Optional Practical Training (OPT): 24-Month STEM Extension Tutorial

Congratulations on finishing your first year of OPT!
Tutorial Outline

• STEM Eligibility and Allowable Employment
• Application Process Overview
• OISS STEM I-20 Request Process & Required Documents
• Submitting the 24-Month Extension request to USCIS
• Maintaining your F-1 status, 6-month & Annual Reporting requirements
• Frequently asked questions about employment
• Frequently asked questions about Travel & Re-entry
Are you eligible for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

REQUIREMENTS:
1. You must be a recipient of a U.S. Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctoral degree in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) designated degree program. See this list of STEM Majors. (You can check the CIP code listed on your I-20).
2. You are currently authorized for 12-month OPT and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment.
3. You can apply based on any previous STEM degree from an SEVP accredited U.S. institution within the last 10 years.
4. You must be employed or have a job offer related to your field of study from an employer who is registered in the USCIS E-Verify Program. Must complete Form I-983 with employer and all employers must have an EIN number.
5. Your employer can work with you to fully complete the Form I-983 and abide by all employer obligations, including Department of Homeland Security site visits.
6. You are applying no more than 3 months before your 12-Month OPT expires and no later than the expiration of your 12-Month OPT.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Types of Allowable Employment

1. Must be a **bona fide** employee of the employer completing the Form I-983. The employer signing the I-983 must be the same entity to employ you and provide the practical training experience required by the I-983.

2. Multiple employer arrangements, sole proprietorships, employment through “temp” agencies, employment through consulting firm arrangements that provide labor for hire, and other relationships that do not constitute a bona fide employer-employee relationship are generally not supported.

3. Volunteer/unpaid positions and self employment are **NOT** supported by the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension.
1. **Request OPT STEM I-20 from OISS.**
   The I-20 will be ready in 10 business days after submitting the OPT 24 Month STEM application and all supporting documents to OISS. Your I-20 will be emailed to you when it’s ready. You must submit your application within 60 days of the issuance of the I-20.

2. **Prepare and submit your application materials to the USCIS.**
   A complete application must be received by USCIS before the end date of your current OPT as noted on the EAD card. You must be in the U.S to file the OPT STEM application with USCIS.

   To check current processing times, visit [https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/) . Then choose Form I-765-> Form Category “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student (c)(3)”-> Field Office or Service Center “Potomac Service Center”. However, you may continue to work on OPT for up to 180 days while the STEM application is pending.

4. **Maintain your F-1 status while on OPT STEM Extension.**
   You must report your home address [UCSBGlobal](http://ucsbglobal.ucsb.edu) and employer updates to UCSBGlobal within 10 days of any change. 24 Month STEM Extension students must also submit a validation report every six months and training evaluations every 12 months. Your I-20 travel signature on page 2 is only valid for 6 months while on OPT STEM. Failure to provide timely updates may result in termination of the F-1 record.
Complete the form I-983 and submit with all the requested materials to OISS.

**Application Deadline**

- USCIS must receive your application before the end date of your OPT.
- OISS recommends that you submit your STEM I-20 request at least 2 months before your current OPT EAD expires.
- You may apply as early as 90 days before your OPT EAD end date.

- Your authorization to work will be automatically extended for 180 days while your OPT STEM application is pending.

Questions? Visit [oiss.ucsb.edu](http://oiss.ucsb.edu) or email [oiss@sa.ucsb.edu](mailto:oiss@sa.ucsb.edu)
Complete Form I-983

The formal training plan must clearly articulate the OPT STEM Learning objectives and affirm the employer’s commitment to helping you achieve those objectives.
To fulfill this requirement, you and your employer must complete and sign Form I-983 and then submit pages 1-5 (leave page 5 blank) to OISS.

For more information, including a detailed tutorial and instructions visit the STEM OPT HUB or https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Note about the Form I-765

Please note that the guidance provided within this tutorial is an interpretation of the instructions published within the USCIS Instructions for Form I-765. The information provided in this tutorial is a supplement that we have created to answer any questions that may arise while completing the Form I-765. We urge all students to also review the guidance provided by USCIS: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765.
The Online I-765

- OISS strongly recommends all students use the online filing for the I-765. The following information is provided as a guide to fill out the I-765. The online form through USCIS will walk you through the information you need to provide. This should only be started once you know you are ready to submit your online application through the USCIS website.

- You MUST have an I-20 with the OPT STEM Extension notation on page 2 from OISS BEFORE starting the online application through USCIS.

- If you prefer to mail your application rather than submit it online, please contact your OISS advisor for further assistance.

- Please look for the File Online button about halfway down this page: https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

- You may need to create a USCIS Online Account before being able to submit your application.

- The application will walk you through the process and indicate the documents you need to submit. This tutorial may include more documents than are required. Please only submit what USCIS asks you to submit in your online application.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
The Online I-765

Make sure to select the (c)(3)(C) eligibility category.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Be sure to select the option “Renewal of permission to accept employment” for the question “What is your reason for applying?”

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Important Information About Mailing Address

It is important to note that the mailing address you indicate on this application is where all your important documents will be mailed. This includes your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) and Social Security Card (if you chose to receive one). If you are using your current mailing address, please make sure that you are staying in that home for at least 6 months after submitting your application to USCIS.

If you are using a friend or family member’s mailing address, you will want a trusted individual who will look out for your important mail. They should write your name on a card taped to the inside of the mailbox so the mail carrier sees you can receive mail at their home.

Not sure about your future mailing address? You may want to look at a Post Office (PO) Box. For example, you can reserve a PO Box through USPS: https://www.usps.com/manage/po-boxes.htm

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
This is where you will upload your OPT STEM Extension I-20 issued by an OISS advisor AFTER you have submitted your OPT STEM Extension request on UCSBGlobal.

You must see an OPT STEM Extension recommendation on page 2 of the I-20 in order to apply for the OPT STEM Extension.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
You may upload a copy of your diploma or transcripts in this section, as long as your selection shows your STEM field of study.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Institution Accreditation

If you are applying for the STEM Extension based on a degree you received from UCSB, you may skip this section.

If you are applying based on a degree received at another institution, please contact OISS for further assistance.

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
What Should Your STEM OPT Application to USCIS Include?

- U.S.-style passport photo taken within the past 30 days. Please see https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html
- Copy of updated I-20 with OPT STEM Extension recommendation on page two
- Copy of current EAD card
- Copy of STEM degree certificate/diploma and/or official transcripts
- Copy of I-94
- Copy of passport information page

*Do not send your I-983 to USCIS. You and your employer should each keep it for your records.*
STEM Reporting Requirements

Address changes
• While you are on STEM OPT you are required to keep your living address updated. Please report all address updates to UCSBGlobal.

Employment changes
• If you change employers or employment status while on STEM OPT, you must submit a new I-983 to UCSBGlobal or alert us to unemployment within 10 days.

Material changes to your Formal Training Plan.
Reporting Your Information

**Reportable Information to UCSBGlobal:**
- Living Address
- Phone Number

**Reportable Information to OISS:**
- Material changes to current employment/employer
- Termination of current employment
- New employment/employer
- Change of email address
- Change of visa status

Questions? Visit oiss.ucsb.edu or email oiss@sa.ucsb.edu
Reporting Material Changes to Your Form I-983 Formal Training Plan

Material changes may include (but are not limited to):

- Any change of the employer’s **Employer Identification Number**, (also known as the company’s Federal Tax ID number). This could result from a change in the employer’s ownership or structure.

- Any **reduction in your compensation** that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.

- Any significant **decrease in hours per week** that you engage in a STEM training opportunity.

- Changes to the **employer’s commitments** or your **learning** objectives as documented on the Form I-983.

If there are any of these Material Changes, a revised I-983 needs to be submitted to OISS within **10 business days**.
6 Month Validation

6 Month Validation

• STEM OPT students must submit a validation report to UCSBGlobal every six months starting from the date the 24-month extension begins. This means 4 validations in total over 24-month OPT STEM Extension. See Page 5 of the I-983.

• Your F-1 record may be terminated if you fail to report every 6 months.

You are responsible for meeting this requirement!
When you receive your STEM Extension, immediately mark your calendar to show 6 month deadlines.
Annual Evaluations of Student Progress

- STEM OPT students must submit an annual evaluation of Student Progress in the top portion of the page. Your employer must review and sign the self evaluation. See Page 5 of the I-983 Form.

- Your F-1 record may be terminated if you fail to report each 12 months

**You are responsible for meeting this requirement!**
When you receive your STEM Extension, immediately mark your calendar to show 12 month deadlines.  
**Example:** Your STEM Extension starts on January 10, 2017. Your annual January 10, 2018 and January 10, 2019. Mark these dates.
Frequently Asked Questions: Employment

What is considered full-time employment on the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

• Students must work over 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to the STEM degree, following the goals and objectives stated in the I-983 training plan.

I have two part-time jobs. One of the employers is enrolled in E-Verify but the other is not. Is this allowed?

• No, only full time employment is allowed at your STEM-eligible E-Verify registered employer.

How many days of unemployment am I allowed while on the 24-month STEM Extension?

• Students who receive a 24-month OPT STEM extension are given an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days over their entire post-completion OPT period.

What counts as unemployment?

• Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.

Can I continue to work while my 24-month STEM Extension OPT is pending?

• If a student’s EAD expires while the STEM Extension application is pending, the student is authorized to work until USCIS makes a decision about the application, but not more than 180 days from the date the student’s initial OPT EAD expires.

What documents should I present to my employer once my 12-month OPT expires and my OPT STEM is pending?

• You should present the employer with the expired EAD card, the form I-20 recommending the student for STEM Extension, and proof of the timely filing with USCIS.

Can I switch employers while my OPT STEM application is pending?

• Yes, but you should contact your OISS STEM OPT advisor immediately for next steps.
Frequently Asked Questions: Travel & Re-entry

Can I travel outside the US during my approved OPT period?
Yes. However, if the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the US while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90/150-day limits.

• If a student travels while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the US will not count as unemployment.

Can I travel outside the US while my 24-month STEM Extension OPT is pending?
OISS does not recommend international travel after the expiration date of your 12-month OPT and while your STEM OPT application is pending. All international travel during this time is at your own risk. Re-entry to the United States is at the discretion of Customs and Border Protection officers.

Can I renew my visa while on OPT STEM?
Yes, you are eligible to renew your visa while on OPT STEM. Remember, that you are still applying for an F-1 non-immigrant visa, the issuance of which is at the discretion of your local consulate office or embassy. Be advised that you MUST have an approved STEM EAD to apply for a new visa.

What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S?
If you are eligible for travel, you will need:

• A valid passport with an unexpired F-1 visa stamp (if applicable)
• Form I-20, signed on page 2 by an OISS Advisor within the last 6 months
• Unexpired EAD Card
• Proof of employment (or employment offer)
There’s more information online!

Visit the Department of Homeland Security STEM OPT HUB for more information, help completing forms, and answers to Frequently Asked Questions.