

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

24-Month STEM OPT Extension

Definition of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

An F-1 student may apply to USCIS for authorization for a 24-month STEM Extension on their current OPT approval. STEM is Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics. The U.S. government has distinguished students graduating in these specific majors the ability to apply for a 24-month extension to their current 12-month OPT to total 3 years of OPT approval. [[8 CFR 214.16](#)]

Eligibility requirements for a 24-month STEM Extension for F-1 students:

- Students who have been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT;
- Students who have earned a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate degree in a field included in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. In order to verify that your degree is included, look at the six-digit code listed next to "Major 1" on Page 1 of your I-20 form, then look for that code in the CIP code column of USCIS's [STEM Designated Degree Programs](#) list;
- Students who are employed in a job directly related to his/her field of study;
- Students who are working for an employer who is enrolled in the E-Verify program. E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly-hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify.
- Students can qualify for the STEM Extension of OPT only twice during their academic careers in the U.S.

*** Please Note: All of the above criteria must be met in order for a student to be eligible for the 24-month OPT extension.**

Deadlines for Submitting 24-Month OPT Extension Application to USCIS:

Students must apply for the 24-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of the first 12 months of "regular" OPT. The application must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration date of the first OPT period in order to be properly (timely) filed. USCIS will not accept I-765 applications for STEM extensions any earlier than 90 days before the current EAD expiration date. Please allow 5 business days after your assigned [International Services Specialist](#) has received all documentation for processing of the I-20 for STEM extension.

International Student and Scholar Services

international.ucdenver.edu/ISSS

Email: iss@ucdenver.edu

Phone: 303.315.2230 | Fax: 303.315.2246

Physical Street Address

University of Colorado Denver
1380 Lawrence Street, Suite 932
Denver, Colorado 80204 U.S.A.

USPS Mailing Address

P.O.Box 173364
Denver, Colorado 80217-3364 U.S.A.

Campus Mail Address

Campus Box A005/185



University of Colorado
Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus

Types of Employment Allowed During a STEM OPT extension

A student authorized for a 24-month extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to his or her DHS-approved STEM CIP.

For students who are on a STEM extension, this employment may include:

- **Work for one or more employer.** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to each individual student's degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify. Each employer must also complete the form I-983.
- **Work for hire.** This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. The company for whom the student is providing services must be registered with E-Verify. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner.** Not allowed on 24-month STEM OPT extension.

Restrictions on Unemployment:

For students on 12-Month OPT, F-1 status is now dependent upon employment. Students cannot be unemployed for more than an aggregate of 90 days while on the initial 12-month OPT period. While on the STEM Extension of OPT, students are granted an additional 60 days of unemployment equaling no more than 150 days in total.

Prepare and email the following items to your International Services Specialist:

Completed I- 983 form by both employer and student
Completed and signed Form I- 765 (with copies of all past EAD cards, if applicable) with correct address
Copy of Offer Letter from Current E-Verify Employer

Once these items are received, ISSS will create a new I-20 endorsed for OPT. **The student is then responsible for making sure that the final OPT packet that is sent to USCIS includes the following:**

USCIS OPT Application Checklist:

Check for \$410.00 made out to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Two passport photos (write full name and I-94 number in pencil on the back for identification purposes)
Completed and signed Form I-765 (with copies of all past EAD cards, if applicable) with current address
Copy of endorsed I-20 with OPT recommendation, DSO's signature and student's signature.
Copy of valid passport, visa and I-94 card
Copy of transcript showing STEM degree completion

Students should file the OPT application within *60 days* of the date ISSS enters the recommendation for OPT on the I-20. Failure to send the application in a timely manner will result in a denial of the STEM OPT extension. * Student should make copies of the entire application for their records and only send a copy of the signed I-20. ****If the address included in section #3 on the I-765 is located in Colorado, send the petition to the address below. If the address is outside of Colorado, contact your International Services Specialist to find out where to send your petition.**

Courier completed petition to:

USCIS

Attn: AOS

1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S

Suite 100

Phoenix, AZ 85034

Please Note: Students should courier the application by Express Mail so that they can track it in case they don't get a Notice of Action (I-797) within 45 days of posting it.