International Student & Scholar Services
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

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The 24-month STEM OPT Extension (STEM OPT) is defined in the F-1 regulations as a "*24-month extension of post-completion OPT for a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) degree.*"

An extension of OPT is available for students who have earned certain qualifying STEM degrees and whose employer is enrolled in the USCIS E-Verify program. This guide reviews information related to the STEM OPT application process as well as the STEM OPT reporting requirements.

SECTION 1
Introduction to STEM OPT

This section will review eligibility requirements and the application timeline.

How do I know if I am eligible for STEM OPT?

1. You must currently be in an authorized period of post-completion OPT and maintaining your F-1 status.
2. You must have a qualifying STEM degree (bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree) earned at an accredited, SEVP-certified, U.S. higher education institution in the last 10 years.
   - The "thesis or dissertation" exception is not available when basing the STEM OPT Extension on a *previous* degree; the previous degree must be conferred.
   - The degree that serves as the basis for a *second* lifetime STEM OPT, must be at a *higher* educational level than the degree that served as the basis for the first STEM OPT.
3. You must have a qualifying employer for a position in the qualifying STEM degree field.
   - The job must be paid for at least 20 hours a week and should reflect a bona fide employer-employee relationship.
   - Remember that you must Stay Away from Marijuana (Cannabis) Related Activities & Industries
   - The employer must be registered in E-Verify, have an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN), and sufficient resources to provide a training program.

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- The employer must sign the Form I-983 Training Plan, agreeing to the wage, working conditions, supervision, site visit, and reporting obligations set forth on the Form I-983 and in the regulations.
4. You must only pursue training directly related to your major field of study.

When can I apply for STEM OPT?

You can apply for STEM OPT no earlier than 90 days prior to your current post-completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) expiration date. If your current post-completion OPT authorization has already expired, you cannot apply for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension.

Do I need to have a job before I apply for STEM OPT?

Yes. When you apply for STEM OPT, you are requesting authorization to work in a specific job that is directly related to your major field of study. Additionally, you are requesting authorization to work for an employer that is registered in E-Verify, has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN), and sufficient resources to provide a training program. You will complete the Form I-983 training plan with your specific employer prior to applying for STEM OPT.

Do I choose my authorization start date for STEM OPT?

No. Your STEM OPT authorization start date must be the date immediately after your post-completion OPT end date. For example, if your post-completion OPT end date is June 1, then your STEM OPT authorization start date will be June 2.

If your STEM OPT *training* start date is after your STEM OPT *authorization* start date, then you will accrue unemployment days from the STEM OPT authorization start date to the date that you begin your *training* while on STEM OPT. For example: If your STEM OPT authorization start date is June 2 but your *training* start date at your STEM OPT employer is July 2, you will accrue 30 unemployment days for the days between June 2 and July 2.

Can I have STEM OPT based on a previously obtained qualifying STEM degree?

Yes, the degree that is the basis for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension may be, but is not required to be, the degree that is the basis for the post-completion OPT period.

The previously obtained qualifying STEM degree must meet the following requirements:
- If an application for a 24-month STEM OPT Extension is based upon a degree obtained previous to the degree that provided the basis for the period of post-completion OPT, that previously obtained degree must have been conferred from a U.S. educational institution that is accredited and SEVP-certified at the time the student's Designated School Official (DSO) recommends the student for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension and must be in a degree program category included on the current STEM Designated Degree Program List at the time of the DSO recommendation.
- That previously obtained degree must have been conferred within the 10 years preceding the date the DSO recommends the student for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension.

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SECTION 2
Applying for STEM OPT

This section provides a material guide to applying for STEM OPT. Included in this section are detailed instructions, a list of documents and materials that you need to compile, and information about what happens after you fill out the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form.

ISSS has a list of STEM OPT resources on the right-hand side of this page including our ISSS STEM OPT Workshop Presentation.

How do I file my STEM OPT Extension application with USCIS?

Before electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online, students must first submit the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form to ISSS and ISSS must make the STEM OPT recommendation in SEVIS. This is very important. If a student first submits the USCIS online application and then requests the STEM OPT recommendation I-20 from ISSS, the STEM OPT application will be denied, as the regulations require the recommendation be entered into SEVIS prior to the STEM OPT filing.

- USCIS has confirmed that an electronically filed STEM OPT application is less likely to be rejected. This is because the USCIS online filing system uses logic that limits the questions you will need to answer based on prior answers, diminishing the opportunity for errors.
- Once the application is submitted online with final payment, students will immediately receive a receipt number and receipt notice. This means that you will not face a receipt notice delay. A paper copy receipt notice will also be mailed to you.
- Payment will be made on a secure website using a credit or debit card. This means that you'll be able to confirm receipt of payment at the time of application. ISSS understands that once you submit payment, your whole application will be submitted to USCIS. Please make sure that you are ready to submit your entire STEM OPT application (including the required STEM OPT recommendation I-20 from ISSS, passport photos, and any other supporting documents) when you get to the payment screen.
- Additional evidence can be uploaded to the application after submitting. However, ISSS urges students to ensure that they submit a complete application at the time of submission to USCIS. ISSS wants to reiterate that you must first receive the I-20 recommending STEM OPT from ISSS before submitting your complete application to USCIS online.

How do I request and receive my STEM OPT I-20 from ISSS?

1. Complete the I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students with your employer
   - Add additional pages/addendums if needed.
   - Detailed instructions for completing the Form I-983 are included on this webpage.
2. Complete the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form and attach a copy of your:
   - Complete and signed Form I-983 Training Plan;
   - most recent EAD card; and

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- documentation of the completion of your STEM degree course work.
  - If you have completed the degree, attach a copy of your diploma and/or a copy of your final transcript indicating the degree and major.
  - If you have only completed the course work for the degree, attach a signed letter on letterhead from your academic department indicating the degree's major, when the course work was completed, and that the degree is still in progress.

3. Attach additional documentation if applicable (e.g., I-20 from a previously obtained STEM degree)

ISSS wants to reiterate that you must first receive the I-20 recommending STEM OPT from ISSS before submitting your completed documents to USCIS.

What happens while ISSS is reviewing my STEM OPT I-20 Request Form and attached materials?

- ISSS will review your request form, your completed Form I-983, diploma, and EAD card. ISSS will contact you if any questions arise or if any edits are required before ISSS proceeds with your request. You can help prevent the need for edits by following the Form I-983 instructions listed below.
- ISSS will recommend the STEM OPT Extension in SEVIS and upload your completed Form I-983 to SEVIS.
- ISSS will use the information that you submit on the Form I-983 and the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form to recommend STEM OPT. Please make sure that you provide accurate information on these forms.
- ISSS will issue you a signed I-20 recommending STEM OPT. You must sign this I-20 by hand and include a copy of it in your application that you submit to USCIS.
- Please note that ISSS only *recommends* that you receive the 24-month STEM OPT Extension; the final decision is made by USCIS.

What evidence do I need to provide to USCIS for my STEM OPT application?

Remember that you must first receive the I-20 recommending the STEM OPT Extension from ISSS **before** submitting your completed documents to USCIS. To receive your I-20 recommending STEM OPT, please complete the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form.

You will need to upload the following materials to the USCIS online application system. Documents can be uploaded in the following formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF. Photos can be uploaded as a JPG, JPEG, or PNG.

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Evidence (as listed in online filing system)	Example	Notes
2x2 photo of you	Passport Photo	See "Photo Requirements" U.S. Department of State photo requirements. DOS also has a photo check tool that you can use to check the photo ahead of time.
Form I-94	Entry I-94 or Change of Status I-979 Approval	Download your most recent I-94 here: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/
Employment Authorization Document	OPT EAD Card	
Form I-20	Newest I-20 with STEM OPT Recommendation.	This is only referring to the recommending I-20, not to prior I-20s.
College Degree	Diploma and/or transcripts showing degree conferral.	
Institution accreditation	Proof of accreditation (screenshot from school or accreditor's website).	Only required if you are filing STEM OPT based on a prior degree (i.e. not the OPT degree).

Additional Notes:

- If you have a prior SEVIS ID number, ISSS recommends including the prior SEVIS ID in the additional information section.

- If you have completed less than 1 full year in F-1 status (e.g. started program in H-4 status), ISSS recommends that you upload proof of prior immigration status as well as transcripts showing that you completed 1 academic year of full-time enrollment.

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SECTION 3
Form I-983 Instructions

What is the difference between the Form I-983 and the Form I-765?

The Form I-983 is a formal training plan between the student in F-1 status and their employer that must clearly articulate the STEM OPT student's learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives. The Form I-983 is not mailed to USCIS with your STEM OPT application, but ISSS uploads it to SEVIS when recommending STEM OPT. The Form I-765 is used to request employment authorization and an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

The Form I-765 is the form where you are formally requesting STEM OPT authorization from USCIS. When electronically filing the Form I-765 with USCIS online, you will not fill out a paper copy of the Form I-765. The USCIS online filing system uses logic that limits the questions you will need to answer based on prior answers, diminishing the opportunity for errors. You will not be required to submit a copy of your I-765 to ISSS for review. The ISSS advisor who issues the I-20 recommending STEM OPT welcomes the opportunity to review your draft I-765 before you make payment and submit your complete application to USCIS.

When filling out your online application, please be sure to select the proper eligibility category: (c) (3) (C) STEM OPT.

What resources should I reference while filling out my Form I-983?

- Below are written ISSS instructions for completing the Form I-983.
- Study in the States I-983 Resources.
- Department of Homeland Security I-983 Instructions.

Form I-983 Instructions

The Form I-983 must clearly articulate the STEM OPT student's learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives. STEM OPT students and their employers are subject to the terms and conditions of the 24-month STEM OPT Extension regulations, effective as of the training start date requested for the associated STEM OPT period, as indicated on the Form I-983. Additional information on completing the Form I-983 can be found at the Department of Homeland Security's website. No questions should be left blank except for page 5 of the Form I-983. When first applying for the STEM OPT Extension, page 5 should be left blank as the evaluations are only completed once a student is in their STEM OPT authorization period.

Section 1: Student Information (completed by the student)
- Student Name: Enter your full name (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name) as it appears on your passport.
- Name of School Recommending STEM OPT: Enter school name (see "School Information" section on your Form I-20) Example: University of Colorado Boulder
- Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned: Enter the name of the school from which you earned the degree upon which the STEM OPT is based. This may or

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may not be the same school recommending the STEM OPT if you are using a prior qualifying STEM degree.

- SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT: University of Colorado Boulder's F-1 School Code is DEN214F00155000.
- DSO Name and Contact Information: Enter the name of an ISSS Advisor, their email address, phone number, and the following address: 2249 Willard Loop Drive Boulder, CO 80309. If you are unable to fit all of this information into the space provided, you may hand write it very neatly in black ink.
- Student SEVIS ID Number: Enter your SEVIS identification (ID) number (see "SEVIS ID" at top of your Form I-20, beginning with N)
- STEM OPT Requested Period: The duration of your STEM OPT extension is based on your current post-completion OPT end date, regardless of whether the authorized dates match actual training dates. For a student currently on post-completion OPT requesting a STEM OPT extension, the start date of the STEM OPT should be the day after your current post-completion OPT ends.
- Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: Enter the code per Form I-20 for the school and degree program you are basing your STEM OPT request. The CIP code is a six-digit code (XX. XXXX) following the major. Example: 11.0701 - Computer Science.
- Level/Type of Qualifying Degree: Enter the academic level upon which you are basing STEM OPT. (For example, Bachelor's, Master's, or Ph.D.)
- Date Awarded: Enter the program end date listed on the Form I-20 for the school and degree program upon which you are basing your STEM OPT request.
- Based on Prior Degree: Check "Yes" if your STEM OPT is based on a previously-obtained U.S. STEM degree and is not the same degree upon which your current post-completion OPT was granted. Check "No" if your STEM OPT is based on your most recently obtained degree, and that is the degree upon which your current post-completion OPT is based.
- Employment Authorization Number: Enter the number found on your Employment Authorization document (EAD card) underneath "USCIS#"

Section 2: Student Certification (Completed by Student)
Review each item carefully and affirm the statements by signing the Form.

Section 3: Employer Information (Completed by Employer)
- Be sure to your employer fully completes section 3. The employer name should be written as the company's legal E-Verify name.
- Start Date of Employment: The date entered here needs to reflect the dates of your *training* with your STEM Extension/E-Verify employer after your post-completion OPT has ended and during the STEM OPT authorization period. In other words, the start date of employment is the date when the student will begin the *STEM OPT training* with the employer. This is confirmed in the ICE.gov I-983 Instructions.
- If you receive any company benefits (health insurance, dental insurance, 401K, etc.) you should list those benefits below your salary. "Standard company benefits" can be written if applicable.
- *Students in F-1 status working at the University of Colorado Boulder during the STEM extension period only:*
  - Employer's E-verify Name: The Regents of the University of Colorado
  - Employer Address: should be determined by the individual completing section 3 of the Form I-983
  - Employer ID Number (EIN) = 84-6000-555

- NAICS Number = 611310
- Number of Full-Time Employees at CU Boulder= approximately 7,000+

Section 4: Employer Certification (Completed by Employer)
- Employer Certification: The Employer Official with Signatory Authority, who is an appropriate individual in the employer's organization, who is familiar with the student's goals and performance, and who is an employee who has signatory authority for the employer should review the certification and affirm the statement by signature.
- *Students in F-1 status working at the University of Colorado Boulder during the STEM extension period only:*
  - The chair of the department or the director of the unit where you work is the only individual authorized to sign on behalf of CU Boulder. In Section 6, Employer Official Certification of the Training Plan Form, the student's direct supervisor should sign.

Section 5: Training Plan for OPT STEM Extension Students (Completed by Employer)
- Federal regulations require each STEM OPT student to prepare and execute with his or her prospective employer a formal training plan that identifies learning objectives and a plan for achieving those objectives. The STEM OPT student and his or her employer must work together to finalize the plan.
- Take care to address the questions being asked in Section 5 of the Form I-983.
- *Students in F-1 status working at the University of Colorado Boulder during the STEM extension period only:*
  - Site address needs to be the physical address where you will be working while on the STEM OPT Extension.

Section 6: Employer Official Certification (Completed by Employer)
- The individual who signs this Certification need not be, but can be, the same individual who signed the Employer Certification in Section 4. An employee with signatory authority for the employer should review the certification and affirm the statement by signature. On the material change certification (#4 under section 6), please note that material changes in the plan can include (but are not limited to) the following:
- Any change of Employer Identification Number (EIN) resulting from a corporate restructuring;
- Any reduction in compensation from the amount previously submitted on the Form I-983 "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students," 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, and;
- Any decrease in hours below the 20-hours-per- week minimum required under this rule.

Students in F-1 status working at the University of Colorado Boulder during the STEM extension period only: The student's direct supervisor should sign the Employer Official Certification of the Training Plan form

Evaluation on Student Progress

Student evaluations are a shared responsibility of both the student and the employer to ensure that the student's practical training goals are being satisfactorily met. The student is responsible for conducting a self-evaluation based on his or her own training progress. The employer must review and sign the self-evaluation to attest to its accuracy.

When first applying for the STEM OPT Extension, page 5 should be left blank as the evaluations are only completed once a student is in their STEM OPT authorization period.

These evaluations are required at the following times:
- Evaluation on Student Progress (top of page 5 of Form I-983) required after completion of 12 months of STEM OPT period. Enter start and end dates for first 12 months of STEM OPT training period.
- Final Evaluation on Student Progress (bottom of page 5 of Form I-983) due within 10 days of the conclusion of 24-month STEM OPT period OR if the STEM OPT training ends early, the student must submit the final evaluation within 10 days following the conclusion of the training opportunity.

The Employer Official with Signatory Authority must sign, print name, and enter the date of signature to show concurrence with the evaluation information that the student has entered. Failing to submit a final evaluation would be a violation of the terms of the Form I-983 and may jeopardize the student's nonimmigrant status.

ISSS will reach out to students on STEM OPT to remind them to complete the 12 month and 24 month evaluations. It is the student's responsibility to submit the evaluations in a timely matter. This includes providing a final evaluation within 10 days of completion if the student leaves a job before the 24-month STEM extension ends.

SECTION 4
Submitting Your STEM OPT Application

This section provides instructions for submitting your complete STEM OPT application materials to USCIS.

ISSS has issued me an I-20 recommending STEM OPT. Now what do I do?

- Make any edits that ISSS has recommended to your STEM OPT application materials and review all your materials completely.
- Compile all the USCIS application materials that were listed in the Applying for STEM OPT section of this webpage. Ensure they are complete and accurate.
- Now submit your materials to USCIS

To electronically file the Form I-765 with USCIS online, individuals must first create a USCIS online account at myaccount.uscis.gov. Once you have created an account, you'll be able to complete the filing process. Within your USCIS account, you will be able to:

- Upload your documents;
  - Documents can be uploaded in the following formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF. Photos can be uploaded as a JPG, JPEG, or PNG.
  - File names must contain only English characters (e.g. ABC). Special characters (e.g. @, #, $, &) are not allowed. You will receive an error message if the file format or file name do not meet the standards above.
- Pay the $410 fee;
  - Payment will be made on a secure website using a credit or debit card. This means that you'll be able to confirm receipt of payment at the time of application. ISSS understands that once you submit payment, your whole application will be submitted to USCIS. Please make sure that you are ready to submit your entire

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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?

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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

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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:

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- 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 your 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.

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