24-Month STEM Optional Practical Training (OPT) Extension

Updated: 2/6/2020
24-Month STEM OPT Extension information
Eligibility requirements
Application process
Application materials
Sending STEM OPT application to USCIS
Reporting Requirements during STEM OPT
Travel
24-Month STEM OPT Extension Information
What is the STEM OPT Extension?

- Extension of Optional Practical Training for students who have completed a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) fields

- Allows students to continue engaging in practical experience that is directly related to their major after they complete their degree requirements

- Valid for 24 months (after initial 12 months of OPT)

- Benefit of F-1 status immediately following a period of post-completion OPT
STEM Extension Overview

- 24 month extension
- Two extensions in lifetime
  - The second extension must be at a higher level than the first
- Extension can be based on previous STEM degree
  - Must follow period of post-completion OPT
- Student and employer must complete Form I-983 Training Plan
- Application can reach USCIS:
  - No earlier than 90 days before OPT EAD end date
  - Additional 60 days of unemployment
Resources

- isso.iastate.edu
- F-1 Students
- Optional Practical Training: Stem Extension

Optional Practical Training: STEM Extension

Application Materials & Other Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Guides:</th>
<th>I-983 Training Plan:</th>
<th>Application Materials:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT Powerpoint</td>
<td>Form I-983</td>
<td>Form G-1185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info on SEVP Portal</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
<td>Form G-1450 (For Credit Card Payment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ISU Employers</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
<td>Form G-1450 (For Credit Card Payment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Requirements</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISU Employer</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT Checklist</td>
<td>Form I-765 Sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overview

What is Optional Practical Training STEM Extension?

Optional Practical Training STEM Extension (STEM OPT) is a 24-month extension directly following post-completion OPT. STEM OPT is an opportunity to expand on previous academic training through a bona fide employer-employee relationship. Students who completed a STEM-related major may qualify for the STEM extension, and employment must be related to the STEM major field of study.

What steps must I take in order to complete the STEM OPT application process?

1. Complete Form I-983 Training Plan with employer
2. Apply for STEM OPT in Cysert
3. Receive e-mail from ISSO to pick up STEM OPT I-20
4. Gather STEM OPT application documents
5. STEM OPT application review by ISSO (optional)
6. Mail STEM OPT application to USCIS
7. Receive receipt notice (Complete new I-9 with employer, if necessary)
8. Wait 90 days (or more) for adjudication
9. Receive I-480 in the mail
10. Complete new I-9 with employer

Eligibility

What are the general eligibility criteria for STEM OPT?
- Students who are in valid F-1 status
STEM OPT Eligibility
Mandatory Degree Requirements

- Degree that is the basis for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension must be:
  - At the Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral level
  - Listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List
    - Based on the major CIP code

- Student is eligible immediately following post-completion OPT and after completing all course requirements
  - Excluding creative component/thesis/dissertation
Previous Degree Requirements

- The STEM OPT Extension may be based on a previously obtained STEM degree that was:
  - Conferred within the past 10 years
  - From a U.S. educational institution that is SEVP-certified
  - Included on the current STEM Designated Degree Program List

- Each degree may only be used once as the basis of a 24-Month STEM OPT extension

- Must be in a period of post-completion OPT when applying

- All requirements must be met at the time of the Designated School Official’s (DSO) STEM OPT recommendation
Employment Requirements

- Employment on STEM OPT must be directly related to the STEM major.
- Employer must be enrolled in E-Verify.
- **Must be paid** employment for a **minimum of 20 hours** per week per employer.
- Employee and employer must complete the Form I-983 Training Plan:
  - Bona fide employer, employee relationship must exist.
  - Employer agrees to report the termination or departure of a STEM OPT student to the DSO within 5 days of the termination or departure.
Compensation and Time Requirements

- Pay must be commensurate with terms and conditions applicable to the employer’s similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment.

- Required to work at least 20 hours per week for each employer.
  - Excluding time off taken consistent with leave-related policies.

- Not allowed to volunteer while on STEM OPT.

- Must disclose any adjustments on an updated Form I-983.
Form I-983, Training Plan

- Form I-983 is used to:
  - Identify goals for the STEM opportunity and specific knowledge, skills, and techniques that will be gained
  - Explain how goals will be achieved
  - Obtain a performance evaluation
  - Describe methods of oversight and supervision
  - Explain how the training is directly related to the student’s qualifying STEM degree

- Completed Form I-983 must be submitted before the DSO may recommend an OPT Extension
  - ICE and/or USCIS may request a copy. Must be kept updated.

- New Form I-983 required when starting with a new employer or when changes are made
  - Student must submit a new Form I-983 within 10 days of change
Application Process
To be eligible for STEM OPT, the application:
- **Must be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days** before the end date of the post-completion OPT EAD
- **Must be received and receipted by USCIS on or before the end date** of the post-completion OPT EAD

USCIS may take over 90 days to process the application

If application is timely and properly filed, student may continue work for up to 180 days beyond the post-completion OPT end date while the application is pending
- USCIS will issue a Receipt Notice which you may use to complete Form I-9 with your employer to authorize this 180 day period of employment

Work performed after post-completion OPT EAD end date must be directly related to STEM degree used as the basis for the 24-month STEM OPT extension
To apply for STEM OPT, first request new I-20 by logging into CyStart through the ISSO website.
Submitting STEM OPT Request to ISSO Through CyStart
Collecting STEM OPT I-20

You will receive an email when your STEM OPT recommendation I-20 is ready to be collected from ISSO. The email will include information on:

- Document collection or document mailing
- Application timeline guidelines
- Review options and times
- Form I-765 feedback
- A list of required STEM OPT application materials
- Mailing your application to USCIS
Required 24-Month STEM OPT Application Documents
Required Application Materials

- Payment of $410
  - Check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or
- Two U.S. passport photos taken within last 30 days (gently write SEVIS # on back)
- Form I-765, typed and signed in black ink
- Form G-1145, typed
- Most recent I-94 (Locate at cbp.gov/i94)
- Copy of passport identity page (and page with expiration date, if different)
- Copy of passport page with most recent F-1 visa
- Copy of previous OPT recommendation I-20s
- Copy of previous EADs (front and back) from USCIS
- Copy of official ISU transcript, which lists major and degree earned
- Copy of diploma (optional)
- Letter from employer verifying current employment and duties related to major & degree earned
Payment

- Payment of $410
  - Check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or
    - Write I-765 and your SEVIS number in the Memo section
    - If the address on your check is not current, cross off and write in correct address
Photos

- 2 color photos
  - Write SEVIS number lightly in black pen on the back of both pictures
- Taken within past **30 days**
- White or off-white background with no shadows
- U.S. quality passport photos
Form I-765: Sample and Template

Optional Practical Training: STEM Extension

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Info on SEVP Portal</td>
<td>Form I-983 Instructions: Non-ISU Employers</td>
<td>Form G-1450 (For Credit Card Payment)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Form I-983 Instructions: ISU Employer</td>
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What steps must I take in order to complete the STEM OPT application process?

1. Complete Form I-983 Training Plan with employer
2. Apply for STEM OPT in Cystert
3. Receive e-mail from ISSO to pick up STEM OPT I-20
4. Gather STEM OPT application documents
5. STEM OPT application review by ISSO (optional)
6. Mail STEM OPT application to USCIS
7. Receive receipt notice (complete new I-9 with employer, if necessary)
8. Wait 90 days (or more) for adjudication
9. Receive EAD card in the mail
10. Complete new I-9 with employer
Form G-1145

e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

What is the Purpose of This Form?

Use this form to request an electronic notification (e-Notification) when U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services accepts your immigration application. This service is available for applications filed in a USCIS Lockbox facility.

General Information

Complete the information below and clip this form to the first page of your application package. You will receive one e-mail and/or text message for each form you are filing.

We will send the e-Notifications within 24 hours after we accept your application. Domestic recipients will receive an e-mail and/or text message; overseas recipients will only receive an e-mail. Underwriter e-Notifications cannot be sent.

The e-mail or text message will display your receipt number and tell you how to get your application information. It will not include any personal information. The e-Notification does not grant any type of status or benefit, rather, it is provided as a convenience to recipients.

USCIS will also send you a receipt notice (I-797C), which you will receive within 10 days after your application has been accepted. Use this notice to proof of your pending application in person.

USCIS Privacy Act Statement

AUTHORITIES: The information requested on this form, and the associated evidence, is collected under the Immigration and Nationality Act, sections 101, et seq.

PURPOSE: The primary purpose of the information on this form is to determine if you have established eligibility for the immigration benefits for which you are filing. The information you provide will be used to grant or deny the benefit sought.

RECORD: The information you provide is voluntary. However, failure to provide the requested information, and any requested evidence, may delay a final decision as to your form.

ROUTINE USES: The information you provide on this form may be shared with other Federal, State, local, and foreign government agencies and authorized organizations. Following approved rules, are described in the an accuracy published of routine uses section. [28 USC 3007; Privacy Act; and DHS 1C101; Alien File Index, and National File Tracking System of Records, which can be found at www.8of.usv.gov]. The information may also be made available, as appropriate, for law enforcement purposes or in the interest of national security.

Paperwork Reduction Act

An agency may not conduct or sponsor an information collection and persons are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to be 10 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions and completing and submitting the form. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this information collection, including suggestions for improving the clarity of the instructions and reducing the burden to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Department of Homeland Security, Regulatory Coordination Division, Office of Policy and Strategy, 25 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20529-2145. OMB No. 1615-0108. Do not send your completed Form G-1145 to this address.

Complete this form and clip it to the first page of your immigration application.

Applicant Petitioner Full Name
Applicant Petitioner Full Date

E-mail Address
Mobile Phone Number (Text Message)

Form G-1145 02/2013 Page 1 of 1
New I-20 with STEM OPT Recommendation

- Recommendation indicated on page 2 of new I-20
  - Requested begin and end date
I-94 Record

- Paper or Electronic copy
- Retrieve from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home
Passport and Visa Copies

- Biographic information
  - Photo, date of birth, country of birth

- Passport expiration date
  - Sometimes on a different page

- Most recent Visa page
Previous OPT I-20s and EADs

- Copy of previous I-20s showing OPT information
- Copy of all previous EADs
  - Front and back
Degree and Employment Information

- Copy of official transcript
- Copy of diploma (optional)
  - Indicating education level and field of study
- Letter of employment
  - Offer letter (if starting in the future) or letter confirming your employment with the company (if currently employed)
  - On company letterhead
Sending STEM OPT Application to USCIS
Application Review

• STEM OPT Application Reviewed by ISSO Adviser

• In person during OPT review times
  • Bring in completed application

• Online through CyStart
  • Upload completed application to OPT Application Online Review form
Mailing Final Application

1. Scan application, submit scanned copy to ISSO, and keep copy for yourself
   • This is important in case USCIS requests additional information or makes a mistake on your application.
   • Submit the scanned copy of your final application in 1 PDF file here:
     • Cystart > F-1 Student Services > Immigration Document Upload

2. Mail application to USCIS
   • Review Form I-765 direct filing addresses based on your address
Electronic Receipt Notice

- You will receive an electronic receipt notice from USCIS by email and text if you complete the G-1145 form.
  - This commonly takes to 2-3 weeks
  - You can check the status of your case with information in the e-mail
  - Sample e-mail message:

    Your case has been accepted and routed to the USCIS Potomac Service Center for processing. Within 7-10 days by standard mail you will receive your official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) with your Receipt Number YSCxxxxxxxxxx. With the official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) you may visit www.uscis.gov where you can check the status of your case using My Case Status. We suggest you wait until you have received your Form I-797 before checking My Case Status.

    This confirmation provides notification of the date USCIS received your case. This notice does NOT grant any immigration status or benefit. You MAY NOT present this notice as evidence that you have been granted any immigration status or benefit. Further, this notice does NOT constitute evidence that your case remains pending with USCIS. The current status of your case must be verified with USCIS.

    PLEASE DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE
Paper Receipt Notice

- You will receive a paper receipt notice from USCIS
  - USCIS sends a paper I-797 Receipt Notice to the mailing address listed on the I-765
    - May take 2 – 4 weeks
  - 90-120 day processing starts from I-797 received date
  - Provide ISSO a copy of I-797 Receipt Notice once received (Cystart > F-1 Student Services > Immigration Document Upload)
Case Status

- Use [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (click “Check Case Status”)
  - Might stay on “Case Was Received” for 2-4 months
Pending STEM OPT Application

- While your STEM OPT application is pending with USCIS:
  - You remain in legal F-1 status
  - You may continue working for 180 days past the end date on the Post-Completion OPT EAD card, as long as STEM OPT application was timely and properly filed
    - USCIS will issue a Receipt Notice which you may use to complete Form I-9 with your employer to authorize this 180 day period of employment
Receiving your EAD

- Your EAD card will be mailed to address listed on Form I-765
  - If you move while your OPT application is processing, you will need to submit a change of address request with USCIS
- If more than 10 days have passed since the USCIS Case Status indicates your EAD has been delivered, you may send an email to isso@iastate.edu or call 515-294-1120
Application Process Overview

1. Verify that you are eligible for the STEM OPT Extension
2. Complete Form I-983 Training Plan with employer
3. Complete the STEM OPT Extension e-form in Cystart
4. Compile all required application materials
5. Collect STEM OPT recommendation I-20 from ISSO
6. Bring or send application materials to ISSO for review (optional)
7. Mail final application to USCIS
8. Receive a receipt notice within 2-3 weeks after submission from USCIS
9. If STEM OPT is approved, USCIS will mail your new EAD to the address listed on your Form I-765
Reporting Requirements During STEM OPT
Reporting Requirements

- Must **update ISSO within CyStart within 10 days** of a change to:
  - Living address
  - Employer
  - Employer address
  - Employer name
  - Loss of employment

- If you change employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify and you must submit the following to ISSO:
  - A new Form I-983 for your new employer within 10 days of starting
  - A final evaluation (page 5 of the Form I-983) of your experience with the previous employer

- Required to complete a **validation report for ISSO every 6 months** while on STEM OPT Extension
  - Due within 10 business days of each reporting date
  - Complete OPT Reporting e-form through CyStart
Changes to the Form I-983

- Student and employer are required to submit a modified Form I-983 to ISSO, if any changes are made

- Material changes and deviations include:
  - Any change of Employer Identification Number
  - Any reduction in compensation that is not tied to reduction in hours worked
  - Any significant decrease in hours worked per week
  - Any decrease in hours worked below the minimum 20 hour weekly requirement
  - Any change that makes the I-983 inaccurate

⚠️ Department of Homeland Security may conduct a site visit to any employer.
Form I-983 - Evaluation Requirements

- Student must submit a self-evaluation of their progress toward the training goals outlined in Form I-983, signed by student and employer:

  - Require an initial evaluation within **12 months** and final evaluation by **24 months**
    - Students will also need to submit a final evaluation when changing positions/employers
    - Due within 10 days following the conclusion of the reporting period

- Changes to the Form I-983, Training Plan must be reported to the ISSO
  - Student must submit a modified Form I-983 through CyStart via the “OPT Reporting” e-form
Periods of Unemployment

- Allowed up to 150 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT (90) and STEM OPT (60) combined
  - Count unemployment days between start date on post-completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and end date of STEM OPT
  - Count all days, including weekends and holidays, during unemployment
  - Count any week employed fewer than 20 hours as a week of unemployment
  - Count days outside the U.S., if unemployed

- Student does not receive additional 60 days of STEM OPT unemployment until STEM OPT application is approved

- Considered a violation of F-1 status to go over 150 days of unemployment
  - Student is required to keep track of unemployment periods

- Students and employers must report the end of employment to ISSO within 5 business days
Travel
Travel During STEM OPT Extension

- Students are able to travel while on an approved 24-month STEM OPT Extension

- Students are able to travel while on the 24-month STEM OPT Extension and should have the following documents when they re-enter the United States:
  - STEM OPT I-20 with a travel signature within 6 months of reentry
  - Passport with at least 6 months of validity
  - Valid F-1 visa
  - STEM OPT EAD card
  - Letter of employment
Questions?

Please email ISSO at isso@iastate.edu or make an appointment with an International Student Advisor.
Contact Information

International Students and Scholars Office
3241 Memorial Union
2229 Lincoln Way, Ames IA 50014
Phone: 515-294-1120
Fax: 515-294-8263
Email: isso@iastate.edu
Website: www.isso.iastate.edu