24-MONTH STEM OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) EXTENSION

F-1 students with degrees in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) may apply for a 24-month extension of their current post-completion OPT status based on several requirements. The 24-month STEM OPT extension may not be divided and may be used twice in non-consecutive periods. Go to STEM OPT Hub for more information.

Eligibility

✓ Applicant must currently be in a 12-month period of post-completion OPT.
✓ Applicant has completed a degree in a current STEM eligible field from a current U.S. accredited institution with SEVP certification within the 10 years before the STEM OPT application date and has not already utilized this degree to apply for an STEM OPT extension.
✓ Student must have at least 20 hours per week paid employment at a job in the U.S. directly related to their STEM degree.
✓ The employer must be enrolled in USCIS’s E-Verify employment eligibility verification program.
✓ The employer must provide the student with formal training and learning objectives.

When to Apply

✓ Students may apply for an extension up to 90 days before the end date of the current 12-month OPT.

Continuing Employment

✓ Students who file in a timely manner will have their post-completion OPT automatically extended while the STEM OPT application is pending until a final decision on the STEM OPT request is processed or for 180 days, whichever is first.
  - Your Receipt Notice is proof of the timely filing.

Important Information

✓ Students may not accrue more than 90 days of unemployment from the start date on their 12-month EAD card during their 12-month post-completion OPT or up to 150 days with a STEM OPT extension.
✓ Although it is possible to change employers and/or have multiple employers during the STEM OPT extension period, all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.
✓ If a student changes employers during the STEM OPT extension period, they must submit a new Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students) within 10 days of leaving the previous employer. If the time between employers is longer than 10 days, the student must report the loss of employment to the OISS advisor and submit the I-983 later.
✓ International students are exempt from paying Social Security and Medicare taxes for the first 5 calendar years (including OPT) they hold F-1 status but are required to pay all federal and state taxes.
✓ F-1 students cannot qualify for STEM OPT extensions unless they will be bona fide employees of the employer signing the Form I-983 because F-1 students may not provide employer attestations on their own behalf.
✓ Travel: We advise that you do not travel if your STEM OPT is pending and your 12-month OPT has ended. To return to the U.S. during STEM OPT, you'll need the following documents:
  - STEO OPT I-20 signed for travel (valid for 6 months) on the 2nd page;
    - If you cannot come to OISS for the signature, complete the Student I-20/DS-2019 Request Form to request a new I-20 with a travel signature;
  - Valid visa (it is possible to renew a visa after STEM OPT approval but difficult with a pending application);
Passport valid for at least 6 months from the date you re-enter;
- If your STEM OPT has not been approved - Form I-797C (Receipt Notice);
  - If your STEM OPT is approved while you are out of the country, you will need to have your EAD card and an employment letter or contract in order to return;
- If your STEM OPT has been approved – STEM OPT EAD card and employment letter or contract;
- Please note: re-entry after travel out of the country is never guaranteed. If your application is denied while you are out of the country, it may not be possible for you to return on the F-1 visa or to resume STEM OPT.

**Reporting requirements:**
- Employers are responsible for reporting the termination or departure of the student to the OISS within 5 business days after the student leaves employment. Employers must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment or if the student has not reported to work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the employer’s consent, whichever date is earlier.
- With any employer changes and EVERY 6 months starting from the date the STEM OPT extension starts and ending when the student’s F-1 status ends or the STEM OPT extension ends, whichever is first, students must send OISS the 24-Month STEM OPT Extension Employer Update/Validation Report. Any employment additions or losses must be reported within 10 days of the change.
- Students must complete the “Evaluation on Student Progress” portion of the Form I-983 within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date. At the end of the STEM OPT extension or if employers change, the student must complete the “Final Evaluation on Student Progress” assessment. Once the evaluations are complete, the student must collect signatures from their employer and submit the form to the OISS advisor.
- Both the student and employer are obligated to report to the OISS advisor any material changes to, or material deviations from, the student’s formal training plan.
- You are required to report your mailing and/or physical address(es) updates within 10 days of the change. You may use the SEVP Portal (https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help) to update these changes.
- Go to Students: STEM OPT Reporting Requirements for detailed STEM OPT reporting requirements.

**How to Apply For A 24-month STEM OPT Extension**
- **If you can come to the OISS:** schedule an appointment with an OISS advisor. Please bring items 1-3 in the checklist items and the items listed in section B to the appointment.
  - Email the OISS advisor the completed I-983 to review before coming in for your appointment.
- **If you cannot come to the OISS:** submit the checklist items below to an OISS advisor by fax or email, specify the OISS advisor the fax is being sent to. Do not send your Social Security Number on any of the documents. Allow 5 business days for the I-20 to be issued once all the required documents are received then follow the directions in section B below.

**Checklist**
- 1. Completed Form I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization). Below are some guidelines for the I-765 to be used in addition to the I-765 instructions. Please read Form I-765 instructions and questions carefully:
  - For “I am applying for”, select “Renewal of my permission to accept employment”;
  - Item 3: the address you enter will be the address used by USCIS for any correspondence regarding your STEM OPT application;
  - Item 15: select “Yes” because you’re applying for an extension. The USCIS Office will be listed on the Form I-797 receipt notice from your 12-month OPT application. The date(s) are both the start and end dates listed on your EAD card (handwrite the dates if you cannot type them);
    - You can also search online for the USCIS office using the first 3 letters of your EAD Card#;
  - Item 20: “Eligibility Category”, enter (c)(3)(C);
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- Item 21: enter the degree level and major (e.g. Master’s – Chemistry) and get the E-Verify information from your employer;
- Float your signature inside the “Applicant’s Signature” box, do not touch or go outside the lines. The signature will be scanned for your EAD card.

2. Completed Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students). Please read and follow the I-983 instructions carefully for detailed information on how to complete each section.
- Student must complete Section 1 and work with their employer to complete Sections 2-6.
  - Section 1:
    - The SEVIS School Code is in the “School Information” on your most recent I-20.
    - Enter the USCIS # on the EAD card for the “Employment Authorization Number”.
    - Major and CIP Code are in the Major information on page 1 of your I-20.
    - “Based on Prior Degree” - Check “Yes” if your STEM OPT participation is based on a previously-obtained STEM degree, and is not the same degree your current 12-month OPT is based on.
  - Section 3, enter the date your STEM OPT training period will start for “Start Date of Employment”.
  - The self-evaluations are not to be completed until within 12 months after the listed STEM OPT start date and at the end of the STEM OPT extension with that employer or when you change your status.

3. Copy of your current EAD card (front and back).

4. If you do not live in the area: Shipping Request Form or Authorization to Release Information.

A. The OISS advisor will review your request and recommend the extension in SEVIS if all requirements are completed. You will receive a new I-20 with the OPT extension recommendation on page 2. If you cannot come to the OISS, the OISS advisor will use the instructions on the Shipping Request Form or the Authorization to Release Information form to get you your I-20.
- Please allow up to 5 business days to process your request.

B. Where you currently live, as listed on Form I-765, determines where you file. Read the “Where to File” section at http://www.uscis.gov/i-765 and send the following documents in the order below to the appropriate address (Form I-983 is for OISS and not to be sent to USCIS):
- We advise that you request tracking information for your mailing.
- Optional: Students may attach Form G-1145 (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance) as the 1st page of the application packet to request an e-Notification of the receipt of the application at the USCIS Lockbox facility. There is no filing fee for this service.
- 2 identical passport photos (2” x 2”) taken within 30 days of filing your application with your name and I-94 number lightly written on the back of the photos in a small envelope; Go to Passport Photos for specifications.
- *Money order, personal check, cashier’s check, or credit card using Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transactions in U.S. currency for the filing fee payment of $410 (four hundred and ten). *Filing fee subject to change. Check Instructions for Form I-765 for the fee.
  - Make checks and money orders payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with “STEM OPT filing fee” in the memo line.
- Original Form I-765 completed and signed.
- Copy of the 1st and 2nd pages of your new 24-month STEM OPT I-20 signed by the OISS advisor and you.
  - If I-20s are issued for dependents, do not send copies or originals to USCIS.
- Copies of:
  - the bio page of your current passport (include extension page if applicable),
  - current visa, and
  - I-94 - go to I-94 Retrieval to print an electronic I-94.
- Copy of the 1st and 2nd pages of your 12-month OPT I-20.
- Copy of your current EAD card (front and back).
- Copy of the proof of your STEM degree and major (official or unofficial transcripts or diploma).
- If the STEM OPT extension is not based on your current 12-month post-completion OPT, include a copy of the 1st and 2nd pages (or 1st and 3rd pages for I-20s issued before July 2015) of the I-20 for the STEM degree.
• If the I-20 is not available, request a letter or a screenshot of your SEVIS record from the previous school.

☐ If you previously had a STEM OPT extension, include a copy of the 1st and 2nd pages (or 1st and 3rd pages for I-20s issued before July 2015) of that I-20 and front and back of the EAD card.

THE APPLICATION PACKET MUST BE RECEIVED BY USCIS WITHIN 60 DAYS OF THE I-20 ISSUE DATE LISTED ON THE 1ST PAGE OF YOUR I-20 OR YOUR APPLICATION WILL BE DENIED

Note:
• In 2 to 4 weeks you will get your Form I-797C, Notice of Action (Receipt Notice) with a Receipt Number confirming that USCIS has received your OPT application. This does not indicate STEM OPT approval.
  o If you included Form G-1145 with your application packet, you will get an email and/or text message notification with your receipt number within 24 hours of USCIS accepting your application – you will still get a receipt notice in the mail.
• Go to www.uscis.gov to check the status of your application under “Check Case Status”.
  o You may sign up for an account to receive email updates on your case.
• You should receive your EAD card within 90 days of the received date on the Receipt Notice if your application is approved.
  o If your application is pending for more than 75 days from the received date, please contact an OISS advisor.

❖ IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST FOR EVIDENCE (RFE) OR REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI) FROM USCIS, IMMEDIATELY CONTACT AN OISS ADVISOR BEFORE RESPONDING ❖