F-1 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION
OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (STEM OPT)

What is the STEM Extension?

F-1 students who are currently approved for a 12 month Post-Completion OPT and have completed a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) field are able to apply for an additional 24 month extension of their practical training (for a total eligibility of 36 months of practical training).


Students are permitted a total of two periods of the 24 month STEM extension, each 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.

Also referred to as: STEM OPT, STEM Extension, STEM OPT Extension, STEM, OPT STEM

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?

• Students who are currently approved for post-completion OPT and are within the application window (90 days prior to their current OPT EAD expiration date but not after the EAD expiration date unless they are in a period of Cap Gap extension with work authorization).
• Students who are engaging in employment directly related to their STEM degree
• Students who have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher in a STEM approved field within the past 10 years
  o Students wishing to do STEM OPT for a previous degree must have received a degree from a SEVP Certified accredited institution, and the institution must be accredited at the time of the student’s application for the STEM extension
  o School must also have been SEVP certified at the time of application for the extension
  o F-1 students who earned a prior STEM degree may qualify for STEM OPT, regardless of whether he or she earned that prior degree as an F-1 student (other nonimmigrant status time may count)
  o Overseas campuses of U.S. educational institutions are not eligible for SEVP certification
• Students whose current or prospective employer is registered in the E-verify program
• NOTE: Students who have participated in one year (12 months) or more of full-time CPT DO NOT qualify for the STEM extension

**STEM Student Responsibilities**

1. **Initial Training Plan:**
   - Upon application 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 of the Form I-983.
   - The student and employer will work together to fill out Section 5, Training Plan.
   - The last page of the form (evaluation) is not filled out until the appropriate times during the approved STEM extension period.
   - The completed I-983 with Training plan must be submitted to ISSS at the time of STEM OPT I-20 e-form request.

2. **Six Month Validations:**
   - Every six months, from the start date of the student’s STEM extension (the day following their Post-Completion OPT EAD expiration), students must confirm their address and employment information in SEVIS by submitting a “**STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation**” e-form through the ISSS ISTART e-form portal.
   - This e-form request 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.
   - Note: if you are submitting a 6 month validation *at the same time* you are also submitting your annual or final evaluation, you only need to select the annual/final evaluation option and it will also count as your validation.
   - Be aware that being put into Cap Gap status may cause confusion on your reporting times; contact the ISSS office for guidance.
   - Please note, students must report a change of information within 10 days of the change to ISSS.

3. **Annual Self-Evaluation:**
   - Students must submit to ISSS an annual self-evaluation about the progress of their training experience on the Form I-983 (2 total: one at 12 months from the STEM OPT start date and one at end of employment or two weeks prior to the end of the STEM extension if employment has not ended prior to that).
   - Only submit page 5 of the I-983 with the appropriate evaluation (*This e-form is not used to report changes to your or your employer’s information or to the I-983. Any changes must first be reported via the STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan e-form request.*)
Training Plan e-form request. Changes to your personal address must be done via the SEVP Portal.
- Evaluation must be signed by student and employer and submitted to ISSS through the ISTART e-form “STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self-Evaluation”
- Be aware that being put into Cap Gap status 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 to ISSS 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 that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity
  - 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 previous 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 their final evaluation (page 5 of the I-983 only – any changes to the plan should have been uploaded in a previous submission of this e-form).
- For new employment, submit the new employment information via a new STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan e-form and upload the new I-983.
- When a student changes employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins to work
- Note: Changes in employment must be submitted within 10 days of ending/starting the new practical training opportunity

6. 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 Student and Exchange Visitor Program 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
**Failure to comply with any and all requirements of the 24 month STEM OPT constitutes a violation of your F-1 status. It is your responsibility to provide updated and accurate information to ISSS!**

**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 on their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy
   - Final Self Evaluation: employers must review the student’s self-evaluation on 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 student must both notify ISSS when the student’s employment is terminated for any reason before the authorized extension period. 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
   - 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)

**E-forms relating to STEM extension OPT:**

To request an OPT STEM extension I-20 so that you can file for the STEM extension with USCIS use the “STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension” e-form.

The most common e-forms you will use while on STEM extension OPT will be:

**STEM OPT: Employment Update/Change in Training Plan** – for updating your employment and your I-983 Training Plan. You will also use this form to report loss of employment.

**STEM OPT: 6 Month Validation OR Annual Self- Evaluation** – to meet your STEM reporting obligations
For detailed information on how to fill out each e-form, please log into I-Start via our website at https://internationalcenter.utah.edu/ and go to F-1 Student Services to view the particular e-form.

**SEVP Portal**

**SEVP Portal Login/Password Request:** This e-form is for students on OPT/STEM extension who need to register for the SEVIS Login portal OR request a reset of their password.

**SEVP Portal: Change E-mail Address:** This e-form is for students on OPT/STEM extension who need to change their e-mail for the purposes of the SEVIS Login portal.

**NOTE for Students on the STEM extension:** For students actively on the STEM extension, to update information such as address and phone number, you MUST use the SEVP portal to update this information, but to update your employment/training plan, submit your validations/evaluations, change your email address or reset your SEVP Portal you must use the e-forms via I-Start on our webpage at https://internationalcenter.utah.edu/

**How To Apply For STEM OPT:**

1. Meet with your E-Verify approved employer and complete the Form I-983 Training plan (Sections 1-6). Do not complete the evaluations until the appropriate times on the actual STEM extension period. Form can be found here: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/I-983.pdf. USCIS Instructions on how to fill out this form can be found here: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/I-983-instructions.pdf PLEASE FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.

2. Log into iStart through the **I-Start Login** button on https://internationalcenter.utah.edu/ and submit the e-form for “STEM OPT: 24 Month STEM Extension”. You will be required to upload your completed Form I-983.

3. Once ISSS receives a complete application of STEM OPT request, the ISSS advisor will issue you a new STEM OPT I-20 within two weeks which will include our recommendation for extended OPT employment on page 2. You will need to send in a copy of this I-20 to USCIS.

4. After gathering your required documents (see below), schedule a packet review session with an ISSS advisor (optional)

5. Mail all the required documents to USCIS within **60 days** of when your STEM OPT I-20 was issued and signed by ISSS. You must file with USCIS before your current EAD expiration date.

6. Keep copies of everything you mail for your own records.

**The following are the documents you will need to send to USCIS:**

- **Form I-765** (downloadable from [www.USCIS.gov](http://www.USCIS.gov)) See the instructions for the form on following page.
- A copy of **new I-20** issued from ISSS with your STEM OPT dates.
- A copy of photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your **valid passport**.

Updated 5/21/2018 SCB
A copy of your current visa page in your passport (even if it’s expired).

A copy of both sides of your I-94 card if a paper one was issued to you. With the new online version, there is just one page, obtainable at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home.

Copies of ALL previous I-20s issued to you in your current education level (if you do not have these, contact ISSS. We may have copies of your old I-20s, however, it is your responsibility to keep previous immigration documents. Requests for previous documents may be submitted via e-form request “Request for Document Copies.” Processing time may be up to 2 weeks.)

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 $410: 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 # and “STEM OPT” ON THE MEMO (SEVIS # starts with N on top left 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 https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145).

Meet with ISSS advisor to review your packet (optional).

Instructions for filling out Form I-765:

• For 24-month STEM extension; check “renewal”.

• Complete the form (see clarifications below); sign and date to certify.

• #3: US Mailing Address: This must be an address at which you can receive mail. Please keep in mind it may take three or more months to receive your EAD card. 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 may be destroyed. If the EAD is returned, contact USCIS immediately for instructions on how to receive your EAD. If you want to use a friend’s address, you must make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. Contact ISSS if there are any issues finding a mailing address to use. NOTE: If the return address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Utah, please check the chart on page 8 of this guide for the proper mailing address to send in your application to USCIS.

• #9a: Indicate whether you have or have not received a Social Security Number (SSN)

• #9b: If you have received a SSN, enter it in the boxes provided

• #10: If you have already received a SSN, check “No” and skip to question 14. If you have NOT received a SSN and therefore indicated “No” on question 9a, check “Yes” on question 10 to have the Social Security Administration issue you a SSN (card); if you do not do this, you will have to apply for a SSN on your own after the EAD is issued.
• Answer questions 11 through 13b if you are requesting that the Social Security Administration issue you a SSN (card)

• #14 Alien Registration Number or Form I-94#: 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/#/home), it is the Admission (I-94) Record number on top of the page. If you have a paper I-94 instead (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.

• #15 Previous Employment Authorization: Since you are already on Post-Completion OPT and are now applying for the 24 month STEM extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.

• #20 Eligibility Category: For F-1 STEM Extension OPT, fill out as follows: (c) (3) (C)

• #21: Since you entered (c) (3) (C) you must also complete this section with your degree, employer name and E-Verify number.

• #22 though 23a and b: These do not apply to you since you indicated (c) (3) (C) and not the categories that these questions refer to

• REMEMBER TO SIGN AND DATE YOUR FORM! (must be signed by hand)

• “Signature of Person Preparing Form, If Other Than Applicant” only applies if someone else filled out the form for you

Am I ready to send in my application?

Gather all documents together and send by certified mail with a return receipt OR express mail that is trackable. You will receive a receipt notice in the mail (Form I-797) from USCIS once they receive your OPT packet. If you attached the G-1145 form to the first page of your application, they will also send you an E-verification of application acceptance via text or email once they receive your packet. Questions to consider:

☐ Am I sending my application within 60 days of ISSS creating my OPT STEM I-20?
☐ Did I sign and date my STEM OPT I-20 and am I sending a copy of it and not the original?
☐ Did I sign and date my I-765 form?
☐ Am I filing my application with USCIS before my current OPT end date?
☐ Did I include all of the documents listed above?
☐ Did I make copies of all my STEM OPT documents for my record?
☐ Did I meet with an ISSS advisor to review my packet?
☐ Have I confirmed where I need to mail my packet? (see “where to mail” on the following page)
**Where to mail:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Phoenix Lockbox:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USCIS&lt;br&gt;PO Box 21281&lt;br&gt;Phoenix, AZ 85036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For (non-USPS) courier service:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USCIS, Attn: AOS&lt;br&gt;1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100&lt;br&gt;Phoenix, AZ 85034</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in (return address on I-765):</th>
<th>Mail your application to USCIS Dallas Lockbox:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USCIS&lt;br&gt;PO Box 660867&lt;br&gt;Dallas, TX 75266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For Express Mail:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USCIS, Attn: AOS&lt;br&gt;2501 S. State Hwy, 121, Business Suite 400&lt;br&gt;Lewisville, TX 75067</td>
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</tbody>
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**GENERAL RULES WHILE ON STEM OPT**

- **HOURS PER WEEK**
  - A minimum number of 21 hours per week or more is required on STEM OPT to count toward employment

- **VOLUNTEER WORK**
  - The STEM OPT rule prohibits students from using the extension to work in a volunteer capacity. The employment must be paid. If you have additional questions, please contact ISSS.

- **EMPLOYMENT SITE VISITS**
  - DHS may perform site visits to employer locations that train STEM OPT students. Site visits are to ensure STEM OPT students receive structured and guided work-based learning experiences. DHS will provide notice to the employer at least 48 hours in advance of any site visit, unless the visit is triggered by a complaint.

- **UNEMPLOYMENT**
  - Students with current, approved OPT STEM extension must report to ISSS office their participation in STEM OPT according to the reporting requirements outlined above. If ISSS staff is not able to report the students participation in the OPT to USCIS on time, the students may automatically be terminated at the discretion of USCIS.
Your OPT STEM Timeline

- **Processing**: Request for STEM extension 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 STEM extension employment on this date unless you are approved for a change of status that authorizes continued work authorization.
- **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 [https://internationalcenter.utah.edu/forms-publications/documents/Policy-Guide-H1B-OPT-CapGap-Extension.pdf](https://internationalcenter.utah.edu/forms-publications/documents/Policy-Guide-H1B-OPT-CapGap-Extension.pdf) and consult with an attorney.
Frequently Asked Questions for STEM Extension:

GENERAL

1. How long will my STEM OPT application take to process?
   Applying for the extension 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 a new Employment Authorization
   Document (EAD) card, which can take 3 or more months to approve.

2. When should I submit my STEM OPT application?
   You must file with USCIS before your current OPT EAD expires. The earliest you can send in your STEM
   extension request is 90 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 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 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. You will receive the official paper receipt I-797
   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?
   Yes, it must be paid. The STEM OPT rule prohibits students from using the extension to work in a
   volunteer 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?
   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

7. 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 indicated on
   your STEM extension EAD. You are expected to leave the country no later than 60 days after the end date
   indicated on the STEM extension EAD or make other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.
   However, If you decide to quit 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 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 istart using the e-form “**Request for Document Copies**”, but keep in mind that it could take up to 2 weeks 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?**
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 the case that your application is lost in the mail.

11. **How can I check on the status of my application?**
When the USCIS sends you your receipt notice in 2-3 weeks, 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](https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)

12. **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 visa status. 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 to apply 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 OPT?**
**Pending and Approved STEM OPT:** Students with pending and approved STEM OPT may travel abroad during the pending time periods (pending means all documents have been submitted and received by USCIS). It is recommended students travel with:

- I-797 receipt
- STEM OPT I-20 signed for travel
- valid visa

- passport valid for at least 6 months after re-entry date
- EAD card (if approved already)
- letter from your employer (The letter may state that they have employed you or plan on employing you, and you are coming back to the U.S. to work for them.)
Please Note: 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. 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 recommendation, EAD card, and 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 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 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 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 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 EAD card or the receipt notice for your application, an I-20 created by the International Student & Scholar Services for your STEM OPT application, 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.

17. 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 in order to re-enter the U.S. If you are not located in the Salt Lake area, mail the original I-20 to ISSS for endorsement, leaving plenty of time for possible mailing delays both ways.
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 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 between OPT and STEM extension (90 days on OPT, 60 days during STEM). This total number of unemployment applies through the entire period of OPT with the maximum limit of 90 during regular OPT. Please remember that you MUST update your employment information and your training plan with ISSS while on STEM OPT.

20. Can I change my employer during STEM OPT?
   A student may change employers during the 24-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, including submitting a new Form I-983 to ISSS within 10 days of the change.

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

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

23. What kind of compensation should I be receiving from my STEM OPT employer?
   OPT STEM employers must provide compensation to the student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers. Alternative compensation may be allowed during a 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.

24. 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 not depart but rather seek advice from an immigration attorney.
25. 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.