

24-MONTH STEM OPT Extension Packet

This handout explains the various extension periods of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for which some students, with degrees in a designated-STEM program, are eligible.

ELIGIBILITY FOR 24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION

- Applicant must be an F-1 student who is currently engaged in post-completion OPT and has a job or job offer from a participating [E-Verify employer](#).
- Applicant has completed a degree in a [STEM-eligible field](#) from a U.S. accredited institution with SEVP certification within the last 10 years and has not already utilized this degree to apply for an OPT STEM Extension,
 - Or, applicant is in a period of post-completion OPT and is currently engaged in a STEM-eligible Master's or PhD program, has completed all degree-required coursework and lacks only the thesis or dissertation to complete the degree.
- Applicant is in an active period of post-completion OPT at the time of requesting the STEM extension.
- Applicant files the [I-765](#), with all required documentation and filing fee, to USCIS to request the STEM extension within the necessary filing timeline.
- Applicant is working in a paid position for a participating E-Verified employer; cannot be self-employed.
- Applicant has filed a completed [I-983](#) with all attestations and supporting documentation to OIE to request the 24-month STEM extension.
- Applicant must have their application received by USCIS within **60 days** of the STEM OPT recommendation in SEVIS, or the application will be denied. If you are unable to adhere to this deadline, then you must contact OIE for a new I-20. This will cause a delay in your filing as reissued STEM I-20s take longer to process.

CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. The STEM OPT start date will begin the day after the initial OPT ends. You do not choose the dates.
2. TWO STEM OPT extensions are allowed per lifetime.
3. A STEM Extension can only be applied for while the applicant is in a valid period of post-completion OPT even if you do not receive your new EAD card before the end of your initial 12-month period of OPT.
4. Failure to comply with reporting requirements will result in the loss of your immigration status and employment authorization. YOU MUST PAY ATTENTION TO AND COMPLY WITH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.
5. Individuals engaged in a period of 24-month STEM extension cannot be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 150 days.

ASSEMBLING AND MAILING THE APPLICATION TO USCIS

You must submit a timely application to USCIS in order to continue working and obtain the STEM OPT extension.

Follow these steps:

STEP 1: Be informed: Read this handout thoroughly and carefully. For more detailed information, consult the [immigration policy guidance on OPT](#).

STEP 2: Obtain the OIE recommendation and new I-20

Complete the STEM Extension Request e-form on iStart and submit all the necessary e-forms in that e-form group (including a copy of your EAD card and a completed and signed I-983, no more than 90 days prior to the end of your initial OPT period. PLEASE TYPE YOUR I-983. You, not your employer or company attorney, must submit this e-form. Carefully follow the instructions on the e-form to avoid processing delays. Upon receiving your complete request, your STEM I-20 will be issued in 5 business days and you will receive an email from OIE.

STEP 3: Form I-983 Training Plan

For full details, you can see the tutorial on Study In The States' website: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>. You may also review OIE's [website](#).

- All questions must be answered clearly and completely. Incomplete forms will not be accepted and may delay the processing of your STEM OPT extension application.
- "SEVIS School Code for School Recommending STEM OPT" – GT's code is: ATL214F00102000
- "Name of School Recommending STEM OPT" – Georgia Institute of Technology
- "Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information"
 - Tina Rousselot de Saint Ceran
 - 631 Cherry St., Savant Suite 211
 - Atlanta, GA 30332-0284
 - 404-894-7475
 - info@oie.gatech.edu
- "STEM OPT Requested Period" – For the start date, list the day after your post-completion OPT end date.
- "Qualifying Major and Classification of Programs (CIP) Code" – List your major and the CIP code listed next to your major in the "Program of Study" box located on the first page of your I-20.
- Page 2, Section 3 "Start Date of Employment" -- Write the first date of your STEM OPT period, not the original start date of your employment
- Leave pages 6 and 7 blank!

STEP 4: Complete the USCIS Application Materials

You will need to gather the following application materials and submit them to USCIS to apply for the STEM OPT extension.

HERE IS WHAT YOU MUST SEND TO USCIS (*in this order*):

- Include a check or money order for the I-765 filing fee made payable to US Department of Homeland Security. Please review USCIS's website for the filing fee amount, <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Check or money order payable to "US Department of Homeland Security." If paying with credit card, you must complete Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transaction and mail with your application.
- Original I-765 form completed by you with your original signature (in black ink) – use the most current version available from the "Immigration Forms" section of the USCIS website since older versions are not acceptable. Note that the address you use must be valid for *at least* 3 months from the time you send the application. The US Postal Service DOES NOT forward EAD cards. For instructions on how to fill out the I-765, please refer to the I-765 website: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>
- Enter the correct eligibility category: **STEM OPT extension (c)(3)(C)**
- Photocopy (NOT original) of STEM I-20 with the OPT recommendation from an OIE Advisor on page 2.** You must obtain your new I-20 from OIE with the STEM OPT recommendation before you can proceed with this application. NOTE: Sign the I-20 before copying it; all I-20 copies must be signed.
- Photocopies of any previous I-20 forms with OPT or CPT authorizations listed.
- Proof of degree: *Official transcript* is recommended. Alternatively, the applicant may choose to provide a copy of the diploma showing the level and program of study.
- [I-94 record](#) or front and back of paper record (if applicable).
- Photocopy of the most recent I.D. page(s) of your passport (these are the page(s) which contain the picture, number, and expiration date).
- Photocopy of the most recent US visa stamp (in a page of your passport).
- Two "passport" photos. In pencil, print your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo.
- Copy of any previously-issued EAD card(s).

STEP 5: Mail the Application Pack to USCIS

- When you have completed the entire application, make a complete set of photocopies for your files, and send the entire application to USCIS to complete the authorization procedure.
- YOU must mail the application to the USCIS PO Box/office that has jurisdiction over the [address you have used on the I-765](#).
- Mail the application so USCIS *receives* it before the application deadlines:
 - Ideally within a few weeks of the OIE recommendation since it must be received by USCIS within 60 days (the date in item 10 on the I-20) AND
 - Before the end of your current OPT period, ideally 90 days prior to the OPT end date.

STEP 6: Wait for the EAD card!

Within one month of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard receipt notice. If you do not get this letter within 6 weeks contact us at info@oie.gatech.edu for more information. The "Receipt Number" in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to check the status of your case on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov or by calling the phone number indicated on the receipt. Keep in mind that this information is updated infrequently.

It takes *approximately 90 days* from the date USCIS receives your application, to receive your EAD card.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

A. Reporting Requirements and Limitations on Unemployment

- **F-1 regulations REQUIRE you to report any change of your name, your address, your employer's name or your employer's address, as well as any interruption or loss of employment, within 10 days to OIE.** Report any of these changes on the OPT Employment Update e-form through iStart and this information will be reported to the Department of Homeland Security, as required in the immigration regulations.
- **Additionally, you must report to OIE every 6 months, within 10 business days, to confirm that the employer information you submitted with this request is still correct.** This report begins 6 months after the end of your 12-month OPT period. After that, they continue every 6 months until your STEM ends, or you change status or depart the U.S.
- As regulations may change, OIE must have your current email address in order to contact you quickly.
- **Period of "unemployment" are limited to 150 days while on OPT.** This dates back to the start of your initial 12-month OPT period.
- **You must report status changes to OIE while you are on OPT.** Examples include:
 - Apply for and are granted a change of status from F-1 (OPT) to H-1B or any other status.
 - If you leave the U.S. and make a new entry in another status.
 - If you leave the U.S. permanently before the end date of your EAD card.
 - If you plan to return to GT as a student or continue studies elsewhere after OPT.

B. Authorization may not be rescinded. Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted, it may not be rescinded or canceled. This means that after OPT is authorized by USCIS, it is impossible to have it canceled and restored at a later date. If you do not use the work authorization, it is forfeited.

C. Change of employer after OPT has been authorized: You must report any change of employer or employer address within 10 days. If you change your employer, you must submit an e-form through iStart as well as a new I-765 and I-983. (You will *not* be required to pay the fee again.)

D. Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. fewer than five tax years are "nonresidents for tax purposes" and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Beginning in the sixth tax year, most students in F-1 status become "residents for tax purposes" and employers should withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year, for both "nonresidents" and "residents."

E. Traveling Outside of the U.S. While on OPT

Reentry provisions of the regulations require students who have graduated and are on authorized OPT to present the following documents to reenter the U.S.:

1. STEM OPT I-20 signed on page 2 by the OIE advisor, within the last six months. Should you require an updated travel signature, submit the Travel Signature Request e-form through iStart.
2. Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
3. A valid passport.
4. A valid F-1 visa stamp.
5. A job offer letter/proof of employment. F-1 regulations allow for travel and reentry in order to "resume employment."

6. Dependent travel: Since dependents do not receive an EAD, an F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student's I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 when traveling.
7. Note: Travel during the "cap gap" period (see below) may not be possible if the EAD card has expired; consult with your employer if you have plans to travel in that circumstance.

Travel at any time while in F-1 status carries some risk. This risk increases for individuals on OPT if the F-1 visa has expired and a new one is required in order to reenter the U.S. or if the F-1 student has been unemployed for more than 150 days. Be sure to consult with an International Student Advisor when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue OPT.

F. Employment Authorization with a pending H-1B petition ("Cap Gap" employment authorization)

- All students on OPT who have a *pending or approved* H-1B petition with a request for change of status will have their F-1 status and OPT authorization automatically extended if the employer has filed a timely H-1B petition with a change of status request with a requested October 1st start date.
- Should your employer require a new Cap-Gap I-20, submit the Cap-Gap e-form through iStart.
- The OPT employment authorization automatically ends if the H-1B petition is denied, rejected or withdrawn (although the student can continue working until the end date indicated on the OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD)). The F-1 would have a 60-day grace period with no work authorization after the end of OPT.