

OPT STEM EXTENSION GUIDE

STEM OPT DEFINITION

Practical work experience authorization that extends OPT for an additional 24 months for those who have earned a degree in a field included on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. DHS grants STEM OPT extensions to eligible F-1 students once per degree level (i.e., bachelor's, master's or doctorate). A student may participate twice in the OPT extension over the course of their academic career.

ELIGIBILITY

WHO CAN APPLY?

The student must meet all the below criteria for STEM OPT eligibility:

- have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a STEM field based on the DHS list of [majors](#) from an SEVP-certified school that is [accredited](#) (from an accrediting agency recognized by [the U.S. Department of Education](#)) at the time the student submits their STEM OPT extension application to USCIS. (Your CIP code is listed on page 1 of your Form I-20.)
- are currently authorized for post-completion OPT and have reported their current local address and employer in their SEVP portal.
- are working for or will join an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program and the work is directly related to the field of study
 - Find out if your employer is E-verified [here](#)
- have paid employment that is directly related to the STEM degree and is at least 20 hours per week.
- have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment during their initial OPT period.
- have an employer who is willing to provide the student with formal training and learning objectives.

NOTE: Duties, hours, and compensation, must be commensurate with terms and conditions applicable to the employer's similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment.

WHEN TO APPLY

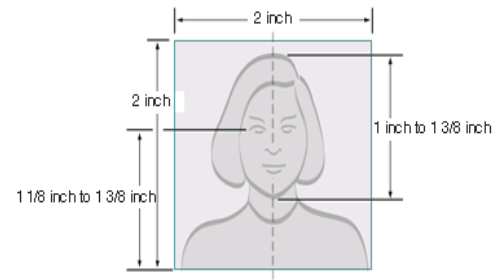
USCIS must receive and receipt your STEM OPT application package before the expiration of current post-completion OPT. The earliest you can apply is **90 days prior to the end date of your current OPT**.

If you apply for STEM OPT before your current OPT expires, you can continue to work while your STEM OPT application is pending, until a final decision is made on your application or it has been pending 180 days with USCIS, whichever comes first.

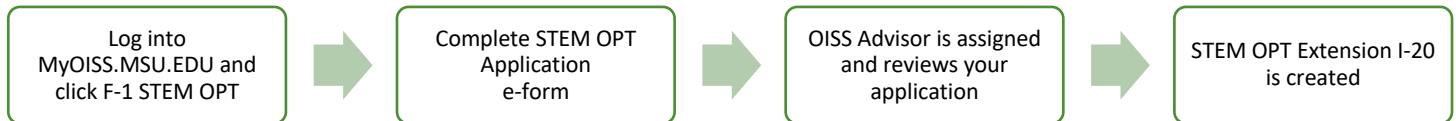
HOW TO APPLY

STEP 1: PREPARE YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

- I-983 Form**
 - Your I-983 form must be fully complete and signed by both you and your employer.
 - Example form
- G-1145 form**
- I-765 form**
 - Example form
- Photocopy:** current Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front and back).
- Photocopy:** MSU diploma or official MSU transcript showing your conferred degree. If you do not have a degree, contact your department to obtain an official letter indicating that you have only thesis or dissertation remaining for degree completion.
- Print out of your most recent I-94** or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.
- Passport and visa** photocopy
- Two Passport Photos** (see example): Gently print your full name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.
 - Photos must be less than 30 days old from STEM OPT I-20 processing date listed on I-20.
 - [Passport photo requirements](#)
- U.S. bank issued check or Money Order for \$410.00** made payable to: **US Department of Homeland Security**. If the address on your check is not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. **The check must have your name preprinted.**



STEP 2: SUBMIT YOUR STEM OPT REQUEST TO OISS



STEP 3: RECEIVE YOUR NEW I-20

To receive your I-20 endorsed for STEM OPT request to have the I-20 shipped to you at your expense via EShipGlobal ([instructions](#)). **Once you receive your new I-20, make sure to sign and date it.**

STEP 4: ASSEMBLE YOUR APPLICATION PACKET

The documents listed below must all be included in your application. Documents should be printed single-sided.

- Photocopy** of all the pages of your STEM OPT I-20 (make sure it is signed & do not send the original)
- G-1145 form**
- I-765 form** (make sure it is signed)
- Photocopy:** current Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front and back)
- Photocopy:** MSU diploma or official MSU transcript showing your conferred degree
- I-94:** (www.cbp.gov/i94) or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card
- Passport and visa** photocopy
- Two Passport Photos**
- U.S. bank issued check or Money Order for \$410.00** made payable to: **US Department of Homeland Security**. If the address on your check is not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. **The check must have your name preprinted.**

STEP 5: MAIL YOUR STEM OPT APPLICATION

USCIS must receive the STEM OPT application within 60 days of the DSO's (OISS Advisor) signature on pg.1 of your I-20 (and in SEVIS) AND before the expiration of your current post-completion OPT.

Method of Delivery:	Processing Center:	Address:
U.S. Postal Service (USPS) - Certified Mail:	USCIS Chicago Lockbox	USCIS PO Box 805373 Chicago, IL 60680
FedEx, UPS, or DHL express mail deliveries:	USCIS Chicago Lockbox	USCIS Attn: I-765 C03 131 South Dearborn – 3 rd Floor Chicago, IL 60603-5517

PENDING STEM OPT INFORMATION

RECEIPT NOTICE

You will receive 3 possible notifications from USCIS:

1. A text message that includes your receipt number for your OPT application.
2. An email with a brief statement on how to get additional information about the status of your case.
3. An I-797c Receipt Notice. This is your official proof of application.

You can use the Receipt Number listed on your I-797C, form to track your application at [USCIS online Case Status](#).

STEM OPT PROCESSING TIMES

You can check USCIS processing times here: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>

WORKING WITH PENDING STEM OPT APPLICATION

Once the STEM OPT application is received by USCIS, you are authorized to continue employment for up to 180 days after the expiration of your post-completion OPT or adjudication of STEM OPT application occurs. Your employer will likely need you to provide your STEM OPT Receipt Notice in order to extend your I-9 form with their company and continue working. If you do not receive your Receipt Notice prior to your current OPT end date, you may need to stop working until the Receipt Notice arrives.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

RE-ENTRY IN THE U.S. WHILE STEM OPT IS PENDING APPROVAL

Traveling while STEM OPT is pending should be undertaken with caution. You cannot renew your F-1 visa, unless you have a valid EAD. USCIS may send you a Request for Evidence (RFE) while you are away. You must respond to the RFE in a timely manner to avoid denial of STEM OPT request. If USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your EAD in-hand to re-enter the United States.

REENTERING U.S. AFTER STEM OPT IS APPROVED

You will need the following original documents to reenter the U.S. during the STEM OPT period:

- Valid passport (make sure it is valid at least 6 months into the future at time of re-entry)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp (You cannot renew your F-1 visa, unless you have a valid EAD)

- I-20 endorsed for STEM OPT with a travel signature less than 6-months old
- Unexpired STEM OPT EAD card
- Confirmation of employment letter from your U.S. E-Verified employer

NOTE: If you have an expired F-1 visa and you plan to make a short trip to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent (Caribbean) islands, visit our page on Automatic Revalidation: http://www.oiiss.msu.edu/students_travel_autorevalid.php

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ON STEM OPT

STANDARD STEM OPT REPORTING TIMELINE

6 Month Report	12 Month Report	18 Month Report	24 Month Report
Validation report: confirm personal and employment information in SEVIS	Submit I-983 with the “evaluation of student progress” (on page 5 of the I-983) completed and validate personal and employment information	Validation report: confirm personal and employment information in SEVIS	Submit I-983 with the “final evaluation of student progress” (on page 5 of the I-983) completed and validate personal and employment information

All reports are submitted via myoiiss.msu.edu within the F-1 STEM OPT section

OFF CYCLE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Material Change to I-983	Ending Employment	New Employment
Any material changes to your I-983 require a new I-983 be submitted to OISS and uploaded to SEVIS. Read more about what constitutes a material change here . Required materials: updated I-983	Ending employment includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leaving an organization / employer - Change of Status - Ending your STEM OPT early Required materials: I-983 with final evaluation completed, approved CoS Receipt Notice if applicable	The New Employment form should be submitted whenever you are starting a new position at an e-verified company/organization. Required materials: I-983

All reports are submitted via myoiiss.msu.edu within the F-1 STEM OPT section

STEM OPT COMPLETION & GRACE PERIOD

Your F-1 status will remain valid for 60 days after the end date of your STEM OPT. During the 60 day grace period you cannot work.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

STEM ELIGIBILITY

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY DEGREE QUALIFIES ME FOR STEM OPT?

DHS maintains the [STEM Designated Degree Program](#) list that meets the extension requirement within the DHS regulatory definition of “STEM field”. This list contains the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code for each STEM degree. The CIP code consisting of six digits is listed next to your MAJOR on your I-20. If your CIP code is listed on the DHS STEM Designated Degree list, then your degree is eligible for the STEM OPT Extension.

CAN I USE A PREVIOUS STEM DEGREE?

Under certain circumstances, an F-1 student may use a prior STEM degree from a currently accredited SEVP-certified school to fulfill this eligibility requirement. To use a prior degree to qualify for the STEM OPT extension, the F-1 student must:

- Have received their most recent degree (which does not need to be -related) from a currently accredited Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/school-search>).
- Have received their prior, qualifying STEM degree* (at the bachelor's level or higher) within 10 years of applying for the STEM OPT extension with United State Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- The qualifying STEM degree needs to be on DHS's [Designated Degree Program List](#) at the time the student submits their application for the STEM OPT extension, rather than at the time that the student received the degree.

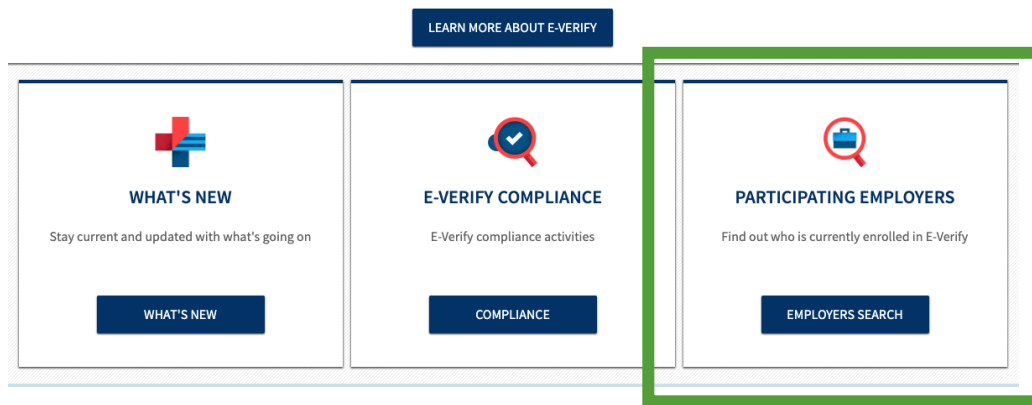
WHAT IS E-VERIFY?

E-Verify is a database system administered by DHS in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. For more information, see DHS E-Verify <http://www.dhs.gov/e-verify>

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY EMPLOYER IS E-VERIFIED?

You must consult with your employer’s Human Resources department to receive the company’s E-verify name and number. Certain employers have an E-verify name that is different than their company’s name. It is vital to confirm in writing the E-verify information of your employer.

You can do an employer search on the E-verify website. Scroll down the page until you see the following options. Click on “Participating Employers”



CAN I USE A STAFFING OR TEMPORARY AGENCY?

No. During the STEM OPT period, self-employment or employment with a staffing agency will **NOT** qualify for STEM OPT Extension. Temporary or staffing agencies cannot complete and sign the [Form I-983, “Training Plan for STEM OPT Students.”](#) Only the E-verified employer that provides the actual training relevant to the student’s qualifying STEM degree is authorized to sign and complete the Form I-983.

The “Official with Signatory Authority” for a student’s Form I-983 must meet the following criteria:

- Be employed by the organization providing the training.
- Be familiar with the STEM OPT student’s goals and performance.
- Have the authority to affirm that the information on the Form I-983 is true and correct.

FORM I-983

WHO QUALIFIES AS AN “OFFICIAL WITH SIGNATORY AUTHORITY”?

The “Official with Signatory Authority” for a student’s Form I-983 must meet the following criteria:

- Be employed by the organization providing the training.
- Be familiar with the STEM OPT student’s goals and performance.
- Have the authority to affirm that the information on the Form I-983 is true and correct.

EMPLOYMENT

WHAT IF I AM TERMINATED/FIRED BY MY EMPLOYER?

If you are terminated, you must report your termination to OISS within 10 days. An advisor in OISS will update your SEVP portal. If you do not have a new employer, you will begin to accrue unemployment days. If you do have a new employer, you will need to provide OISS with all the documents outlined in the “Changing Employers” section of this packet within 10 days of beginning work.

WHAT IF I NEED TO CHANGE EMPLOYERS BEFORE MY STEM OPT IS APPROVED?

OISS does not recommend changing employers with a pending STEM OPT application, but if you must, then you will need to meet with your OISS advisor to discuss process and timelines. Request an appointment [here](#).

CAN I BE SELF EMPLOYED OR VOLUNTEER DURING STEM OPT?

No. Self-employment and volunteering do not qualify as STEM OPT employment.