F-1 17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (STEM OPT)

STEM UPDATE:

Please be aware this 17 month STEM OPT extension is only effective until May 9, 2016. For the new 24 month STEM OPT extension, please visit the following link: http://ic.utah.edu/OPT-changes.php.

What is STEM Extension?

F-1 students approved for standard post-OPT based on a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) field that appears on the DHS STEM-Designated Degree Program List can apply to USCIS for a one-time, 17-month extension (one time per lifetime) of post-completion OPT (for total eligibility of 29 months). To be eligible for the extension, the student’s employer must be registered in E-Verify and must agree to report to the DSO when the student is terminated or leaves employment. The student must apply for the STEM OPT extension before the period of post-OPT expires.

Students with current, approved OPT STEM extension must report to ISS office their participation in STEM OPT both 6 months and 12 months after the start date on the EAD card. If ISS staff is not able to report the students participation on OPT to USCIS on time, the student will automatically be terminated 32 days after the reporting due date.

Please note that this is not an entitled benefit. USCIS has the right to deny any OPT application at their discretion.

Who is eligible to apply?

- You must have not previously completed a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- You are currently approved for post-completion OPT.
- Your current OPT must be based on degree in field on DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- Your employer must be registered in the E-verify program.
- Your employer must agree to report the termination of your employment or your departure to the International Student & Scholar Services or through any other means or process identified by DHS within 48 hours of the event if it is prior to end of the authorized period of OPT.
- The work has to be directly related to your major.
How to apply for STEM OPT:

1. Log into iStart through the START LOGIN button on ic.utah.edu and submit an online request by completing “OPT STEM Extension Request” e-form.
2. Once ISS receives a complete application of OPT STEM extension request, as ISS advisor will issue you a new OPT STEM I-20 within two weeks which will include our recommendation for extended employment on page 2. You will need to send in a copy of this I-20 to USCIS.
3. Mail all the required documents to USCIS within 30 days of when your OPT STEM I-20 was issued.
4. Keep copies of everything you mail for your own records.

Following are the documents you will need to send to USCIS:

- Form I-765 (downloadable from www.USCIS.gov, see page 4 for instructions)
- A copy of new I-20 issued from ISS with your OPT STEM dates.
- A copy of photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your valid passport.
- A copy of your visa page of your passport- even if expired.
- A copy of both sides of your I-94 card (with the new online version, there is just one page, obtainable at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html).
- Copies of ALL previous I-20 issued to you in your current education level (if you do not have these, contact ISS. We may have copies of your old I-20s. Please give ISS one week to look for your documents. However, it is your responsibility to keep previous immigration documents.)
- Copy of previous EAD card, both front and back.
- Two passport type photographs (taken within 30 days of submitting application). Print your name and I-94 card number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of I-765.
- Fee of $380- In the form of check or money order, made to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Cash or debit cards are not accepted. WRITE YOUR SEVIS # ON THE MEMO (starts with N on top right corner of your I-20).
- A copy of your transcript and diploma that states the degree field.
- G-1145 (optional) to receive an E-verification of application acceptance. Attach to the first page of your application (downloadable from www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf).
- Meet with ISS advisor to review your packet (optional).
Instructions for filling out Form I-765:

- For 17-month STEM extension; check “renewal”.
- Fill out lines 1 through 17; sign and date to certify.
- #3 Return Address: This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least 3½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address- the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward”. If the card is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your card will be returned to the immigration services and destroyed. If you want to use a friend’s address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. Contact ISS if there are any issues finding a mailing address.
- #3 Return Address: If the return address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Utah, please check the chart on page 3 for the proper mailing address for your application.
- #10 Alien Registration Number: In most cases you will use your I-94 number. If you obtained a most recent copy of your I-94 from the web (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/Request.htm), it is the Admission (I-94) Record number on top of the page. If you have a small white card in your passport, the number is found on the upper left side of the I-94 card. It is usually an 11 digit number- sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.
- #11 Previous Employment Authorization: For a 17 month STEM extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.
- #16 Eligibility Categories: For F-1 OPT, fill out as follows:
  - For 17 month OPT STEM extension: (C) (3) (C)
- #17 OPT STEM Extension: Since you are applying for the 17 month extension, you must also complete this section with your degree field and your employer’s E-Verify number.

Am I ready to send in my application?

Gather all documents together and send by certified mail with a return receipt OR FedEx or UPS (so that you may have a tracking number). You will receive a receipt notice (Form I-797) from the USCIS once they receive your OPT packet. If you attached G-1145 form to the first page of your application, they will also send you an E-verification of application acceptance once they receive your packet.

- Am I sending my application within 30 days of ISS creating my OPT STEM I-20?
- Am I sending my application before my current OPT end date?
- Did I include all of the documents listed above?
- Did I make copies of my OPT STEM documents for my record?
- Did I meet with an ISS advisor to review my packet?

Where to mail:

Updated 03/16/16 AKC
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<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington (state), Wisconsin, Wyoming, or Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands</td>
<td>For U.S. Postal Service deliveries including U.S.P.S. express mail: USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 For (non-USPS) courier service: USCIS, Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034</td>
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<tr>
<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Dallas Lockbox:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia</td>
<td>For U.S. Postal Service deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 For Express Mail: USCIS, Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy, 121, Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
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**REMINDERS: REGULATIONS WHILE YOU ARE ON "OPT"**

- **REQUIRED UPDATES (ADDRESS AND EMPLOYMENT):**
  Immigration regulations require that while you are on OPT, you **MUST** notify the University of Utah ISS within 15 days of changing your address by filling out the Address Update e-form from iStart. If you have a change of employer, you are responsible to notify ISS about the change of employment by completing the OPT/OPT STEM Employment Update Request e-form from iStart. ISS will create a new OPT STEM I-20 with updated employer information and contact you for pick up.

- **TRAVELING ABROAD WHILE ON OPT:**
  In order to re-enter the U.S. while you are on OPT, you must have a valid passport, valid F-1 visa, I-20 signed within last six months (travel signature), and the valid EAD (OPT work card), **AND your job offer letter**.

- **NEVER ENTER the U.S. in ANY VISA STATUS OTHER THAN F-1 while on OPT. It will invalidate your OPT.**

- **REPORT OPT PARTICIPATION:**
  Students with current, approved OPT STEM extension must report to ISS office their participation in the OPT on their 6 months and 12 months after the employment start date. If ISS staff is not able to report the students participation in the OPT to USCIS on time, the students will automatically be terminated 32 days after the reporting due date.
**Processing**: Request for OPT I-20 should be received by the International Student & Scholar Services no later than 3 weeks before your current OPT end date.

**Start date**: The employment authorization for STEM extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization.

**End date**: It is the date on your EAD card. You must end your employment on this date unless you are granted an H1B visa, or change to another visa type that allows employment.

**60 day grace period**: You have 60 days of grace period once you complete STEM OPT. If you are remaining in the U.S. for the grace period, you cannot leave and re-enter. You can either leave U.S., transfer to another school, or change to another visa category.

**H-1B and Cap Gap**: Current regulations allow students with pending or approved H-1B petitions to remain in F-1 Status during the cap-gap period. For more information, please refer to our H-1B OPT Cap-Gap Extension Policy guide (http://ic.utah.edu/forms-publications/documents/Policy-Guide-H1B-OPT-CapGap-Extension.pdf) and consult with your employer’s attorney.
Frequently Asked Questions for STEM Extension:

GENERAL

1. How long will my STEM OPT application take to process?
   Applying for practical training is a two-step process. You must first obtain your certified OPT STEM I-20 from the International Student & Scholar Services, which can take up to 2 weeks to process, and then mail your application with all the required documents to USCIS to request an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card, which can take up to 3 months to approve.

2. When should I submit my OPT application?
   You must apply before your current OPT EAD expires. The earliest you can send in your STEM extension request is 120 days prior to the end of your post-completion OPT.

3. I sent in my application but my POST OPT EAD card expired. What happens?
   If the STEM application is properly and timely filed, the student’s employment authorization is considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT extension EAD application is pending. Please note USCIS must have received your OPT STEM application before your POST-OPT has expired for you to be considered for STEM OPT.

4. Can I get a confirmation that my application has been received by USCIS?
   If you would like an email confirmation that your application has been received by USCIS, you may fill out Form G-1145 (http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf) and attach it to the top of your application. The notice you receive will not be a guarantee that they will approve your application, but merely a confirmation that it arrived at their office for processing.

5. Do I have to do anything with ISS while I am on STEM OPT?
   ISS needs to report your participation in the STEM by adding employment information to your SEVIS record. Students with current, approved OPT STEM extension must report to ISS office their participation in OPT both 6 months and 12 months after the employment start date. If ISS staff is not able to report the students participation in the OPT to USCIS on time, the student will automatically be terminated 32 days after the reporting due date.

   You should bring the EAD card to ISS so we can make a photocopy of the card for your file. We also accept scanned and emailed copies as well. We will verify that the information on your EAD card matches the information on the SEVIS system.

6. Does the job I have while on STEM OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid?
   Employment can be paid or unpaid.

7. If I complete one degree program, take 12 months of OPT, and then begin a second course of study, am I eligible for an additional 12 months of practical training?
   After completing one OPT, you must complete a higher academic level (Bachelors, Masters, or PhD) before you are eligible for another OPT. If you complete a PhD degree, you may not apply for a Masters level OPT, even if you have never participated in OPT on that level before.
8. Do I get a grace period after my STEM OPT?
Yes, your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days (called a ‘60-day grace period’) after the date you complete STEM OPT requirements. You are expected to leave the country by that date or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.

9. What if I have lost or thrown away my old I-20s?
The International Student & Scholar Services might have copies of your old I-20s in your file. You can request that ISS make you copies of your old I-20s, but keep in mind that it could take up to a week to process your request. Also note that it is your responsibility to keep your I-20's in your record. Your file may or may not contain copies of the documents you are looking for. It is best if you maintain a well-kept file of your documents in a safe place.

10. Since I am moving this summer (and I still have not moved to my new address), can I use a foreign address to receive the EAD?
No, USCIS requires that you indicate an address in the United States and the address must be appropriate to the Service Center address to which you send your application. You may not put a foreign address on form I-765. The address you use may be a P. O. Box. Contact ISS if you have further issues with your mailing address.

11. Should I keep a copy of my application?
Always keep copies of all official documents that you send through the mail. We also strongly recommend that you make copies of any checks or money orders that you mail to USCIS as proof of payment in case your application is lost in the mail.

12. How can I check on the status of my application?
When USCIS sends you your receipt notice in 2-3 weeks, you will receive a receipt number which begins with the letters "LIN". Please check their website at http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis. You can use this "LIN" number to access information about your application.

13. What happens to my dependents, who are on F-2 visas, during the application and OPT STEM process?
If you are granted STEM OPT work authorization, you are still in legal F-1 immigration status. Your dependents also remain in legal F-2 immigration visa status. You will receive new I-20s for yourself and all dependents if you are eligible for the OPT STEM work authorization.

OPT AND TRAVELING

14. Can I travel home (or anywhere outside of the U.S.) while I am on the OPT?
Pending STEM OPT: A student need to wait to receive the I-797 receipt to prove the STEM OPT application is in process.

Approved STEM OPT: After you have received your EAD card, your travel documents should include your signed OPT I-20, valid visa, your passport valid for at least six months, EAD card, and a letter from your employer. The letter should state that they have employed you or plan on employing you, and you are
coming back to the U.S. to work for them. When you receive your EAD card it will say, “not valid for travel”. This means besides your EAD card you will need your I-20, valid passport, visa, and I-20 in order to travel. However, you must carry your EAD card with you when traveling.

Please understand that entry into the U.S. is granted at the discretion of the USCIS officer, and you travel at your own risk.

Dependent travel: Since STEM OPT is not noted on dependent I-20s, an F2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation, EAD card, and proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

15. I want to leave the U.S. for a short time while my STEM OPT application is in process, but I need to return before the card will arrive. I have a tourist visa (B2) that is valid for 10 years. Can’t I just enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while I’m waiting to get the EAD card, and then start work with the card once I get it?

NO!! If you intend to continue working on your OPT, NEVER enter in any other immigration status except F-1. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B status, and you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT will be invalid!

16. Can I renew my F-1 visa while on the STEM OPT?

The risk of denial of an application for a renewed visa stamp for STEM OPT is somewhat higher than while you are in your active student program. The F-1 student visa requires that the applicant must intend to return to the home country at the end of the program, and if the embassy official is not convinced of your intention to return home, the visa application will be denied. However, it is possible and many students on OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent. Please see ISS advisor to discuss more in detail.

17. What documents do I need to show at the embassy for a new visa stamp under STEM OPT?

You need to take a valid passport, the EAD card or the receipt notice for your application, an I-20 created by the International Student & Scholar Services for your OPT STEM application, AND your job offer letter or proof of employment. The official job offer letter should sound temporary and not permanent. You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will apply to the job market in your home country, and how you intend to apply it there. Check with your specific embassy or consulate for additional documents needed. Each embassy is different.

18. Do I still need my I-20 endorsed for travel if I am on the STEM OPT?

Yes, during the STEM OPT year, if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every six months. If you are not located in the Salt Lake area, mail the original I-20 to ISS for endorsement, leaving plenty of time for possible mailing delays both ways.
OPT AND EMPLOYMENT

19. Do I need to have a job offer to apply for the STEM OPT?
   You are required to have a job offer to apply for STEM OPT. To be eligible for a STEM OPT extension, your employer must be registered in the E-verify program. Please check with your employer if they participate in E-Verify. You are required to provide their E-Verify number on your STEM OPT application.

20. Do I need to have a job while I am on the STEM OPT?
   Yes, you do need to be employed while on your STEM OPT. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of post completion OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension (POST and STEM combined). This total number of unemployment applies through the entire period of OPT. Please remember that you MUST update your employment information with International Student & Scholar Services while on STEM OPT.

21. What if I can’t find a full time job?
   USCIS requires that students on STEM OPT program have no more than 120 days of unemployment throughout the duration of your Post OPT and STEM OPT combined. The International Student & Scholar Services strongly recommends students that are nearing the 120 days of unemployment apply for volunteer work. Interning or volunteering in a position directly related to the academic field would be considered “employment” for the purpose of OPT employment as long as you work at least 20 hours per week.

22. Can I change my employer during STEM OPT?
   A student may change employers during the 17-month period, but all employers that a student will work for during the STEM extension period must be registered in the DHS E-Verify program, and the student must report the change in employment to ISS within 10 days of the change.