STEM EXTENSION
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (STEM OPT)

F-1 students who are currently approved for Post-Completion OPT and have completed a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field are eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their practical training.

To be eligible, the degree must appear on the 2016 DHS STEM-Designated Degree Program List: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf.

Students are permitted a total of two periods of the 24-month STEM extension, each immediately following a 12-month OPT period. Students applying for a second STEM extension must have earned a second qualifying degree at a higher education level.

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

Important Reminder

Note: It is your responsibility to ensure you send in the correct application fee and the correct edition of the application.

You can find filing fee and the form edition information on: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765.

Who is eligible to apply?

- You must be approved for post-completion OPT and USCIS must receive your application no earlier than 90 days before the OPT end date and no later than the OPT end date.
- You must be engaging in employment directly related to your STEM degree
- You must have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher in a STEM-approved field:
  - If you wish to apply for STEM OPT based on a previous degree, you must have received the degree from a SEVP-certified institution within the past 10 years and the institution must be accredited at the time you apply for the STEM extension
  - Overseas campuses of U.S. educational institutions are not eligible for SEVP-certification and degrees from these schools cannot be used to apply for STEM OPT
- Your current or prospective STEM OPT employer must be registered in the E-Verify program
- Your current or prospective STEM OPT employer must employ you in a paid position and that position must be at least 21 hours per week and related to your program of study.

NOTE: If you have participated in 12 months or more of full-time CPT, if you have already been approved for STEM OPT twice, or if your Post-OPT has ended, you DO NOT qualify for the STEM extension.
### STEM OPT Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPT End Date</strong></td>
<td>Submission of I-20 from school for OPT completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Earliest USCIS application date</strong></td>
<td>OPT must be received no later than 90 days after OPT End Date.</td>
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| **STEM OPT 24 Months**                     |● Unemployment time: You cannot accrue more than 90 days on post-completion OPT. You receive an additional 60 days of unemployment time for the STEM OPT Extension. In aggregate, the total unemployment allowed on OPT and STEM OPT is 150 days.  
● 180 days of work authorization automatically approved by USCIS if your extension request was filed before the last day of your EAD card.  
● Validation Reports and Evaluations must be submitted in your U Atlas. Be advised that your F-1 record may be terminated for failure to submit these reports. Please see STEM OPT Student Responsibilities in STEM OPT Policy guide for more details.  
● Students should complete their 6-, 12-, 18-, and 24-month validations and submit it to ISSS no later than when it is due.  
● You are responsible for keeping track of these dates. |
| **60 Days Grace Period**                   |You may:  
● return home  
● obtain a new I-20 for the next program of study  
● transfer to another school  
● apply for a change of status  
If you are remaining in the U.S. for the grace period, you cannot leave and re-enter. |

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**Updated 10/08/2021 CAC**
Applying for STEM OPT:

Please note you must mail your documents to USCIS and USCIS must receive your STEM OPT application before the post-completion OPT end date on your EAD card. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure their STEM OPT packet is complete and mailed to the USCIS lockbox.

The following steps are discussed in this policy guide:

**Step 1: Complete the Training Plan (I-983)**
**Step 2: Request a STEM OPT I-20**
**Step 3: Prepare your documents**
**Step 4: Mail your documents to USCIS**

**STEP 1: Complete the Training Plan (I-983)**

Meet with your employer and complete the Form I-983 Training plan (Sections 1-6). You should complete Sections 1 and 2. Your employer will complete Sections 3, 4, and 6. Work together with your employer to complete Section 5.

Your I-983 is not required to be mailed in with your STEM OPT documents. USCIS will reach out to ISSS if they have any questions or would like to review your I-983. You must keep a copy of your I-983 for your own documentation.

1. I-983 form can be found here: [ICE Form I-983](#)
2. Instructions on how to fill out the I-983 form can be found here: [Microsoft Word - i983Instructions (ice.gov)](#)

**STEP 2: Request a STEM OPT I-20**

1. Log into UAtlas and submit an online request by completing the “STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension” e-form. You will be required to upload your completed Form I-983.
2. Once the ISSS office receives your complete and accurate STEM OPT request, ISSS will review your documents and process STEM OPT I-20 within the following 10 business days. The new I-20 will include our recommendation for a STEM OPT extension on page 2. You will need to send in a copy of this I-20 to USCIS. Make sure to hand-sign and date your I-20.
**STEP 3: Prepare your documents**

- **Documents to send to USCIS (in the recommended order):**
  
  - **G-1145** - Downloadable from [https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145](https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145). By completing this form you are requesting an email or text message to be sent to you when your application arrives at the USCIS office. Place this on top of your application so they are aware of your request.
  
  - **Two U.S. passport type photographs** - photos must be taken within the past 30 days and may not be the same photos used for other government requests, such as passport or visa renewals. Print your name and I-94 number clearly on the back of each photo and make sure to not damage the photos. USCIS recommends you use a pencil and write the information lightly but readable. Put the photos in an envelope and place it top of I-765 and indicate on the envelope the photos are inside. Ensure the photos U.S. passport requirements. Photos from hour home country may not be the correct size or may be too old to be used.
  
  - **Application Fee** - In the form of check or money order, made to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. You can find the appropriate fee by using the USCIS Fee Calculator ([https://www.uscis.gov/feecalculator](https://www.uscis.gov/feecalculator)), select “I-765”, “Permission to accept Employment”, “Foreign Students” then “(c)(3)(C)” for STEM OPT. The fee can also be found [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765).
  
  - **Form I-765** (downloadable from [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765)) Instructions on how to complete this form are in the [I-765 Instructions guide](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765). You can find a STEM OPT mock I-765 form here.
  
  - A copy of:
    - Your **STEM OPT I-20** issued from ISSS with your STEM OPT dates (Remember USCIS must receive it within 60 days of the issue date). Make sure you sign and date your OPT I-20 in wet ink by hand.
    - Valid passport identification page (and the expiration date page if it’s on a separate page).
    - F-1 Visa- the most recent F-1 visa issued to you.
    - I-94 (obtainable at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html))
    - Previous EAD card, include a copy of the front and back
    - Your transcript and diploma that states the degree field
    - ALL previous I-20s issued to you in your current education level*
  
  - Meet with ISSS advisor to review your packet (optional but strongly encouraged).

* It is your responsibility to keep your previous immigration documents. However, if you do not have all of your I-20s, you can request ISSS to provide you the copies of your old I-20s by submitting the “Request for Document Copies” e-form. ISSS cannot guarantee that we will have all or any of your documents on our record. If you are missing one or more of your previous I-20s and ISSS does not have them on record, simply include the I-20s that you do have. Missing I-20s do not automatically result in a denial.
➤ Payment Options:

This is only a guideline. If you have any question on your personal check or money order please check with the issuer to confirm each entry as each may have different requirements. ISSS is not liable for incorrect payments submitted to USCIS.

Personal Check:

- Pay to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”. If the money order asks for the recipient address, you should list the address where you are mailing your Post-Completion OPT application.
- In the Memo/Payment For section, put “your SEVIS ID number, STEM OPT”
- In the bottom right corner, sign your name in the “From” section.
- In the money order asks for your purchaser’s address, include your mailing address noted on your I-20 application form.
- Keep the receipt portion of the money order for your records as that is the only way to track your payment.
- Do not sign the back of the money order as it will void the payment.

Money Order:

This is only a guideline. Please double check with the money order issuer to confirm each entry as each money order may have different requirements.

1. Date: MM/DD/YYYY
2. U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3. Write out the fee amount
4. Fee amount in dollar form
5. SEVIS ID (starts with N, found on your I-20), STEM OPT
6. Signature
Step 4: Mail your documents to USCIS

1. Keep copies of everything you mail for your own record.
2. Mail all the required documents to USCIS (see above). Your STEM OPT I-20 is valid for 60 days and it must arrive at USCIS facility before it expires. USCIS also must receive your STEM OPT application before your post-completion OPT EAD expiration date.
3. If USCIS receives your packet before 90 days from your post-completion OPT end date or after your post-completion OPT has ended, then your packet may be rejected right away or worse, be denied about 3 months later.
4. To find the appropriate mailing address, please refer to USCIS website: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765.
5. Be sure to keep your I-797 receipt in a safe place. This receipt is proof of your pending application and allows you to remain in the United States and continue working while your application is pending.

➤ Before you send in your application

☐ Are you sending in your application within 60 days of ISSS issuing your STEM OPT I-20? Also, will USCIS be able to receive your application before your STEM OPT I-20 expires?
☐ Will your STEM OPT request arrive at USCIS offices before your Post-completion OPT end date?
☐ Are all applications complete and accurate?
☐ Are you including the correct fee? www.uscis.gov/feecalculator
☐ Did you sign and date your STEM OPT I-20, I-765 and all the I-20s you are submitting by hand in wet ink?
☐ Did you include all of the documents listed above?
☐ Did you make copies of all STEM OPT documents for your records?
☐ (recommended) Did you meet with an ISSS advisor to review your packet?
☐ Have you discussed your travel plans with ISSS advisor?
Working at a 3rd Party Client Site on STEM OPT

If you plan to be working at a 3rd Party Client Site on STEM OPT, please note that it may not meet STEM OPT training requirements especially if your employer does not participate in the training (many recruitment firms simply place you for employment purposes and may not be able to provide on-site supervision nor evaluate your work because they are not specialists in your field but rather specialists in placement). Please read the following carefully before filling out the I-983 Training Plan with your employer:

The Employer’s Training Obligation:

. . . to be eligible to employ a STEM OPT student, an employer must have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student. The employer must attest to this fact by signing the Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. To establish a bona fide relationship, the employer may not be the student’s “employer” in name only, nor may the student work for the employer on a “volunteer” basis. Moreover, the employer that signs the Form I-983 must be the same entity that provides the practical training experience to the student.

An employer must have sufficient resources and trained or supervisory personnel available to provide appropriate training in connection with the specified training opportunity at the location(s) where the student’s practical training experience will take place, as specified in the Form I-983. The “personnel” who may provide and supervise the training experience may be either employees of the employer, or contractors who the employer has directly retained to provide services to the employer; they may not, however, be employees or contractors of the employer’s clients or customers. Additionally, under no circumstances would another F-1 student with OPT or a STEM OPT extension (who is undergoing training in their own right) be qualified to train another F-1 student with a STEM OPT extension.

While employers may rely on their existing training programs or policies to satisfy the requirements relating to performance evaluation and oversight and supervision, the student’s Training Plan must nevertheless be customized for the individual student. For instance, every Training Plan must describe the direct relationship between the STEM OPT opportunity and the student’s qualifying STEM degree, as well as the relationship between the STEM OPT opportunity and the student’s goals and objectives for work-based learning. Moreover, a STEM OPT employer may not assign, or otherwise delegate, its training responsibilities to a non-employer third party (e.g., a client/customer of the employer, employees of the client/customer, or contractors of the client/customer).

. . . DHS, at its discretion, may conduct a site visit of any STEM OPT employer to ensure that the employer possesses and maintains the ability and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences consistent with the Form I-983. See 8 C.F.R. 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(11). Consistent with this provision, during a site visit, DHS may verify that the employer that signs the Form I-983 is the same entity that provides the practical training experience to the student and ensure compliance.

The Employer’s Training Obligation: Staffing and Temporary Agencies

Staffing and temporary agencies and consulting firms may seek to employ students under the STEM OPT program, but only if they will be the entity that provides the practical training experience to the student and they have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student. STEM OPT participants may engage in a training experience that takes place at a site other than the employer’s principal place of business as long as all of
the training obligations are met, including that the employer has and maintains a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student. Certain types of arrangements, including multiple employer arrangements, sole proprietorships, employment through “temp” agencies, employment through consulting firm arrangements that provide labor for hire, and other similar relationships may not be able to demonstrate a bona fide employer-employee relationship and, therefore, may not meet the requirements of the STEM OPT extension.


**SEVP Portal vs. ISSS E-form**

Please DO NOT change your employment information by yourself via the SEVP Portal. You must complete a new I-983 to reflect the changes and submit “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” E-form. Your SEVIS record, Form I-983, and the E-form must have the same information.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEVP Portal</th>
<th>Active Post-OPT</th>
<th>Active STEM OPT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Address</td>
<td>U.S. Address</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. &amp; Foreign Phone Number</td>
<td>U.S. &amp; Foreign Phone Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Information *</td>
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<tr>
<th>ISSS E-Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• E-mail Address (E-form: SEVP Portal Change E-mail Address)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Foreign mailing address (E-form: Update Address)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Password reset for SEVP Portal (E-form: SEVP Portal Login/Password Request)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan E-form, 6 Month Validations or Annual Self-Evaluation E-form</td>
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* Please refer to the “SEVP Portal: Post-OPT and STEM OPT” policy guide for more information.

**STEM Employer Responsibilities**

1. **E-Verify**: Employers must be enrolled in the E-Verify program
2. **Form I-983**: Employers must sign and assist
   - **Initial Training Plan**: employers are responsible for completing Section 3, 4, and 6 of the Form I-983, section 5 must be completed with the student
   - **Annual Self Evaluation**: employers must review the student’s self-evaluation of their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy
   - **Final Self Evaluation**: employers must review the student’s self-evaluation of their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy prior to the student’s departure from the company or 2 weeks prior to the student’s STEM extension ending
   - Please note that the official with Signatory Authority must be familiar with the STEM OPT student’s goals and performance, and have authority to affirm that the statements provided on the Form I-983 are true and correct
3. **Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983**: Employer must work with the student to report any material changes to the Form I-983
4. **Practical Training Employment Termination**: Employer and the student must both notify ISSS when the student’s employment is terminated for any reason before the STEM OPT authorization ends. Employers must report such change no later than **five business days** after the student’s employment terminates or the student has departed. This may be done by simply informing ISSS that the student is no longer with the company. Email: international@utah.edu
o Departure date: the date the employer knows the student has left employment, or the date after five consecutive business days have elapsed and the student has not reported for their practical training (without the employer’s consent)

**STEM OPT Student Responsibilities**

*all signatures on the I-983 form must be signed by hand in wet ink as the digital signatures are not accepted.*

1. **I-983 Training Plan:**
   - To apply for STEM OPT, students must fill out the Form I-983, sections 1 and 2.
   - Students must have their employer fill out and sign sections 3, 4, and 6.
   - The student and employer work together to fill out Section 5.
   - The last page of the form should not be filled out until the appropriate times during the approved STEM extension period.
   - The completed I-983 Training Plan must be submitted to ISSS at the time of STEM OPT I-20 e-form request. ISSS is not able to issue STEM OPT I-20 without the completed I-983.
   - All signatures must be signed by hand in wet ink—no digital signatures are allowed.

2. **Six Month Validations:**
   - Every six months, from the start date of the student’s STEM OPT EAD card (the day following their post-completion OPT expiration), students must confirm their address and employment information by submitting a “STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation” e-form through the UAtlas portal.
   - The SEVP portal will send you a reminder email to submit these validation reports about 30 days before the reporting deadline. Please take immediate action then.
   - This e-form will confirm the student’s most current: legal name, physical address, employer name and address, and status of current employment. Note: This form is not used to report changes to your or your employer’s information or the I-983. Any changes must first be reported via the STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan e-form request. Changes to your personal address must be done via the SEVP Portal.
   - Be aware that receiving Cap Gap status for an approved H1B visa may cause confusion on your reporting times. Contact the ISSS office for guidance.
   - Validation request must be submitted no later than 10 business days prior to the reporting deadline.

3. **Annual Self-Evaluation:**
   - Students must submit an annual self-evaluation to ISSS about the progress of their training experience. This is done on the last page of the Form I-983. Students will submit 2 evaluations throughout their STEM OPT: one at 12 months after the STEM OPT start date and one at the end of the STEM OPT employment period.
   - The SEVP portal will send you a reminder email to submit these evaluations about 30 days before the reporting deadline. Please take immediate action then.
   - Validation request must be submitted no later than 10 business days prior to the reporting deadline.
   - Evaluation must be signed by the student and employer in wet ink, by hand and be submitted to ISSS through the UAtlas e-form “STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation”
When you submit your Annual or Final Evaluation you will be reporting your current address and employment in the e-form. This will meet the validation reporting requirement so it is not necessary to submit a separate validation e-form when submitting your Annual or Final Evaluation e-form.

Be aware that receiving Cap Gap status for an approved H1B visa may cause confusion on your reporting times. Contact the ISSS office for guidance.

4. Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983:
   - Students must report any material changes to their training plan by using the “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” e-form. Material changes include but are not limited to:
     - Any change in the employer’s EIN
     - Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked
     - Any significant decrease in hours per week worked
     - Changes to the employer’s commitments or student’s learning objective as documented on the Form I-983
   - Be aware that student’s employment authorization will not cease based on a change to the plan, as long as the regulatory requirements are being met

5. Ending Employment/Changing Employers:
   - The student must first report the loss/end of employment by submitting the e-form “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” (select reason for submission as “Loss of Employment”) and upload the final evaluation (page 5 of the I-983 only). See next page for details.
   - For new employment, submit the new employment information via a new “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” e-form and upload a new, completed I-983. See next page for details.
   - All STEM OPT employers must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins their employment.
   - Note: Changes in employment must be submitted to ISSS within 10 days of ending/starting new STEM OPT

6. Departing U.S. and terminate STEM OPT
   - If you plan on departing U.S. and terminate your STEM OPT, please submit “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” e-form and choose “Departing US-No longer continuing with STEM OPT”. You will need to upload the final evaluation with the most recent employer. Once your request is approved your SEVIS record will be “completed” and you will not be able to return to U.S. on your current SEVIS record/I-20.

7. Employer Noncompliance
   - If a student believes that their employer is not complying with the terms and regulations of the STEM OPT, the student may:
     - Contact the SEVP at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at sevp@ice.dhs.gov, or (703) 603-3400 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM ET on weekdays, except holidays
     - Report violation through Homeland Security Investigations Form:
Examples of STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenarios:
*This is a recommended reporting process prepared by ISSS. If you have any questions, please contact international@utah.edu.

Please note if you submit your report outside the reporting window, ISSS will not be able to report your validation or evaluation to SEVIS. You must report any changes to ISSS within 10 days.

I. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 1: No Change in Employer/Position
1. 6-month validation
2. 12-month annual evaluation: top portion of page 5 of I-983 required, all signatures must be signed by hand in wet ink.
3. 18-month validation
4. 24-month final evaluation: bottom portion of page 5 of I-983 required, all signatures must be signed by hand in wet ink.

II. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 2: Change in Employer
It is your responsibility to know when you are due for your validation and evaluation deadlines and report to ISSS in a timely manner. These deadlines are based off of your STEM OPT start date. A final evaluation is required each time you terminate your employment with your employer. A new I-983 is required to report a new employer.

III. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 3: Change in Position (different duties), Same Employer
It is your responsibility to know when you are due for your validation and evaluation deadlines and report to ISSS in a timely manner. These deadlines are based off of your STEM OPT start date. A final evaluation is required to report termination of your previous position and a new I-983 is also required to report a new position.

IV. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 4: Change in Title (same duties), Same Employer
It is your responsibility to know when you are due for your validation and evaluation deadlines and report to ISSS in a timely manner. These deadlines are based off of your STEM OPT start date. If no information other than your official job title has changed, no final evaluation is required as your job duties remain same. ISSS recommends you still go ahead and submit a new I-983 for the new title and mention this on the “additional comments” of the e-form. This will allow ISSS to report your new title to SEVIS.

V. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 5: Change of Status Approved While on STEM OPT
ISSS strongly recommends that you complete your final evaluation and submit to ISSS before your change of status effective date begins. This will allow ISSS to report your final evaluation to your SEVIS record before it is automatically completed when your new status begins.

VI. STEM OPT Mandatory Reporting Scenario 6: Direct Supervisor Change (Official on Page 3 of I-983)
It is your responsibility to know when you are due for your validation and evaluation deadlines and report to ISSS in a timely manner. These deadlines are based off of your STEM OPT start date. Your SEVIS record must always have correct information. Therefore, if there is a change in your supervisor (official on page 3 of I-983), please complete a new I-983 and submit it to ISSS by using the “STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan” e-form.

** Failure to comply with any and all requirements of the STEM OPT constitutes a violation of your F-1 status. It is your responsibility to provide updated and accurate information to ISSS in a timely manner **
Important Reminders:

- **Processing time:** your STEM OPT I-20 will be processed by ISSS within 10 business days if we have all the correct documents. USCIS takes an average of 3-5 months to process requests once the documents have been received.
- **STEM OPT start date:** Your STEM OPT date will be the date after the last day on your post-completion OPT EAD card. There are no exceptions.
- **STEM OPT end date:** This is the end date on your STEM EAD card. You must end your employment on this date unless you have changed to any other visa status that allows you to work.
- **E-verify:** E-verify participation is required on STEM OPT so please check with your employer. Do not make a mistake of providing your EIN number on your I-765.
- **60-day grace period:** You have 60 days of grace period once your STEM OPT ends. If you are remaining in the U.S. for the grace period, you cannot leave and re-enter on your F-1 visa. During your grace period, you can either leave U.S., transfer to another school, or change to another visa category.
- **60 days from the I-20 issue date:** Your STEM OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the STEM OPT I-20 issue date by ISSS and also before the last day of your Post-completion OPT. Failure to send it in a timely manner will result in denial of STEM OPT.
- **60 days of unemployment:** You receive an additional 60 days of unemployment time for the STEM extension. The aggregate unemployment allowed on OPT and STEM OPT is 150 days.
- **90 days prior to your Post-Completion OPT end date:** The earliest date USCIS can receive your STEM OPT application is 90 days before your Post-Completion OPT end date.
- **Part time/Full time:** You must work more than 21 hours/week on STEM OPT to count as eligible employment. Part-time work is not allowed on STEM OPT.
- **Address Update:** Immigration regulations require that while you are on STEM OPT, you MUST keep USCIS updated on your address. If you change your address, you must report your new address in the SEVP portal. We recommend you report your change of address to ISSS as well by using “Address Update” e-form.
- **Travel:** Traveling with a pending STEM OPT is strongly **NOT** recommended. If you must travel while your STEM OPT is pending, please speak with ISSS as you may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S. until your STEM OPT is approved.
- **6 months:** Your travel signature is valid for 6 months once you are on post-completion/STEM OPT.
- **Your employment needs to show clear and strong connection to your major.** Please note this information can be reviewed by Department of Homeland Security at any time. Failure to show unclear connection between your major and employment may impact your future benefits and applications to USCIS.
- **Your access to SEVP Portal will permanently be removed 6 months after your STEM OPT end date.** You will receive multiple communications from SEVP notifying you of your access removal. It is highly recommended that you make a copy of your employment history and the descriptions you provided for each employment before your access is removed for your own documentation. You may be asked to provide that information in the future.
STEM OPT Related E-forms

- **STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension**: This form is used to request an OPT STEM extension I-20 so you can file a STEM OPT extension request with USCIS.
- **STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan**: This form is used to update your employment and your I-983 Training Plan, and/or to report loss of employment. You can also report your permanent departure from the U.S. on this e-form.
- **STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation**: This form is used to meet STEM OPT reporting obligations. You must report your STEM participation every 6 months by submitting this e-form. You must submit an annual evaluation yearly.

SEVP Portal Related E-forms

- **SEVP Portal Login/Password Request**: This is used to request a reset of an SEVP Portal password if you are locked out from the portal. Please make sure you are locked out before you submit the request. ISSS is not able to reset the portal until you are locked out.
- **SEVP Portal: Change E-mail Address**: This e-form is used to change your e-mail on your SEVIS record for the purposes of the SEVIS Login portal.

**NOTE**: To update information such as address and phone number, you MUST use the SEVP portal to update this information. To update your employment or training plan, to submit validations or evaluations, to change your email address or reset your SEVP Portal, you must use the appropriate e-forms on UAtlas.

Helpful Policy Guides

- **F-1 Student Travel Guidance**: This guide lists the documents you should travel with.
- **OPT/STEM OPT: Form I-765 Sample**: This guide explains in detail how to complete the I-765 form.
- **OPT/STEM OPT: Form I-983 Sample**: This guide serves as a general guide on how to complete the I-983 training plan.
- **OPT/STEM OPT: H1B Cap Gap Extension**: This guide explains what Cap Gap extension is and how you can request an updated I-20 if needed. As ISSS does not advice on H1B visa, please speak to your employer’s immigration attorney for any questions.
- **OPT/STEM OPT: Guide to SEVP Portal**: This guide explains how and when to utilize the SEVP portal.

*All policy guides are found on our website (isss.utah.edu) under F-1 Student Visa Policies tab.*
Frequently Asked Questions for STEM OPT Extension

GENERAL

1. **How long will my STEM OPT application take to process?**
   You must first obtain your STEM OPT I-20 from International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS), which has a 10-business day processing time, and then mail your application with all the required documents to USCIS to obtain approval as well as Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card for STEM OPT, which takes average of 3-5 months to process.

2. **When should I submit my STEM OPT application?**
   USCIS must receive your STEM OPT application before your post-completion OPT ends. The earliest you can send in your STEM OPT extension request is 90 days prior to the end of your post-completion OPT. Please plan accordingly to allow ISSS time to review and process your STEM OPT I-20 request.

3. **I sent in my application but my post-completion OPT EAD card is now expired. What happens now?**
   If the STEM application is properly and timely filed (i.e. STEM OPT application received by USCIS before the last day of your post-completion OPT), the student’s employment authorization is automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT extension request is pending review with USCIS.

4. **Can I get a confirmation that my application has been received by USCIS?**
   If you would like an email or text confirmation that your application has been received by USCIS, you may fill out Form G-1145 (https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145) and attach it to the top of your STEM OPT application. The notice you receive is not a guarantee that your application is approved, but merely a confirmation that it arrived at the USCIS office for processing. You will receive an official paper I-797 receipt within 2-3 weeks.

5. **Does the job I have while on STEM OPT have to be paid employment, or can it be unpaid/volunteer work?**
   It must be paid. The STEM OPT rule prohibits students from using the extension to work in a volunteer or unpaid capacity.

6. **If I complete one STEM degree program, and then complete a second non-STEM degree program and apply for OPT, am I eligible to apply for the STEM extension again?**
   Yes- only if:
   - Your second non-STEM degree was at a higher education level than the one used for the first STEM OPT extension
   - Your STEM degree was earned within the past 10 years
   - The STEM degree was earned from an appropriately accredited and SEVP-certified school inside the United States

7. **Do I get a grace period after my STEM OPT?**
   Yes, your lawful F-1 status expires 60 days after the end date indicated on your STEM OPT extension EAD only if you have successfully completed your STEM OPT. This is called a “grace period”. You are expected to leave the country within 60 days from the end date indicated on the EAD or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S. However, if you decide to discontinue with your STEM OPT before it officially ends, you must leave the U.S. immediately, as no grace period applies in that situation unless you have other legal means of remaining in the US.
8. What if I have lost or thrown away my old I-20s?
The International Student & Scholar Services office may have copies of your old I-20s in your file. You can request that ISSS make you copies of your old I-20s through UAtlas using the e-form “Request for Document Copies”, but keep in mind that it could take up to 10 business days to process your request. Also note that it is your responsibility to keep your I-20s 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.

9. 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 due to jurisdiction issues. You may not put a foreign address on form I-765. The address you use may be a P. O. Box. Contact ISSS if you have further issues with your mailing address.

10. Should I keep a copy of my application?
Yes, 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 and you have to contact the bank/issuer.

11. How can I check on the status of my application?
When USCIS sends you your I-797 receipt notice, you will receive a receipt number which begins with three letters; for example, "LIN" or "YSC". Use this number to track your application at the following USCIS website: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

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

STEM OPT AND TRAVELING

13. Can I travel home (or anywhere outside of the U.S.) while I am on STEM OPT?
Pending STEM OPT: It is NOT RECOMMENDED to travel outside of the United States while you are pending STEM OPT approval if your post-completion OPT has already expired. Until your STEM OPT is approved, you have no legal documentation for re-entry into the United States and you could be denied entry by Customs and Border Protection agents. If you must travel while STEM OPT is pending and your OPT has already expired, please discuss your situation with an ISSS advisor.

If you have applied for STEM OPT but your post-completion OPT is still valid and plan to return before your post-completion OPT ends, you may travel abroad. It is recommended students travel with:
- I-797 receipt (filed receipt for STEM OPT)
- Passport valid for at least 6 months after re-entry date
- STEM OPT I-20 signed for travel
- Post-completion OPT EAD card
- Valid F-1 visa
- Letter from your employer, explaining your employment and that you are expected back to continue work
Approved STEM OPT:
If you have been approved for STEM OPT and have received a new EAD card, you may travel abroad. It is recommended students travel with:

- Passport valid for at least 6 months after re-entry date
- STEM OPT I-20 signed for travel
- EAD card
- Valid F-1 visa
- Letter from your employer, explaining your employment and that you are expected back to continue work

Please Note: When you receive your EAD card it will say, “not valid for travel”. This means in addition to your EAD card, you will need an I-20, valid passport, and F-1 visa 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 CBP officer, and you travel at your own risk. Please note that if your visa is expired, in order to re-enter the US, you will need to renew it at a US embassy. This will increase your travel risk since the renewal is at the discretion of the embassy.

Dependent travel: An F2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with STEM OPT approval, a copy of the EAD card, proof of employment, in addition to their own F-2 I-20 when traveling.

14. 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 post-completion OPT or STEM OPT, NEVER enter in any other immigration status except your current F-1 status. If you leave the U.S. and re-enter with a B status, you will have lost your F-1 status and your OPT and/or STEM OPT will be invalid!

15. 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 may be denied. However, it is possible and many students on STEM OPT get their F-1 visa stamps renewed. You do have to be careful to demonstrate non-immigrant intent. Please see ISSS advisor to discuss more in detail.

16. 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 STEM OPT EAD card, your most recent I-20, AND your job offer letter or proof of employment. The official job offer letter must be clear that your position is temporary, 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. For additional information, visit your embassy website or contact the embassy directly as each embassy may require different documents.

17. Do I still need my I-20 endorsed for travel if I am on STEM OPT?
Yes, during the STEM OPT period, if you travel outside the U.S., you need to have the travel line signed every six months in order to re-enter the U.S. If you are not located in the Salt Lake area, you may request an “I-20 Reprint” through UAtlas and arrange for a new I-20 to be mailed to you.
STEM OPT AND EMPLOYMENT

18. Do I need to have job offer to apply for the STEM OPT?
Yes, 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 to find out if they participate in E-Verify. You are required to provide their E-Verify number on your STEM OPT application, as well as a completed form I-983.

19. 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 150 calendar days of unemployment aggregate while on post-completion OPT and STEM OPT (90 days on post-completion OPT, 60 additional days during STEM). This total number of unemployment applies through the entire period of OPT with the maximum limit of 90 during post-completion OPT. Please remember that you MUST update your employment information and your training plan with ISSS while on STEM OPT each time you begin or terminate employment.

20. Do I need to work full-time on STEM OPT?
Yes, you must work full-time while on STEM OPT. For immigration purpose, 21 hours or more/week is considered to be full-time. Part-time work is not allowed on STEM OPT.

21. Can I change my employer while on STEM OPT?
A student may change employers during the 24-month STEM OPT period, but all employers that a student will work for during the STEM extension period must be registered in the E-Verify program, and the student must report the change, including submitting a new Form I-983 to ISSS within 10 days of the change. You must be working more than 21 hours per week for each employer to meet the STEM OPT requirement.

22. Can I be self-employed on STEM OPT?
Students may be employed by start-up business however, all regulatory requirements must be met and the student may not provide employer attestations on his or her own behalf.

23. How do I calculate the 10-year eligibility period for STEM for a previous degree?
The 10-year eligibility period for previously-earned STEM degrees is determined by the date the degree was conferred/earned (reflected on the official transcript). The application date is the date on which the DSO recommends the STEM OPT extension on the I-20.

24. What kind of compensation should I be receiving from my STEM OPT employer?
STEM OPT employers must provide compensation to the student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers. Alternative compensation may be allowed during STEM OPT as long as the student can show that he or she is a bona fide employee and that his or her compensation, including any ownership interest in the employer entity (such as stock options), is commensurate with the compensation provided to other similarly situated US workers.
25. What happens if I do not comply with parts of/any of the STEM requirements?

Failure to comply will result in a loss of F-1 status. Students who lose their F-1 status must depart from the country immediately as their F-1 visa status is no longer valid. Students with another status in process that allows them to remain in the US should seek advice from an immigration attorney.

26. Can I have multiple employers on STEM OPT?

Yes; however, each employer must fully comply with the regulations (complete and sign a Form I-983 for each employer) and employ the student full-time. Full time consists of 21 hours or more per week.