24-Month STEM OPT Extension
Introduction to STEM OPT
What is the STEM OPT Extension?

The STEM OPT Extension is an additional 24-months of Optional Practical Training authorized by USCIS for additional training in certain STEM fields.

- STEM Eligible CIP Codes
What is a Qualifying STEM Degree?

- The STEM OPT Extension must be based on a Bachelor's, Master's, or Ph.D.
- The degree must be earned from an accredited SEVP certified school and must be in an eligible STEM field as noted on the STEM Designated Program List.
- Note: The thesis requirement or equivalent can be outstanding at the time of application (although this is not an available option when using a previously obtained STEM degree).
Can I have STEM OPT based on a previously obtained qualifying STEM degree?

Yes.

The previously obtained qualifying STEM degree must meet the following requirements:

• Conferred from a U.S. educational institution that is accredited and SEVP-certified.

• In a degree program category included on the current STEM Designated Degree Program List at the time of the DSO recommendation.

• Conferred within the 10 years preceding the date the DSO recommends the student for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension.
Additional Eligibility Requirements

✓ Maintaining lawful F-1 status in a valid period of post-completion OPT authorization.

✓ Reporting all post-completion OPT employment in a timely manner.
✓ Accruing no more than 90 days of unemployment while on Post-Completion OPT.

✓ Working for an E-Verify Employer.

✓ Having a *paid* job/internship offer directly related to your major STEM Extension field of study for at least 20 hours per week.
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 already registered in E-Verify, has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN), and sufficient resources to provide a training program.

• The employer's E-Verify number is required as part of the STEM OPT application.

You will complete the Form I-983 training plan with your specific employer prior to applying for STEM OPT.
More About the STEM OPT Qualifying Job

- The job must assist the student with their STEM OPT practical training and goals.
- The job must be paid, it cannot be a volunteer position.
  - Salary must be commensurate "with the terms and conditions applicable to the employer's similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment."
- The employer must fulfill all terms and conditions outlined on the Form I-983.
- Cannot be self-employment.
  - Requires a bona-fide employer-employee relationship.
How do I choose my start date?

• The STEM OPT *authorization* start date must be the date immediately after your post-completion OPT end date.
  • Post-completion OPT end date is June 1.
  • STEM OPT authorization start date will be June 2.

• If your STEM OPT *employment* start date is after your STEM OPT *authorization* start date, then you will accrue unemployment days.
  • STEM OPT authorization start date is June 2.
  • STEM OPT employment start date is July 2.
    • You will accrue 30 unemployment days for the days between June 2 and July 2.
Application Timeline

• Your STEM OPT application must be receipted by USCIS:
  • No earlier than 90 days prior to your current post-completion OPT EAD expiration date; and
  • 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.

You MUST submit your application to USCIS while you are inside of the United States.
Applying for STEM OPT
Step 1: I-983

Complete the I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students with your employer.

The Form I-983:

- Clearly articulates the STEM OPT student’s learning objectives
- Affirms 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 STEM OPT Training Plan (Form I-983) Section One

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

**TRAINING PLAN FOR STEM OPT STUDENTS**  
Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Optional Practical Training (OPT)

### SECTION 1: STUDENT INFORMATION (Completed by Student)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Email Address:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of School Recommending STEM OPT:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned:</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix):</td>
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<td>Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information:</td>
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<td>Student SEVIS ID No.:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>STEM OPT Requested Period (mm-dd-yyyy):</td>
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<td>From:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level/Type of Qualifying Degree:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Awarded (mm-dd-yyyy):</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Based on Prior Degree?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Authorization Number:</td>
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</table>

**SECTION 2: STUDENT CERTIFICATION**

I declare and affirm under penalty of perjury that the statements and information made herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief. I understand that the law provides severe penalties for knowingly and willfully falsifying or concealing a material fact, or using any false document in the submission of this form.
Page 5 of the I-983 (Evaluations)

• At the time that you submit your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request to ISSS, page 5 of your I-983 should be left blank.
  • This page will be used for your 12-month and 24-month (or final) evaluations. It will be completed by you and your employer later.

• For additional guidance on filling out the I-983, please see our comprehensive ISSS STEM OPT Extension Guide.
## EVALUATION ON STUDENT PROGRESS

Provide a self-evaluation of your performance, using the measures previously identified, in applying and acquiring new knowledge, skills, and competencies identified in the Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. Discuss accomplishments, successful projects, overall contributions, etc., during this review period. Address whether there are any modifications to the objectives and goals for projects, or new areas for skill and competency development.

<table>
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<th>Range of Evaluation Dates:</th>
<th>From (mm-dd-yyyy):</th>
<th>To (mm-dd-yyyy):</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Student (Sign in ink):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed Name of Student:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Employer Official with Signatory Authority (Sign in ink):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed Name of Employer Official with Signatory Authority:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 2: ISSS Request

2. Complete the [STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form](#) and attach a copy of your:
   - Form I-983 Training Plan (complete and signed);
   - most recent EAD card; and
   - 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.

You must first receive the I-20 recommending STEM OPT from ISSS before submitting your I-765 to USCIS.
What happens while ISSS is reviewing my STEM OPT I-20 Request Form?

• ISSS will review your request. ISSS will contact you if any questions arise or if any edits are required.

• ISSS will recommend the STEM OPT Extension in SEVIS and upload your completed Form I-983 to SEVIS.

• 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. You must first receive the I-20 recommending STEM OPT from ISSS before submitting your I-765 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 happens if I apply to USCIS first without an ISSS OPT STEM Extension recommendation?

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.
The USCIS Form I-765 is used to request employment authorization and an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

The Form I-765 must be submitted online or mailed to USCIS.
Submitting Your STEM OPT Application
Have you moved in the last 12 months?

- If you have moved or changed addresses since filing your Post-completion OPT I-765, update your address with USCIS before initiating a new I-765 form online.
  - Continue through the update form until you see Applicant or Petitioner Information and a place to note the change in address.
Filing electronically

Create or log in to your USCIS online account at myaccount.uscis.gov.

Within your USCIS account, you will be able to:
• Complete the online Form I-765.
• Upload required evidence.
• Pay the I-765 filing fee.

Please note: filing online does not expedite the USCIS processing times.
### What evidence do I need to submit to USCIS for my online STEM OPT application?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence (as listed in online filing system)</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 x 2 photo of you</strong></td>
<td>Passport Photo</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form I-94</strong></td>
<td>Entry I-94 Or Change of Status I-797 Approval</td>
<td>Download your most recent I-94 here: <a href="https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/">https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Authorization Document</strong></td>
<td>Post-completion OPT EAD Card</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form I-20</strong></td>
<td>Newest I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation</td>
<td>This is only referring to the recommending I-20, not to prior I-20s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College degree</strong></td>
<td>Diploma and / or transcripts showing degree conferral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution accreditation</strong></td>
<td>Proof of Accreditation (screenshot from school or accreditor’s website)</td>
<td>Only required if you are filing STEM OPT based on a prior degree (i.e. not the OPT degree).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Submission Note

• USCIS is not open on the weekends or on federal holidays. If your Post-Completion OPT ends on a weekend day or federal holiday, USCIS must receive your application the morning of the weekday before.
How can I check USCIS processing times?

• Go to [https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/)
• Select:
  • I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
  • Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]
  • Potomac Service Center

There you will be able to see the USCIS estimated time range for processing OPT (including STEM OPT) applications.
When can I start working on STEM OPT?

You may continue to work on your expired EAD for post-completion OPT 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.

You can learn more about the 180-extension on the [USCIS website](http://www.uscis.gov).
What do I do while I wait for USCIS to approve my application?

• Pay attention to receipt notices and notifications from USCIS.
  • Make sure your date of birth and name are correct on the receipt notice.
  • Make sure you receive a paper receipt notice.

• 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 on the Form I-765 or are no longer receiving mail there and have not yet received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card), you must update your address as soon as possible with the Form AR-11.

• Be mindful of the 180-day extension.
USCIS Case Inquiries & Status Requests

In addition to the National Customer Service Center phone line, 800-375-5283, USCIS offers several online tools.

- Check your case status online (click here).
- Get automatic updates about your case.
- Submit an online case inquiry or service request.
- Get a tracking number and register for Informed Delivery through USPS to get previews of the mail in transit.
EAD: Employment Authorization Document

STEM OPT work authorization is granted in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Dates of employment authorization:
You CANNOT work outside of these dates.
What is the SEVP Portal?

The SEVP Portal allows students in F-1 status to:

• monitor their employment authorization.
• update their address and telephone.
• monitor their 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. Please review the SEVP Help Hub for additional resources (e.g., user guide, instructional videos).
STEM OPT Reporting Requirements

STEM OPT reporting requirements are different from Post-completion OPT reporting requirements.

- **General Reporting:**
  - Any changes in legal name, address, phone number → SEVP Portal (student reports).
  - Change in employment → Student must notify ISSS within 10 days of a change.
  - Updates must be first reviewed by ISSS. Please contact ISSS if you have questions.

- **Validation Reporting:**
  - An ISSS DSO will reach out to collect a 6-, 12- and 18-month validation report confirming your 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 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.

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.
Employer Reporting Requirements

• 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 the 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 employer changes?

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

• Submit a new Form I-983 to ISSS for the new employer.
  • Use the Document Submission Form (available in MyISSS portal).

• ISSS will 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.
What do I do if my employer changes?

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

• Report the end date of your current employer to ISSS. Send [ISSS](mailto:iss@colorado.edu) an email.

• Your current employer is required to report the termination of your employment to ISSS within 5 business days. They can send [ISSS](mailto:iss@colorado.edu) an email.

• You must complete your Form I-983 **final evaluation (page 5)** for your current employer.
  • Submit via the Document Submission Form (available in [MyISSS portal](https://myiss.colorado.edu)).

• Complete the ISSS [OPT Information Update Form (name, address, citizenship, and employment)](https://myiss.colorado.edu).  
  • Here you will upload a copy of the **new** completed and signed Form I-983 Training Plan for your **new** STEM OPT training opportunity.
Unemployment Days while on STEM OPT

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?

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):

• 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.

• Copies of your pay vouchers/pay stubs, copies of your bank statements that show direct or corresponding deposits from your employer(s), and associated W-2 tax forms.
Can I extend my employment period after STEM OPT?

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

• student is the beneficiary of a H-1B petition; and
• a change of status was requested on the Form I-129; and
• the change of status Form I-129 was received by USCIS before the OPT STEM Extension authorization end date; and
• the H-1B start date is 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 of the record also applies to the duration of status of any dependents in F-2 status.

• To request an I-20 noting this extension, complete the Cap-Gap I-20 Request.
Do I get a grace period after STEM OPT?

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 should plan to exit the United States on or before the end of their 60-day grace period.
- Note: 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.
- Note: 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 program or need a SEVIS transfer while I am on STEM OPT?

• If you choose to enroll in a course of study while participating in STEM OPT, it may impact your work authorization.
  • Consult ISSS if 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 STEM OPT?

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)*
    - *As noted on the EAD, the EAD (alone) is not valid for reentry to U.S.*
  - Evidence that you have a job or a job offer in your major field of study in the United States and **documentation** of your employment history.
  - I-901 SEVIS fee receipt - a copy can be printed from **online**.
Travel while on STEM OPT

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.
Additional STEM OPT Resources

• DHS' STEM OPT Hub
• USCIS OPT Extension for STEM Students
• I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students
• Form I-983 Training Plan Resources
• STEM OPT Reporting Requirements Handout
Applying for STEM OPT can be a complicated process.

If you have questions after reviewing this presentation:

• Email your questions to isss@colorado.edu.
• Speak with an ISSS advisor during in-person or remote ISSS Advising.