

# 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: DETERMINE APPLICATION METHOD AND PREPARE MATERIALS

Online USCIS Application	Paper-based/Mail-in USCIS Application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I-983 Form</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Your I-983 form must be fully complete and signed by both you and your employer.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Example form</a></li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Create <a href="#">USCIS online account</a></b> if you do not already have one</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Select “File a Form Online”</b> and select “<b>I-765 Application for Employment Authorization</b>”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Select (C)(3)(c)</b> as your category</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Generate I-765 draft snapshot</b> – In the “Review &amp; Submit” section, click “<b>Application Summary</b>” and select “<b>View Draft Snapshot.</b>” Download and save the PDF. You will upload this copy to your MyOISS OPT request - <b>DO NOT PAY FEE OR SUBMIT TO USCIS UNTIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED OPT I-20 FROM OISS</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Degree or Transcripts</b> for STEM eligible program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I-94:</b> Obtain your <b>most recent I-94</b> or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Passport:</b> Photocopy of the picture page of your passport.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Copy of current EAD</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Passport Photo:</b> Digital photo meeting <a href="#">Department of State’s passport photo requirements</a>. You may use the <a href="#">Department of State’s Photo Tool</a> to upload and crop your photo to the correct size.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I-983 Form</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Your I-983 form must be fully complete and signed by both you and your employer.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Example form</a></li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>G-1145 form</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I-765 form</b> (view sample <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Degree or Transcripts</b> for STEM eligible program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>I-94:</b> Obtain your <b>most recent I-94</b> or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Passport:</b> Photocopy of the picture page of your passport.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Two Passport Photos:</b> Gently print your full name and SEVIS ID on the back of each photo. Photos must be less than 30 days old from OPT processing date listed on I-20. <a href="#">Passport photo requirements</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>U.S. bank issued check or Money Order for \$410.00</b> made payable to: <b>US Department of Homeland Security</b>. If the address on your check is not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. <b>The check must have your name preprinted.</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Copy of current EAD</b></li> </ul>

**Note: If filing for STEM OPT Extension based on prior degree, a copy of the previous institution’s accreditation will be required.**

### STEP 2: SUBMIT YOUR STEM OPT REQUEST TO OISS



### STEP 3: RECEIVE YOUR NEW I-20

OISS will provide your OPT I-20 via email. You will need to PRINT and SIGN the OPT I-20 before submitting your application to USCIS.

**NOTE:** Once you receive your new I-20, make sure you review it carefully and confirm the OPT recommendation is listed on page 2.

STEP 4: ASSEMBLE YOUR APPLICATION PACKET FOR USCIS SUBMISSION

The documents listed below must all be included in your application.

Online USCIS Application	Paper-based/Mail-in USCIS Application
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Log into your <a href="#">USCIS online account</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Navigate to “Evidence” section of online I-765 and upload STEM OPT I-20 under the “Form I-20” section</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Confirm all fields in your I-765 are complete and all required evidence is uploaded</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide payment of \$410 with a US Debit or Credit Card</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Submit application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">G-1145 form</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">I-765 form</a> (This form must be typed)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I-94: Obtain your <a href="#">most recent I-94</a> or photocopy of both sides of your I-94 card.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Passport:</b> Photocopy of the picture page of your passport.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Current EAD copy</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Degree or Transcripts</b> for STEM eligible program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Two Passport Photos:</b> Gently print your full name and SEVIS ID on the back of each photo. Photos must be less than 30 days old from OPT processing date listed on I-20. <a href="#">Passport photo requirements</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>U.S. bank issued check or Money Order for \$410.00</b> made payable to: <b>US Department of Homeland Security</b>. If the address on your check is not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. <b>The check must have your name preprinted.</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>If applying based on prior degree:</b> Proof of institutional accreditation</li> </ul> <p>Documents should be printed single-sided page format. Only include the following documents and do not include other documents without consulting with OISS.</p> <p>Mail documents to USCIS using the <a href="#">Direct Filing Address for I-765</a></p>

## PENDING STEM OPT INFORMATION

### RECEIPT NOTICE

USCIS will provide all applicants with a I-797 Notice of Action after receiving the OPT application:

Online USCIS Application	Paper-based/Mail-in USCIS Application
I-797C Notice of Action will be accessible within 48 hours in the USCIS online account	<p>I-797C Notice of Action sent to provided mailing address on I-765 form within 6-12 weeks of USCIS receiving application.</p> <p>Prior to the Notice of Action, you will receive:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A text message that includes your receipt number for your OPT application.</li> <li>2. An email with a brief statement on how to get additional information about the status of your case.</li> <li>3. An I-797C Receipt Notice. This is your official proof of application.</li> </ol>

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](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 [myoiss.msu.edu](http://myoiss.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 <a href="#">here</a> .  Required materials: updated I-983	Ending employment includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- leaving an organization / employer</li> <li>- Change of Status</li> <li>- Ending your STEM OPT early</li> </ul> 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 [myoiss.msu.edu](http://myoiss.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.

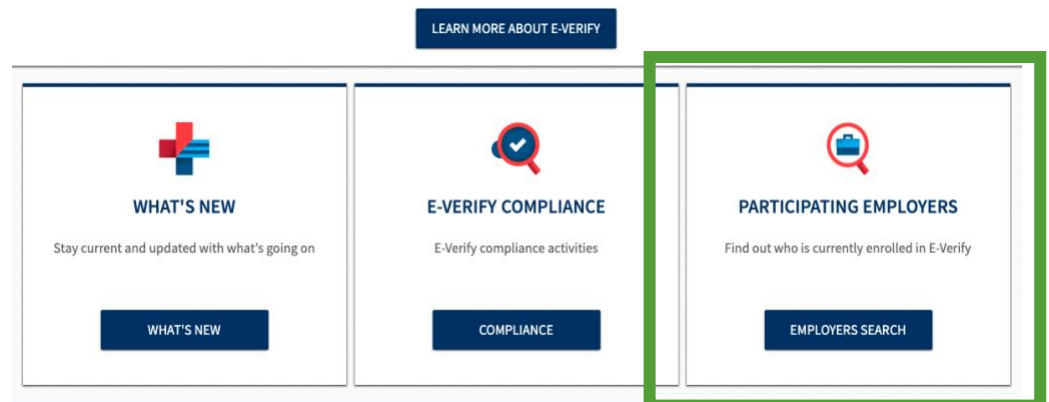
### WHAT IS E-VERIFY?

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.