STEM OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

WHAT IS STEM OPT?

Practical work experience authorization that extends OPT for another 24 months for those who have earned a degree in a field included on the Department of Homeland Security (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.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE STEM OPT?

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

- An F-1 student who has been approved for and is currently working in post-completion OPT
- Working in a job directly related to their field of study
- Has earned a bachelor's degree or higher degree in a field included on the DHS list of fields 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
- Are working for or will join an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program
- Work a minimum of 20 hours per week per employer
- Employer must 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.

IS MY DEGREE IN A STEM FIELD?

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.

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

Can STEM OPT Students Use Staffing or Temporary Agencies?

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.

WHEN SHOULD ONE APPLY FOR THE STEM OPT?

USCIS must receive and receipt your STEM OPT application package before the expiration of current post-completion OPT. Students may apply for STEM OPT no sooner than 90 days before the post-completion OPT expiration.

WHAT HAPPENS WHILE THE APPLICATION IS PENDING APPROVAL?

Once the STEM OPT application is received by USCIS, the student is authorized to continue employment for up to 180 days after the expiration of the student's post-completion OPT or adjudication of STEM OPT application.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS DURING STEM OPT

To maintain legal F-1 status, a STEM OPT student must regularly check-in with their DSO (OISS Advisor) throughout the duration of the extension to validate Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) information and report changes made to the student's training plan or change of employers. For details on reporting requirements, see STEM OPT HUB https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-stem-opt-reporting-requirements

STARTING AND ENDING DATES

The 24-month STEM OPT extension period begins on the day following the expiration of post-completion OPT. The end date is 24 months later. For exact start and end dates, see STEM OPT EAD.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES FOR STEM OPT

1. **Assemble the following documents. If you are located within a reasonable distance of MSU, meet with an OISS advisor during walk-in advising hours or schedule an appointment. If you are located far away from MSU, email OISS copies of all of the following documents via one email attachment to oiss@msu.edu.**

   ☐ **STEM OPT Form**
   ☐ **I-983 Form:** (https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-and-the-form-i-983)
      A. Instructions on how to complete the I-983 form, visit https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-and-the-form-i-983
      B. Your I-983 form must be fully complete and signed by both you and your employer.
         1. If you are working for MSU, the MSU HR Solutions Center must complete and sign sections 3 and 4.
         2. MSU HR Solutions Center – 517-353-4434 – solutionscenter@hr.msu.edu
         3. Sections 5 and 6 must be completed and signed by your immediate supervisor.
      C. MSU's SEVIS School Code (including 3-digit suffix): **DET214F00086000**
      D. Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information: OISS will contact you with advisor information after you submit the full packet including the I-983 form.
      E. Student SEVIS ID No.: This number is listed on your I-20 (e.g., N00xxxxxxx)
   ☐ **G-1145 form**: (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf)
   ☐ **I-765 form**: (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf)
      A. For #15 select YES
         1. Which USCIS Office: Depends on your EAD, if your card number begins with
            a. LIN: Nebraska Service Center
            b. WAC: California Service Center
            c. SRC: Texas Service Center
            d. EAC: Vermont Service Center
            e. YSC: Potomac Service Center
      B. For #20 enter **(c)(3)(C)**.
      C. For #21 in "Degree" enter the degree level (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral) as listed on the I-20 under Program of Study below the Major. **NOTE**: If you received a STEM degree under a different immigration status, then contact your institution that granted your STEM OPT degree for CIP Code.
      D. Obtain E-Verify information from your employer.
   ☐ **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.
   ☐ **I-94**: Printout of the electronic I-94 record from CBP website (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** (see example): Photos cannot be older than 30 days from STEM OPT application. Gently print your full name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.
   ☐ **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 in not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. **The check must have your name preprinted**.

2. OISS will prepare a STEM OPT I-20 for you. If mailed or emailed, it is the student's responsibility to follow up and make sure that the STEM OPT is processed in a timely manner. In most cases, it will be ready in approximately one week. OISS will notify you via your MSU email once it is ready. **OISS WILL NOT PROCESS INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS.**

PASSPORT PHOTOGRAPH REQUIREMENTS

- Photos must be less than 30 days old from STEM OPT I-20 processing date listed on I-20.
- Photos must be 2 inches in height by 2 inches in width (see figure below).
- The photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background.
- Head height should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches from top to bottom of chin.
- Eye height is between 1 1/8 inch to 1 3/8 inch from bottom of photo (see figure below).
- Head must be bare unless a headdress is required by religious order of which you are a member.
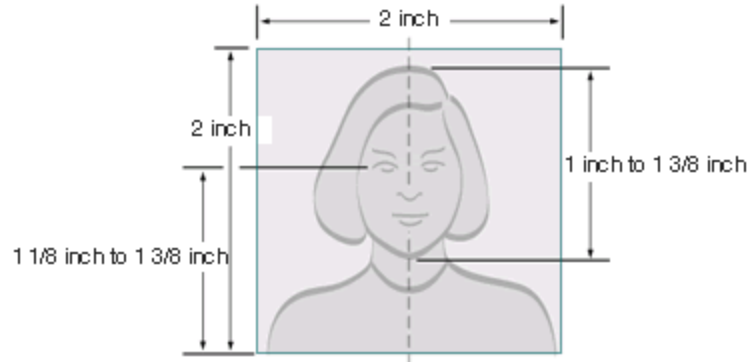
- **DO NOT USE OLD PHOTOS OR THE SAME PHOTOS YOU USED FOR YOUR VISA STAMP, PASSPORT OR OPT.**

YOU HAVE BEEN RECOMMEND FOR STEM OPT…NOW WHAT?

OISS will prepare a STEM OPT I-20 for you. In most cases, it will be ready in approximately one week. We will notify you via your MSU email once it is ready.

CHECKLIST FOR MAILING YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS

☐ **Photocopy** all pages of your new STEM OPT I-20 (do not send the original). Make sure to sign and date your new I-20 before you make the photocopy.

☐ **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.

☐ **I-94:** Printout of the electronic I-94 record from CBP website (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 in not current, cross out the old address and write your present address. **The check must have your name preprinted**.

HOW TO MAIL

Use either USPS Certified Mail or a courier service (FedEx, DHL, UPS etc.) to mail your OPT application to USCIS. These options have different mailing addresses. See page *Address for Mailing Your STEM OPT* for specific USCIS mailing address options. **USCIS must receive the STEM OPT application packet within 60 days of the DSO's (OISS Advisor) signature on I-20 as listened on page 1 and in SEVIS, and before the expiration of the student's post-completion OPT.**

RECEIPT NOTICE

With submission of G-1145 form, USCIS will email/text you a receipt number for your OPT application. The message will provide a receipt number as information, but will not constitute official notice of acceptance. The email notice will also provide a brief statement on how to get additional information about the status of your case. USCIS will also mail you a paper copy Receipt Notice. This is your proof of application. It will state when your application was received and give you an application number. You can use the application number to check your application status at www.uscis.gov.

STEM OPT APPROVAL

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

MAINTAINING YOUR STATUS DURING STEM OPT

You must comply with the below requirements. As long as the STEM OPT student and employer meet the regulatory requirements and the modified Form I-983 meets the specified requirements, the student's employment authorization will not terminate based on a change to the plan. The below requirements must be emailed to OISS at oiss@msu.edu.

1. **Six Month Reporting**:
   STEM OPT students must email OISS every six months from the start date listed on their STEM EAD to confirm that their SEVIS information correctly identifies:
   a. Legal name
   b. Residential address (no P.O. Box)
   c. Employer name and address
   d. Status of current employment
   e. Please note that STEM OPT students must report a change in this information, including any loss of employment, within 10 days of the change

2. **Annual Self-Evaluations**:
   a. The annual self-evaluation is found on Form I-983 https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-and-the-form-i-983 .
   b. STEM OPT student must submit to their DSO an annual self-evaluation about the progress of the training experience.
   c. Students and their employers must sign the student's self-evaluation before the student submits it to the DSO, who will include it in the student's record.
3. **Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983**:
   Each STEM OPT student must report to their DSO any material changes to, or material deviations from, the student's formal training plan. Material changes or deviations from the original Form I-983 may include, but are not limited to:
   a. Any change of the employer's EIN.
   b. Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
   c. Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity.
   d. Changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983.
4. **Changing Employers**:
   a. When a STEM OPT student changes employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins work. The student must submit the following documents to OISS IMMEDIATELY:
      I. STEM OPT EMPLOYMENT REPORTING Form to end the previous employer
      II. Completed page 5 of the I-983 Form: "Evaluation on Student Progress" for the employment that is ending.
      III. STEM OPT EMPLOYMENT REPORTING Form to report the new employer
      IV. A New Form I-983, completed by both the student and the employer.
      V. If you change employers while STEM OPT application is pending, a student is required to submit a new I-765 form to OISS. OISS will update your I-20 and you must mail your I-20, new Form I-765, a receipt notice of your STEM OPT application and a letter explaining the change of employment to USCIS immediately.
   b. In cases where the STEM OPT student stopped one employer and has not secured another employer; the student must complete steps I and II immediately. If this happens while STEM OPT application is pending, the student's STEM OPT application may be denied.
5. **Unemployment**:
   a. STEM OPT students must report the termination of employment within 10 days of the event.
   b. Students who are granted a 24-month STEM OPT extension are allowed an additional 60 days of unemployment beyond the initial post-completion OPT limit. This means that students who obtain a 24-month STEM OPT extension will receive a total of 150 days of allowable unemployment (90 days during the initial period of post-completion OPT plus an additional 60 days during the extension period).
6. **Employer Noncompliance**:
   a. If a STEM OPT student believes that their employer is not complying with the terms and conditions with STEM OPT extension regulations, the Form I-983 instructions, and the completed Form I-983 on file with their DSO, the student may:
   b. Contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by following the instructions found on ICE.gov.
   c. Report violations through this Homeland Security Investigations tip submission form.
   d. For more information, visit: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-stem-opt-reporting-requirements

NOTE: Self-employment and volunteer positions will not qualify as valid employment for STEM OPT purposes during the STEM OPT period. "The terms and conditions of a STEM practical training opportunity during the period of the 24-month OPT extension, including duties, hours, and compensation, must be commensurate with terms and conditions applicable to the employers' similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment."

TRAVEL DURING STEM OPT

Reentering 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.oiss.msu.edu/students_travel_autorevalid.php

ENDING YOUR STEM OPT

Your F-1 status remains valid until 60 days after the expiration of your EAD card. During this 60-day grace period, you cannot work; however, you may legally stay in the U.S to prepare for departure. If you depart the U.S. during the 60-day grace period, you are no longer eligible to reenter under your F-1 visa status.

- If you plan to return home after the end of your STEM OPT, make sure that you depart the U.S. before the end of your 60-day grace period.
- If you plan to change your visa status, we recommend you begin this process before your STEM OPT expires.
- If you plan to start a new degree program at another college or university, you must contact OISS regarding the transfer of your SEVIS record. Transfers must be done before the end of the 60-day grace period.

STEM OPT FORM

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

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:

☐ Full Time: more than 20 hours/week | ☐ Part Time: 20 hours or less/week

Is this employer a temporary or a staffing agency?	☐ No	☐ Yes - Temporary or staffing agencies do **NOT** qualify for STEM OPT Extension

Explain how employment is related to student's course of study:

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:** _____

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ADDRESSES FOR MAILING YOUR STEM OPT

NOTE: The below addresses correlate to the address that you fill on your I-765 form.

If Your Address Listed On I-765 Is In	Mail Your Application To
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 *For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) - Certified Mail:* USCIS P.O. Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 **OR** *For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:* USCIS Attn: NFB AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 8503
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 *For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) - Certified Mail:* USCIS P.O. Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 **OR** *For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:* USCIS Attn: NFB AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067