



pre-completion OPT application (including the required pre-completion OPT recommendation I-20 from ISSS, passport photos, and any other supporting documents) when you get to the payment screen.

- Once you submit your application through the online system, you should:
 - Receive your receipt notice and receipt number immediately within your USCIS account;
 - Be able to track the status of your case;
 - Communicate with USCIS through a secure inbox; and
 - Respond to Requests for Evidence (RFE).

No matter how you file, USCIS must receive your STEM OPT application within 60 days of the date ISSS enters the recommendation for STEM OPT into your SEVIS record.

Is there anything I should be aware of while I work on submitting my STEM OPT materials to USCIS?

You **MUST** submit your application to USCIS while you are inside of the United States.

Your STEM OPT application must be received and begin being processed by USCIS:

- No earlier than 90 days prior to your current post-completion OPT EAD expiration date;
- No later than your current post-completion OPT EAD end date; and
- Within 60 days of the “School Attestation” signature date on page 1 of the STEM OPT I-20.

If your current post-completion OPT authorization has already expired, you cannot apply for STEM OPT.

When can I start working on STEM OPT?

You may continue to work on your expired EAD for post-completion OPT along with your STEM OPT Receipt Notice for up to 180 days while your STEM OPT petition is pending if you meet the following conditions:

- You are currently in a period of post-completion OPT.
- You properly and in a timely manner filed your application for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension with USCIS.

*Receipt Notice must show a receipt date that is prior to your current post-completion OPT EAD end date.

If you are applying for STEM OPT and if you have timely filed your STEM OPT application with USCIS and your post-completion OPT expires prior to the approval of the OPT STEM Extension, then USCIS will automatically extend your OPT employment authorization for an additional 180 days. You can learn more about the 180-extension on the [USCIS website](#).

How long will it take USCIS to process my STEM OPT application?

You can check USCIS’s OPT processing time by going to their [processing times website](#), selecting “I-765 Application for Employment Authorization” under “Form”, selecting “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” under “Form Category”, and selecting “Potomac Service Center” under “Field Office or Service Center.” There you will be able to see their estimated time range for processing OPT applications.

What copies of my I-20s must I include with my application?

- You must include a copy of your I-20 recommending STEM OPT. You should also include:
 - A copy of any previous OPT approval I-20(s).
 - A copy of any I-20s from a different SEVIS ID than you have now (if applicable).

I submitted my STEM OPT application materials to USCIS. What should I do while I wait?

- Pay attention to receipt notices, mail, and notifications from USCIS.
- Contact ISSS if your STEM OPT application is rejected, denied, or if you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE).
 - If you move from the U.S. address you entered in your application or are no longer receiving mail there and have not yet received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card), you must update your address information in the [USCIS Online Change of Address System](#).
- If you have questions about your case or status of your application, please use the [USCIS online tools](#) or call the National Customer Service Number (800-375-5283). To check your case status online, [click here](#). On that webpage, you can create a free account which will allow you to view your case status, history, and easily save your receipt numbers. You will also receive electronic case updates.
- Be mindful of the 180-day extension. You may continue to work on your expired EAD for post-completion OPT along with your STEM OPT Receipt Notice up to 180 days while your STEM OPT petition is pending if you meet the following conditions:
 - You are currently in a period of post-completion OPT.
 - You properly and in a timely manner filed your application for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension with USCIS.
 - Receipt Notice must show a receipt date that is prior to your current post-completion OPT EAD end date.
 - If your STEM OPT application is still pending after the 180-day extension, you must stop working. Contact ISSS if your STEM OPT application is still pending and the end of the 180-day extension is nearing.

SECTION 5

STEM OPT Reporting Requirements

This section reviews your reporting requirements while on an approved period of STEM OPT.

What is the SEVP Portal?

The SEVP Portal allows students in F-1 status to monitor their employment authorization and update their address, telephone, and employer information to meet regulatory reporting requirements. Access to the SEVP Portal is granted when a student is on an authorized period of post-completion OPT. Students on STEM OPT should be familiar with the SEVP Portal and have experience using it to update their contact information and employment details. Please review the [SEVP Help Hub](#) for additional resources (e.g., user guide, instructional videos).

What am I required to report while I'm on an authorized period of STEM OPT?

This Study in the States [STEM OPT Reporting Requirements handout](#) is helpful for students and employers to understand their reporting requirements.

It is important that you understand that your reporting requirements on STEM OPT are different from your reporting requirements while in a period of post-completion OPT.

- **General Reporting:** Any changes in the student's legal name, address, phone number, can be made by the student in the SEVP portal. If the student has an update regarding the employer, or employment status, the student must notify ISSS within 10 days of the change by submitting the [ISSS OPT Information Update Form](#) which will allow ISSS to make the employment update on the student's behalf.
- **Validation Reporting:** A 6-, 12- and 18-month validation report to the Designated School Official (DSO) that confirms the student's name, address, employer name and address, and employment status are correct.
- **Self-Evaluations:** Self-evaluations are submitted to the Designated School Office (DSO) at the end of any employment and at the 12- and 24-month marks from the start date of the STEM OPT Extension. A concluding self-evaluation occurs at the end of any period of employment, regardless of its duration.

During your STEM OPT authorization period, you should report changes of address or telephone information in the [SEVP Portal](#). For alumni purposes, you can update your address in [Buff Portal](#) and with [Alumni Association](#). Any changes to your name or citizenship should be communicated to [ISSS](#).

What is my employer required to report while I am on an authorized period of STEM OPT?

This Study in the States [STEM OPT Reporting Requirements handout](#) is helpful for students and employers to understand their reporting requirements. Additionally, the [Study in the States Employer: STEM OPT Reporting Requirements page](#) is a great resource that includes more information about the requirements listed below. You may also download [SEVP's Training STEM OPT Students presentation](#) for more employer-related compliance information. Below are the specific instances in which employers are required to fulfill reporting requirements.

- Complete and Certify the Form I-983
 - The STEM OPT employer must work with the student to complete the Form I-983 and designate an Official with Signatory Authority to certify that information in the document is true and correct. The form is not complete until the employer has signed and certified it in the designated areas.
- Evaluation on Student Progress
 - The STEM OPT employer must review the student's annual self-evaluation on their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy.
- Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983
 - Employers must work with the STEM OPT student to report to the Designated School Official (DSO) any [material changes](#) to, or material deviations from, the

student's formal training plan, by filling out a new Form I-983.

- Loss of Employment
 - The employer and student both must notify the Designated School Official (DSO) when the student's employment is terminated for any reason before the end of the authorized extension period. The employer must report such a change in employment to ISSS no later than five business days after the student's employment terminates or the student has departed the United States. Employers and students can satisfy this requirement with an email to the [ISSS](#) indicating that the student was terminated or has otherwise departed, as well as the applicable date of such termination or departure.

What do I do if my STEM OPT employer changes?

The steps involved depend on if your STEM OPT has been approved or is in pending status.

If your STEM OPT application is pending and your employer changes:

- You will need to submit a new Form I-983 to ISSS for the new employer. You can submit the new Form I-983 to ISSS via the Document Submission Form (available in [MyISSS portal](#)).
- ISSS will need to submit an updated Form I-20 with the new employer information and the new Employer Identification Number (EIN) to USCIS. We will do this on your behalf. A new Form I-765 is not needed.
 - If you are already within your STEM OPT period which begins immediately after your post-completion OPT end date (even if your application is pending), then you also need to submit your Form I-983 final evaluation for your current employer. The final evaluation must be completed by you and signed by your supervisor. You do not have to complete a brand-new Form I-983 for the evaluation, just the final evaluation found on page 5. You can submit the final evaluation via the Document Submission Form (available in [MyISSS portal](#)).

If your STEM OPT application is approved and your employer changes:

- You'll need to report the end date of your current employer to ISSS. You can do this by simply sending [ISSS](#) an email.
- Your current employer is required to report the termination of your employment to ISSS within 5 business days. They can do this by simply sending [ISSS](#) an email.
- You must complete your Form I-983 final evaluation for your current employer. The final evaluation must be completed by you and signed by your supervisor. You do not have to complete a brand-new Form I-983 for the evaluation, just the final evaluation found on page 5. You can submit the final evaluation via the Document Submission Form (available in [MyISSS portal](#)).
- You will need to complete the ISSS [OPT Information Update Form \(name, address, citizenship, and employment\)](#). You will need to provide your current employer end date and your new employer's information. You will also need to upload a copy of the new completed and signed Form I-983 Training Plan for your new STEM OPT training opportunity.

In what situations would I need to submit a new Form I-983?

Both STEM OPT students and employers are obligated to report material changes to, or material deviations from, the student's formal training plan.

Material changes or deviations may include, but are not limited to:

- Any change of the employer's Employer Identification Number, (the company's Federal Tax ID number) resulting from a change in the employer's ownership or structure.
- 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.

So 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 cease based on a change to the plan.

Do I have unemployment days while on the OPT STEM Extension?

A student on the 24-month STEM OPT Extension can be unemployed for a total of 150 days. This includes any of the remaining 90 days of unemployment allotted from the standard post-completion OPT.

What documentation should I keep for my records while on STEM OPT?

The list below is a suggestion of records you may be asked to present to prove STEM OPT training (during or after your STEM OPT authorization); it is not exhaustive. Be sure to maintain documentation that the training is in your major field of study.

- Copies of offer letters and agreements/contracts with all STEM OPT employers including: start/ end dates, pay rate, and number of weekly work hours.
- Copies of job descriptions including job title, duties, location, and supervisor's contact information.
- If you worked for an agency or consultancy, keep evidence of the projects you worked on.
- Keep copies of your pay vouchers/pay stubs for all periods of employment, copies of your bank statements that show direct or corresponding deposits from your employer(s), and associated W-2 tax forms.

What types of employment are permitted during the STEM OPT Extension?

E-Verify:

- STEM OPT employers also must be enrolled in the USCIS e-verify [program](#).

Location:

- [USCIS](#) explains, "STEM OPT participants may engage in a training experience that takes place at a site other than the employer's principal place of business as long as all of the training obligations are met, including that the employer has and maintains a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student."

Unacceptable Forms of Employment:

- Self-Employment is not acceptable during the OPT STEM Extension period due to the lack of the required employer-employee relationship.
- 1099 contract work is not acceptable during the OPT STEM Extension period due to the lack of the required employer-employee relationship

- Volunteer employment is not an acceptable form of employment during the OPT STEM Extension period:
 - The [USCIS website](#) states, “To establish a bona fide relationship, the employer may not be the student’s ‘employer’ in name only, nor may the student work for the employer on a ‘volunteer’ basis”

Temporary Employment Agencies/3rd Party Employers: Employment with temporary employment agencies can be problematic during the STEM OPT Extension period. If a student is working for a third party staffing agency the employer that signs the Form I-983 must be the same entity that provides the practical training experience to the student. Please visit the USCIS website for further information regarding third-party placement and employment by temporary agencies during the OPT STEM extension period.

SECTION 6

Travel, Extension, and Changes While on STEM OPT

Are there any options to extend my employment period after STEM OPT?

Cap-Gap Extension

A student in F-1 status is eligible for a cap-gap extension if they:

- are the beneficiary of a H-1B petition
- have requested a change of status
- have an employment start date of October 1 of the current year

If eligible, your duration of status (D/S) and any post-completion OPT (including STEM OPT) work authorization is extended to September 30 or until the H-1B petition is withdrawn or denied. An automatic cap-gap extension also applies to the duration of status of any dependents in F-2 status. To request an I-20 with a comment indicating the H-1B is pending or has been approved, complete the [Cap-Gap I-20 Request](#).

Do I get a grace period when I come to the end of my STEM OPT authorization?

There is a 60-day grace period following the completion of your 24-month STEM OPT Extension (starting from the day after your EAD end date) for students who maintained status and did not accrue more than 150 days of unemployment. You are not eligible for employment or to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status during the 60-day grace period. Students in F-1 status who are in the 60-day grace period should plan to exit the United States on or before the end of their 60-day grace period. Students in F-1 status can request that their SEVIS record be transferred to another institution during their grace period if they have been admitted and will begin the program within 5 months. Students in F-1 status can also apply for a [change of status](#) during the grace period.

What happens if I begin a new degree level or need a SEVIS transfer while I am on STEM OPT?

Enrollment is not required while on an authorized period of STEM OPT and if you choose to enroll while participating in STEM OPT, it may impact your work authorization. Consult ISSS if

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you are considering beginning a new course of study or will seek to [transfer your SEVIS record](#) to another institution. STEM OPT work authorization is terminated when your SEVIS record is transferred to a new school and/or you begin a program at a new degree level.

Can I travel while I am on an authorized period of the OPT STEM Extension?

If you depart the U.S. while authorized for STEM OPT for a temporary absence, you must have proof of employment, or a job offer in your major field of study in order to re-enter the U.S. If you seek re-entry to the U.S. in F-1 status while authorized for STEM OPT, carry the following documents:

- I-20 ISSS issued with STEM OPT employment information on page 2 and travel signature dated less than six months from your date of re-entry to the U.S.
- Valid Passport (validity should extend at least 6 months beyond your date of re-entry to the U.S.)
- *Valid F-1 visa (exception- Canadians; *[automatic visa revalidation](#))
- Unexpired Employment Authorization Document (EAD card)
- Evidence that you have a job, or a job offer in your major field of study in the United States and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment since the EAD card start date.
- I-901 SEVIS fee receipt - a copy can be printed from [online](#).
- If you are using automatic visa revalidation to re-enter the U.S., have your printed I-94.

Things to keep in mind if you choose to travel while authorized for the OPT STEM Extension:

- **A temporary absence from the U.S. should be less than 5 months.** Even with a job offer and valid EAD, an absence greater than 5 months may not be considered temporary and you may be denied re-entry.
- **Do NOT leave the U.S. if you have a pending change of status application as it will likely be considered abandoned.** Please consult an immigration attorney if you have questions about this.
- **Do NOT re-enter the U.S. in another status (e.g., B) if you intend to work on the OPT STEM Extension.** You must be present in the U.S. in F-1 status to work on the OPT STEM Extension.

Additional Travel Resources:

- [ICE Travel FAQ](#)
- [ISSS OPT Travel FAQ](#)
- [Visa Renewal](#)
- [Printing a Copy of Your I-94](#)

I-94 Arrival Record

Review your [I-94 arrival record](#) every time you re-enter the U.S. to ensure that your entry was recorded properly. Check your biographical information as well as your Class of Admission (F-1) and Admit until Date (D/S).

Travel to Third-Country Destinations

Depending on the country you are traveling to and/or through, you may require a transit visa (to travel through an intermediary country on your way to your final destination) or a tourist visa to enter your final destination. Please consult the appropriate embassy or foreign consular office to determine if an additional visa is necessary. ISSS cannot give advice on visa procedures or application requirements for other countries.