

GENERAL INFORMATION

On March 11, 2016, the Department of Homeland Security published [a final rule](#) allowing certain F-1 students who receive science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees, and who meet other specified requirements, to apply for a 24-month extension of their post-completion OPT. To view the full list of [STEM-Designated Degree Program List](#), please click on the link:

<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf>.

OPT STEM Extension is a benefit of an F-1 STEM degree student. It is NOT a type of visa.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To qualify for the 24-month extension, the student must meet all of the following requirements:

- ❖ F-1 student must currently be working in a period of Approved post-completion 12-month OPT.
- ❖ Have earned a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree from a school that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency and is certified by the [Student and Exchange Visitor Program \(SEVP\)](#) when you submit your STEM OPT extension application.
 - Previously obtained STEM degrees: If you are an F-1 student participating in a 12-month period of post-completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree, you may be eligible to use a prior STEM degree earned from a U.S. institution of higher education to apply for a STEM OPT extension. You must have received both degrees from currently accredited and SEVP-certified institutions, and cannot have already received a STEM OPT extension based on this prior degree. The practical training opportunity also must be directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree. In addition the following conditions must be met
 - The prior degree was conferred no more than 10 years before the DSO recommends a STEM OPT extension in SEVIS based on that degree;
 - The prior degree was conferred by a U.S. educational institution that is accredited and SEVP-certified at the time the student's DSO recommends the student for the 24-month OPT extension;
 - The prior degree is in a degree program category included on the current [STEM Designated Degree Program List](#) at the time of the DSO recommendation;
 - The practical training opportunity that is the basis for the 24-month STEM OPT extension must directly relate to the prior degree;
 - The prior degree was actually conferred (i.e., a student who uses a prior degree cannot take advantage of the "all but thesis or dissertation" exception).

For example: If you are currently participating in OPT based on a master's degree in business administration but you previously received a bachelor's degree in mathematics, you may be able to apply for a STEM OPT extension based on your bachelor's degree as long as it is from an accredited U.S. college or university and the OPT employment opportunity is directly related to your bachelor's degree in mathematics.

- ❖ **STEM degrees you obtain in the future:** If you enroll in a new academic program in the future and earn another qualifying STEM degree at a higher educational level, you may be eligible for one additional 24-month STEM OPT extension.

For example: If you receive a 24-month STEM OPT extension based on your bachelor's degree in engineering and you later earn a master's degree in engineering, you may apply for an additional 24-month STEM OPT extension based on your master's degree.

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

- ✓ The student must be employed with or have a job offer from an employer registered with the [E-Verify](#) employment verification system. (Employment must be directly related to the student's major area of study.
 - ❖ Employer shall provide the student with the company's E-Verify number. For more information on E-verify please visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify.
 - ❖ The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the ISA or through "any other means or process identified by DHS" within 5 days of termination of employment. An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of five consecutive business days without the employer's consent.
 - ❖ The student must work for an employer, who will meet the responsibilities listed below:
 - Report material changes to the STEM OPT student's employment to the DSO within 5 business days.
 - Implement a formal training program to augment the student's academic learning through practical experience.
 - Provide an OPT opportunity that is commensurate with those of similarly situated U.S. workers in duties, hours, and compensation.
 - Complete the Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. In this, the employer attests that:
 - They have enough resources and trained personnel available to appropriately train the student;
 - The student will not replace a full- or part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. worker; and
 - Working for the employer will help the student attain his or her training objectives.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement may visit the student's worksite(s) to verify whether they are meeting the STEM OPT program requirements, including whether they are maintaining the ability and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences for the STEM OPT student.

- ✓ Submit [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#) up to 90 days before the current OPT employment authorization expires, and within 60 days of the OPT STEM recommendation date (This is the date that the ISA entered the STEM OPT Extension recommendation in SEVIS) whichever is earlier.

APPLICATION FILLING WINDOW

Students can apply for the STEM OPT Extension as early as 90 days prior to the expiration of the current OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD), but no later than the expiration of the current OPT EAD. Please note that the STEM OPT Extension application cannot be filed after the expiration of the current OPT EAD.

In addition, STEM OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the STEM OPT Recommendation Date (This is the date that the ISA entered the OPT STEM Extension recommendation in SEVIS). Usually, the date that is printed on the SCHOOL ATTESTATION section (Date Issued) of the STEM OPT I-20 is the date that the ISA recommended the STEM OPT.

Note: Once student mails STEM OPT application to USCIS and USCIS receives it, USCIS will take 90-120 days approximately to process the request.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- ✓ **STEP 1:** Student will email the following documents an attachment to iescrequest@csun.edu (please make sure to email all STEP 1 documents requested to avoid delays):
 - ☐ **STEM OPT Extension Request Form** (form is available at www.csun.edu/international or at IESC)
 - ☐ **COPY of completed Form I-765.** Please review instructions and download the form at www.uscis.gov.
 - This is an online fillable form. Please type or print legibly in black ink
 - Answer all questions fully and accurately. If a question does not apply to you (for example, if you have not used any other names), type or print "N/A" unless otherwise directed. If your answer to a question which requires a numeric response is zero or none (for example, if you do not have a USCIS Online Account Number), type or print "None" unless otherwise directed.
 - Check the box that says "Renewal of my permission to accept employment"
 - Item #12: Have you previously filed form I-765? Check the "yes" box.
 - Item #27: Type in the eligibility code (c)(3)(C)
 - Item #28a. For your "Degree" use what is listed on page 1 of your OPT I-20 (In the middle of the 'Program of Study' section, under 'Major 1')
 - Item #28b. will be your employer's name as it is listed in E-Verify
 - Item #28c. will be your employer's E-verify company identification number
 - Leave item #29 - #31b. blank
 - Applicant's Declaration and Certification Section: Sign your name using a BLACK ink pen. Make sure your signature stays within the signature box without touching any words noted on the form
 - If you need extra space to complete any item within this application, use the space provided in Part 6. Additional Information or attach a separate sheet of paper. Type or print your name and Alien Registration Number (A-Number) (if any) at the top of each sheet; indicate the Page Number, Part Number, and Item Number to which your answer refers; and sign and date each sheet.
 - ☐ **COPY of completed Form I-983** (<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/I-983.pdf>)
 - This form must be completed by the student and their STEM OPT Extension employer
 - In section 1 the Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information should read: Michelle Garcia, PH: (818) 677-3053 EM: iesc@csun.edu
 - Complete ONLY pages 1-4. Page 5 is to be completed and submitted at evaluation times. Evaluation on Student Progress section is due at the 12-month evaluation and Final Evaluation on Student Progress is due at the end of STEM OPT
 - For additional assistance and detailed instructions with Form I-983, see [Form I-983 Instructions](#) and [Form I-983 Tutorial](#) in the [Study in the States](#) website.
 - ☐ **COPY of the most recent I-94** Departure Record Electronic form (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html>)
 - ☐ **COPY of your Passport** Identification Page(s)
 - Passport page(s) must show your name, photograph, date of birth, passport expiration and/or renewal date
 - Passport must be valid at least 6 months into the future.
 - ☐ **COPY of all previously issued OPT/CPT I-20s** *if* you had OPT or CPT in the past.
The student should ask previous schools for copies of I-20 if he/she does not have the originals.
 - ☐ **COPY of front and back of any previously issued EAD(s).**

Please allow Three weeks to review and recommend your STEM OPT Extension in SEVIS. An ISA will email you when the STEM OPT I-20 has been issued and is ready for STEP 2.

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

- ✓ **STEP 2*:** The student will obtain the STEM-OPT I-20 via email.

It is important for the student to review the STEM-OPT checklist and ensure all documents are included in their packet. The student will need to prepare and add the following documents to their application:

- ☐ **Official/Unofficial transcripts OR Copy of Diploma that shows program of study**
- ☐ **Completed Form I-765** - USCIS will consider a photocopied, faxed, or scanned copy of the original, handwritten signature valid for filing purposes. The photocopy, fax, or scan must be of the original document containing the handwritten, ink signature
- ☐ **2 U.S. Passport-Style photographs with small envelope**
 - Photos must meet U.S specifications (not taken in home country). Refer to I-765 instructions on page 20 for photograph requirements.
 - The student must write his/her name and A-Number (if any) on back edge of each photo lightly in felt pen or pencil.
- ☐ **The filing fee for Form I-765 is \$410**
 - Payments by check or money order - \$410.00 payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security" from a bank or other financial institution located in the United States and must be payable in U.S. currency.
 - Payments by credit card - Please see Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transactions, at www.uscis.gov/G-1450 for more information. (Do not submit this form or any payment to the IESC)
- ☐ **Completed Form G-1145** - Please download the form at www.uscis.gov.
 - Complete Form G-1145 and attach it to the first page of your application, when filing Form I-765 at one of the USCIS Lockbox facilities, to receive an email and/or text message notifying you that your application has been received.

** At STEP 2, the student will receive the STEM-OPT I-20 and will be asked to sign their STEM-OPT I-20. The student will be responsible for assembling the STEM-OPT Application Packet and mailing the packet to the appropriate USCIS Lockbox based on the address that is printed on the student's Form I-765. For students living in California, please mail your packet to Arizona USCIS Lockbox Facility. For students living outside of California, please refer to the Form I-765 Application Instructions (www.uscis.gov) for the appropriate lockbox location.*

Important: IESC does not require ANY fees for the services it provides to international students. No fees, under any circumstances, shall be submitted to IESC.

DURATION OF STEM OPT EXTENSION

An F-1 student is eligible for 24 months of STEM OPT Extension. By default, the start date of the STEM OPT Extension will be the day after the POST OPT EAD expires. SEVIS will automatically calculate 24 months and use that date as the official end date for the STEM OPT Extension period. If the STEM OPT Extension application is approved, the student will receive the EAD from USCIS via mail. The start and end dates will be printed on the EAD. These dates are the authorized period for STEM OPT Extension.

Students may continue working for up to 180 days with their expired OPT EAD while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending with USCIS or until the final decision is made on the I-765, whichever comes first. Student must stop working if the application is denied. *Please note that all work done during this 180-day time period is considered STEM OPT extension time that counts towards the 24-month total if your STEM OPT application is approved by USCIS.*

WHILE ON STEM OPT

F-1 Students must maintain all of the following requirements while on STEM OPT:

- ✓ The student must work in a job that is directly related to his/her major field of study.

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

- ✓ Employed/have a job offer from an employer registered in an E-Verify Program; STEM OPT Extension restricts work to E-Verify employer only. (Volunteering and self-employment are not permitted during the STEM OPT extension).
- ✓ Students must work full-time (20+ hours per week) during STEM OPT.
 - Students can work for multiple employers, but must work 20 hours minimum per week for each employer. A Form I-983 and all reporting requirements are required for each employer.
- ✓ **STEM OPT Reporting Requirements**
 - ❖ While on STEM OPT, student must report any changes to the IESC office within 10 days of change. Student must report changes to any of the following:
 - Legal name
 - Residential or mailing address
 - Employer's name & address
 - Periods of unemployment
 - ❖ Student must report to the IESC office every 6 months to confirm the information listed above, even if none of the information has changed. To report personal and STEM OPT employer information, students must visit the IESC website, under the STEM OPT Section, click on the link titled 'Student: Report Your STEM OPT Employment' and complete the online STEM OPT reporting form. Student's information will be updated automatically.
 - ❖ An annual self-evaluation is required to report a student's progress with the practical training. The student must complete the first "Evaluation of Student Progress" portion of the Form I-983 page 5 within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date no later than 10 days after the 12-month mark. Employer must sign the self-evaluation prior to submission to iesc@csun.edu.
 - ❖ The student must complete the "Final Evaluation on Student Progress" portion of the Form I-983 page 5 which is required at the end of the STEM OPT extension no later than 10 days. Employer must sign the final-evaluation prior to submission to iesc@csun.edu.
 - ❖ When student changes employers (new employer must be E-Verify), the student must submit a new I-983 form to the IESC office within 10 days of starting the new practical training opportunity.
 - ❖ Students Employers also have reporting requirements and may be subject to DHS site visits
 - The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the ISA or through "any other means or process identified by DHS" within 5 days of termination of employment.
 - New Form I-983 must be submitted to the IESC if any material changes in this form occur.
 - ❖ Email a copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to iesc@csun.edu. Please include your full name and CSUN ID # in the subject line.

Warning! SEVIS records of students who fail to report their information within the required time will be automatically terminated.

✓ **150 Days Unemployment Rule**

F-1 status is dependent on employment while the student is on STEM OPT. Students may not accrue an aggregate of 150 days of unemployment during their OPT and STEM OPT Extension period. Students who accrue more than 150 days of unemployment will be considered out of F1 status. Students must notify their ISA if they are nearing their 150th day of unemployment to discuss their future plans to remain in correct immigration status. Otherwise, students will need to depart the U.S.

Employer Obligations/Responsibilities

✓ **Employer Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements:**

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

- ❖ Employer must be registered with the [E-Verify](#) employment verification system.
- ❖ Employer shall provide the student with the company's E-Verify number. For more information on E-verify please visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify.
- ❖ Employer and student must complete and sign [Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan](#). This form must be completed by the student and their STEM OPT Extension Employer. For guidance on the I-983 please visit the [Study in the States website](#).
 - Employer is responsible for review and signing of the students annual self-evaluation reporting. There are two evaluations, the first "Evaluation of Student Progress" portion of the Form I-983 page 5 will be due within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date and the final evaluation on the student progress of the form I-983 page 5 will be due at the end of the student's STEM OPT period.
- ❖ The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the ISA or through "any other means or process identified by DHS" within 5 days of termination of employment. An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of five consecutive business days without the employer's consent. Employer must report the termination or departure of the student by emailing iesc@csun.edu.
- ❖ The employer is responsible of the following:
 - Report material changes to the STEM OPT student's employment to the DSO within 5 business days. This can be reported by emailing iesc@csun.edu.
 - Implement a formal training program to augment the student's academic learning through practical experience.
 - Provide an OPT opportunity that is commensurate with those of similarly situated U.S. workers in duties, hours, and compensation.
 - Complete the Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. In this the employer attest that:
 - They have enough resources and trained personnel available to appropriately train the student;
 - The student will not replace a full- or part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. worker; and
 - Working for the employer will help the student attain his or her training objectives.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement may visit the student's worksite(s) to verify whether they are meeting the STEM OPT program requirements, including whether they are maintaining the ability and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences for the STEM OPT student.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ✓ If the student changes his employer while the STEM OPT Extension application is pending, the student will contact USCIS for specific instructions and also notify ISA to request a revised STEM OPT Extension I-20. The new employer must also be e-verified.
- ✓ If the student loses a valid EAD, he/she must re-apply to USCIS with all the required documents as well as the application fee. The student will contact the International Student Advisor for current information.

TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.

- ✓ The student must use the new OPT STEM Extension I-20 for all purposes including travel.
- ✓ Travel risks –Please note that the EAD states "Not valid for re-entry to the United States." F-1 students must have the following documents to re-enter the U.S.:

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

- ❖ With a pending STEM OPT Extension application, the student will need:
 - A Travel signature – each signature is valid for 6 months at a time
 - Valid passport- Must be valid at least 6 months into the future
 - Valid F-1 visa- students with an expired F1 visa must contact the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in their home country to renew their F1 visa prior to their return to the U.S.
 - The I-797 Notice of Action (payment receipt) from USCIS
 - An offer of employment or verification of employment on company letterhead
 - Valid OPT EAD*
 - *IMPORTANT: If your OPT EAD has expired, you may not travel outside the U.S. You will need to wait to receive the new EAD for the OPT STEM Extension.
- ❖ With an approved STEM OPT, the student will need:
 - A travel signature – each signature is valid for 6 months at a time
 - Valid passport- Must be valid at least 6 months into the future
 - Valid F-1 visa- students with an expired F1 visa must contact the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in their home country to renew their F1 visa prior to their return to the U.S.
 - Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD) for OPT STEM Extension
 - An offer of employment or verification of employment on company letterhead

OPTIONS AFTER STEM OPT

At the end of STEM OPT Extension, the student can select ONE of the following options: (must be done within 60 days of the EAD expiration date).

- ✓ Return to home country
- ✓ Apply to CSUN for a higher degree (CSUN issues a new I-20)
- ✓ Transfer out to another school (New school issues a new I-20. Note: If the student transfers the SEVIS record to another program prior to the expiration of OPT, he/she will forfeit the remaining period.)
- ✓ Change Status within the U.S. (The best option here is to consult with an immigration attorney).

Note that you cannot travel back to the U.S. during your grace period using the F-1 status. If you will enroll at a new school for continued study, please email your ISA to arrange a SEVIS record transfer.

H-1B CAP GAP EXTENSION

- ✓ Duration of F-1 status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT STEM Extension who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following federal fiscal year (October through September). This would apply to all students on OPT, not just STEM students.
- ✓ The student must submit proof of a filed or waitlisted petition to his/her ISA and request that the OPT STEM Extension and/or F1 status be extended accordingly.
- ✓ The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

IESC/ISA CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact IESC at (818) 677-3053 or email an International Student Advisor (ISA) for questions or clarifications.

College	ISA	Email
Engineering & Computer Science	Brenda Acosta	brenda.acosta@csun.edu
Business & Economics and Health & Human Development	Cynthia Alvarez	cynthia.alvarez@csun.edu

24-month Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

Arts, Media, & Communication and Education	Michelle Garcia	michelle.garcia@csun.edu
Science & Mathematics and Social & Behavioral Sciences, and Humanities	Nicole Goddard	nicole.goddard@csun.edu

For processing times please visit: <http://www.csun.edu/international/current-students-forms>. Processing times may vary during peak times. For additional information, please contact us at (818) 677-3053.