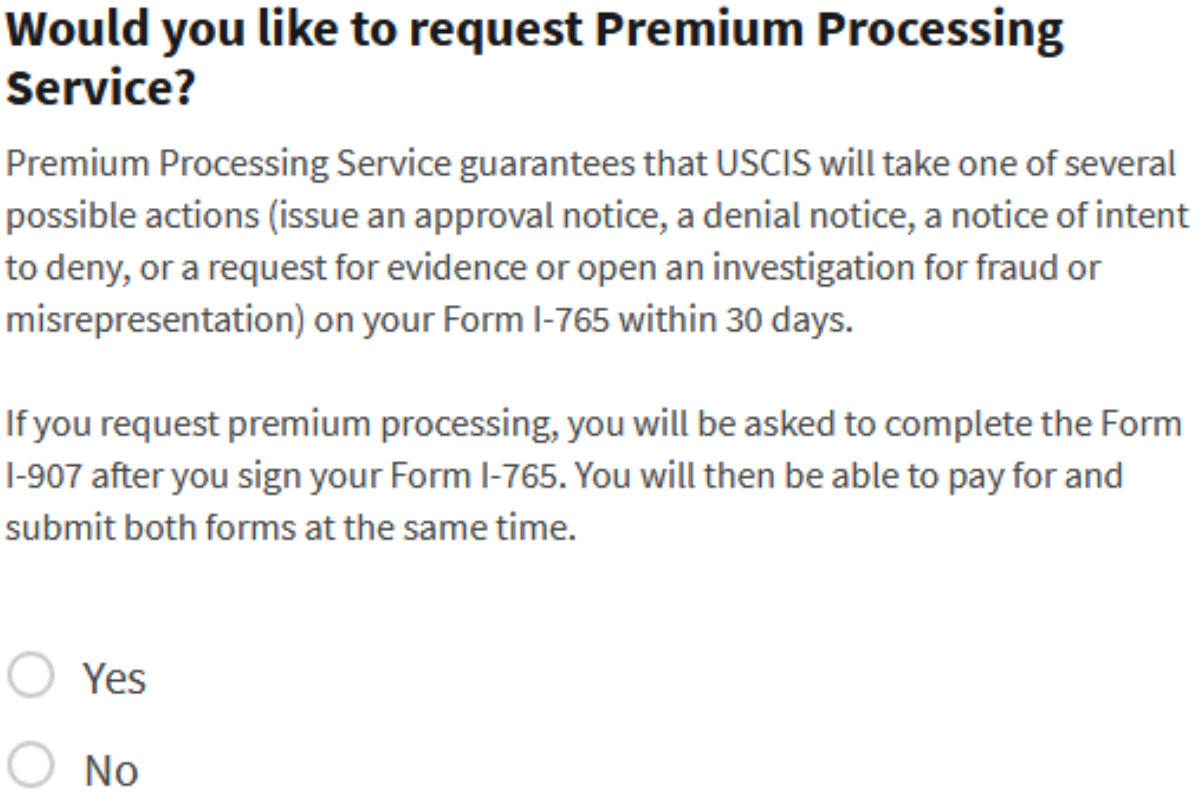
After Submitting

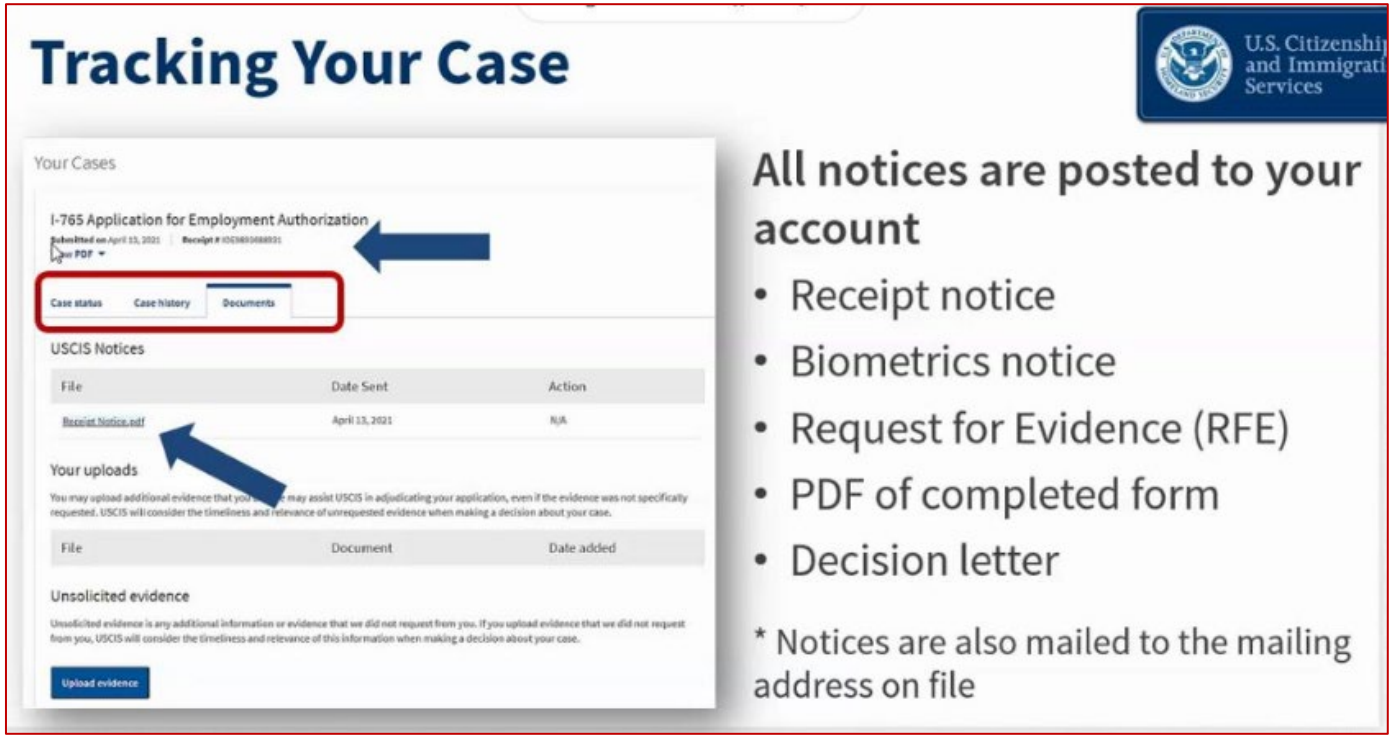
Pre-Completion OPT – (c) (03) (A)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
International Students and Scholars Office

Adding Form I-907 Premium Processing

- If you selected **Yes** to requesting the Premium Processing service, then the system should automatically route you to complete the **Form I-907** after submitting your Form I-765.
- The Form I-907 will “link” to your Form I-765 receipt notice.
- The Form I-907 does not require additional ISSO review. You only need to confirm your name and address, and submit the additional fee.



After Submitting Your Final Application

- After submitting your application, a receipt notice will be automatically generated in the **Documents** tab
- Future notices will also appear in the **Documents** tab, such as:
  - Biometrics notice
  - Request for Evidence (RFE)
  - Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID)
  - Approval notice
- A formal receipt notice will be mailed within 1-2 weeks
- After approval, your EAD card should be received at your mailing address within 1-2 weeks