

STEM OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

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

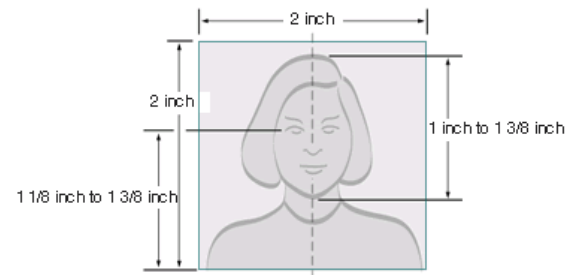
USCIS must receive and receipt your STEM OPT application package before the expiration of current post-completion OPT. The earliest you can apply is **90 days prior to the end date of your current OPT**.

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 THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS

- STEM OPT Form** (located on page of this packet)
- I-983 Form**
 - Your I-983 form must be fully complete and signed by both you and your employer.
 - If you are working for MSU, the MSU HR Solutions Center must complete and sign sections 3 and 4. For questions you can call or email the MSU HR Solutions Center: 517-353-4434/solutionscenter@hr.msu.edu
 - Sections 5 and 6 must be completed and signed by your immediate supervisor.
- G-1145 form**
- I-765 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:** Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your passport.
- 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.**



[Example drafts of the I-983 and I-765 can be found here.](#)

STEP 2: SUBMIT YOUR STEM OPT REQUEST TO OISS

- Scan all the prepared application materials listed in Step 1 into a single PDF file
- Email your materials to oiiss@msu.edu

An OISS advisor will be assigned your STEM OPT case for review. After the advisor has reviewed your application, they will communicate with you any need for corrections via email.

Once all documents are correct and provided to us, OISS will issue a new I-20 to you. This can take up to 14 business days. We will email you when your new I-20 is ready.

STEP 3: RECEIVE YOUR NEW I-20

There are 3 ways you can receive your new I-20:

1. Pick up your I-20 up from OISS during regular business hours
2. Have your I-20 picked up by a friend. Complete the [Document Pick up Authorization eForm](#).
3. Request to have your 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:** Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your passport.
- 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.

If the address listed on your I-765 is in:

Mail your application to:

U.S. Postal Service (USPS) - Certified Mail:

USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

FedEx, UPS, or DHL express mail deliveries:

USCIS
Attn: NFB AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

USCIS Phoenix Lockbox

U.S. Postal Service (USPS) - Certified Mail:

USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

FedEx, UPS, or DHL express mail deliveries:

USCIS
Attn: NFB AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

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

USCIS Dallas Lockbox

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

Processing time may take 90 days or more after USCIS receives your application. If approved, you will receive your EAD card (Employment Authorization Document).

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

SEVIS VALIDATION REPORTS: EVERY 6 MONTHS

Every 6 months individuals on STEM OPT must confirm their personal and employment information in their SEVP portal are correct by completing the [STEM OPT SEVIS VALIDATION REPORT](#). This form should be emailed to oiiss@msu.edu.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PROGRESS: 12 MONTHS

12 months into the STEM OPT period a student is required to submit the “Evaluation of Student Progress” on page 5 of their most recent I-983. This must be signed by both the student and the supervisor.

The evaluation AND a copy of the 6-month SEVIS Validation Report should be sent to oiiss@msu.edu.

FINAL EVALUATION OF STUDENT PROGRESS: 24 MONTHS

At the end of the STEM OPT period or 24 months into the STEM OPT period a student is required to submit the “Final Evaluation of Student Progress” on page 5 of their most recent I-983. This must be signed by both the student and the supervisor.

The final evaluation AND a copy of the 6-month SEVIS Validation Report should be sent to oiiss@msu.edu.

UPDATES TO EMPLOYMENT / MATERIAL CHANGES TO I-983

Any material changes to your I-983 require a new I-983 be submitted to OISS. A material change may include, but is not limited to:

- Any change of 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 objectives as documented on the Form I-983

When submitting your new I-983 you should also submit a [STEM OPT Employment Update](#) form. Both should be emailed to oiiss@msu.edu.

CHANGING EMPLOYERS

If you are changing employers you need to complete the following and email all documents in a PDF to oiiss@msu.edu:

- Final Evaluation for current employer (page 5 of the I-983)
- Update your employment end date in your SEVP portal
- Complete [STEM OPT Employment Update](#) form for the new employer
- Complete new I-983 for new employer

CHANGE IN STATUS / ENDING STEM OPT

If you have a change in status you must provide OISS with:

- Copy of Change of Status Approval Notice
- Final Evaluation on page 5 of the I-983
- Update your SEVP Portal with employment end date

If you are ending your STEM OPT early, you must provide OISS with:

- Final Evaluation on page 5 of the I-983
- Update your SEVP Portal with the employment end date
- Any additional form that may be needed, such as:
 - o [Notice of Departure form](#)
 - o [Transfer Out form](#)

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. Your options during this 60 day grace period are:

1. Depart the US:

This will end your F-1 status. You must depart before the 60 day grace period ends.

OISS will need:

- Final Evaluation on page 5 of I-983
- [Notice of Departure](#) form

2. Apply for a Change of Status

We recommend you begin this process before your STEM OPT expires.

OISS will need:

- Final Evaluation on page 5 of I-983
- Copy of Approval Notice

3. Start a new degree program:

You will need to transfer your SEVIS record from MSU to your new school before the 60 day grace period ends

OISS will need:

- Final Evaluation on page 5 of I-983
- [Transfer Out](#) form
- Proof of Admission to the new degree program

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.

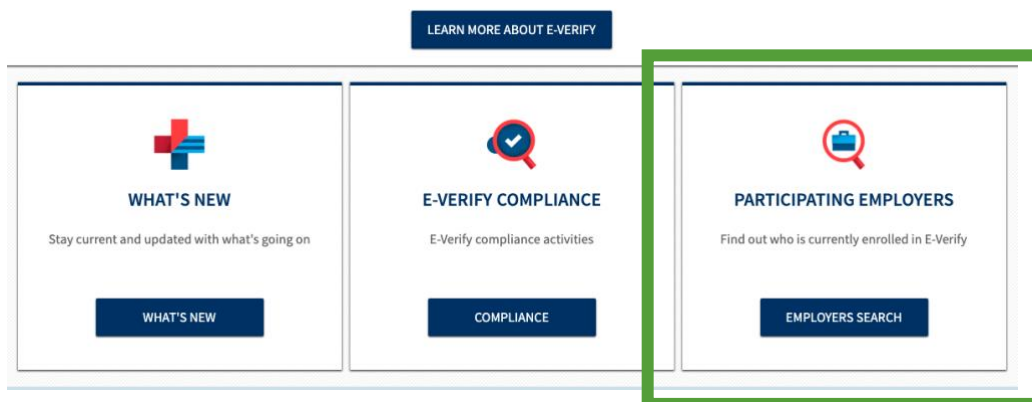
WHAT IS E-VERIFY?

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 FROM 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 submit to OISS:

- STEM OPT Employment Update form
- New I-983
- New I-765

OISS will create a new I-20 for you and an update will need to be sent to USCIS. It is very important that you contact an OISS advisor as soon as you think a change of employer during a pending STEM application is possible.

CAN I BE SELF EMPLOYED OR VOLUNTEER DURING STEM OPT?

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

STEM OPT FORM

THIS FORM TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

Last Name:		First Name:	
Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy):	PID: A		SEVIS ID #: N
Current EAD End Date:		Non-MSU Email Address:	
Student's Address:			
City:	State:	Zip Code	

EMPLOYER INFORMATION

E-Verified Employer's Name:		E-Verify Number:	
Employer EIN:	Job Title:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Time: more than 20 hours/week	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Time: 20 hours or less/week		
Is this employer a temporary or a staffing agency?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - Temporary or staffing agencies do NOT qualify for STEM OPT Extension	
Explain how employment is related to student's course of study: (this information will be copied into your SEVP portal)			

EMPLOYER ADDRESS

Address of Company or Organization:		
City:	State:	Zip Code:

SUPERVISOR INFORMATION

Last Name:	First Name:
Telephone Number:	Email Address:

ATTESTATION

By signing this document, I agree to report any material changes to current employment, change of employers or unemployment to OISS in timely manner as outlined by the [Department Homeland Security STEM OPT requirements](#)

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____