

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

24-Month STEM OPT Extension

(Updated 01/11/2023)

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 214.2\(f\)\(10\)\(ii\)\(C\)](#)].

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 OPT extensions any earlier than 90 days before the current EAD expiration date. Please allow 10 business days after your assigned International Services Specialist has received all documentation for processing of the I-20 with STEM OPT extension recommendation.

International Student and Scholar Services

international.ucdenver.edu/ISSS

Email: iss@ucdenver.edu

Phone: 303.315.2230 | Fax: 303.315.2246

Physical Street Address

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Denver, Colorado 80204 U.S.A.

USPS Mailing Address

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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 STEM OPT extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to their DHS-approved STEM CIP.

For students who are on a STEM OPT 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 standard OPT students cannot be unemployed for more than an aggregate of 90 days while on the initial 12-month OPT period. While on the 24 month STEM OPT extension, students are granted an additional 60 days of unemployment equaling no more than 150 days in total during the entire period of OPT.

HOW TO APPLY FOR 24-Month STEM Extension:

Step 1: Complete Online STEM OPT Eligibility Course (Final Quiz must be 100%)

- To Complete this course at your own pace, you can sign up here: [STEM OPT Eligibility Course](#)
- To receive Credit your final quiz must be 100%
- After February 1, 2023, this course will be required, we will accept requests prior to this date without completion of the course

Step 2: Make a request in MyISSS: <http://issc.cu.edu/>

Step 3: Receive I-20 within 10 Business Days of COMPLETE Request

Step 4: Apply to USCIS

The student is then responsible for making sure the final STEM OPT application is submitted to USCIS and includes the following documents noted on the following pages.

ISSS staff do not have the legal authority to review or give advice regarding these applications. ISSS will continue to provide general instructions on completing the Form I-765 and preparing documents for your STEM OPT application, however we do not review your application in any detail. You are welcome to seek advice from an immigration attorney.

Application Options

Students have the option of applying online [through myUSCIS](#) or completing the paper I-765 and mailing their documents to USCIS.

To prevent delays related to mailing documents, we encourage student to apply online. The sections below go through essential information about both methods.

Applying Online through myUSCIS

Step One: After you receive your STEM OPT I-20, create a myUSCIS account at https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up.

Step Two: Once you are logged into your myUSCIS account, click on “File a form online.”

Step Three: Select “I-765, Application for Employment Authorization” from the list of forms and then click “Start form.”

Step Four: Review the application instructions and then click “Next”.

Step Five: Review the additional instructions and then click “Start.”

Step Six: Select “c(3)(C) STEM Extension” and then click “Next”.

Step Seven: Complete the Getting Started and About You sections.

Step Eight: In the Evidence section, provide a 2x2 passport-style photo of yourself. Please use the Department of State's [photo composition tool](#) to ensure that your photo meets the requirements.

Step Nine: Upload a copy of [your most recent I-94](#). Make sure to provide the page with your name, class of admission, and last date of entry.

Step Ten: If you have your previous OPT EAD card, please upload it on the “Employment Authorization Document or Government ID” page. If you do not have your previous EAD, please upload a copy of the biographical page of your passport.

Step Eleven: Upload copies of your CPT and OPT I-20s on the “Previously Authorized CPT or OPT” page.

Step Twelve: Upload your most recent I-20 with the STEM OPT Recommendation on the “Form I-20” page.

Step Thirteen: If you need to provide additional information about any question or your application in general, you can provide it in the “Additional Information” section. Click the “Add a response” button to create a box to enter the additional information.

Step Fourteen: After you have completed all of the sections of the application and uploaded all of the required documents, review your application. In the “Review and Submit” section, it will indicate any **required questions** that you have missed. However, it will **not** highlight missing evidence.

Step Fifteen: Review the application summary to catch any final mistakes or missing information. Click the “View draft snapshot” to download a copy of your application. Then, click “Next.”

Step Sixteen: Agree to the Applicant’s statement. Then click “Next.”

Step Seventeen: Read the Applicant’s Declaration and Certification. Agree to the conditions by checking the box. Type your name in the box provided to sign the application. Then click “Next.”

Step Eighteen: You are now ready to pay the application fee. **Once you pay the application fee, you cannot edit anything on your OPT application.** If you are ready to pay, read the instructions and then click “Pay and submit.”

Step Nineteen: You will be taken to Pay.Gov to pay. You have two payment options: debit/credit card or bank account withdrawal (ACH). For the bank account withdrawal, please have the account number and routing number for your U.S. bank account. **To prevent issues with your application, please make sure to pay for your application fee at least 24 hours before any STEM OPT deadlines.**

Step Twenty: After your payment is accepted, you should receive your I-797 receipt notice. Please download a copy of that notice to use if you need assistance with your STEM OPT application and proof that your OPT has been extended while the application is pending.

Additional Considerations:

- You must submit your online STEM OPT applications within 30 days of starting the application, or it will be deleted from the application system.
- The online form name fields allow for a maximum of 40 characters each. If any part of your name is longer than 40 characters, enter what you can in the About You section and write your full name in the Additional Information section.

USCIS STEM OPT Paper Application Checklist:

Completed form G-1145 (optional, if student would like text and/or email notifications of case status updates)
Check/money order for \$410.00 made out to U.S. Department of Homeland Security; or form G-1450 (for credit cards) * Always refer to USCIS's I-765 website for current Filing Fee information and to use the USCIS Fee Calculator
Two passport photos (write full name and I-94 number in pencil on the back for identification purposes)
Completed and signed current edition of Form I-765 (with copies of all past EAD cards, if applicable) * Always refer to USCIS's I-765 website for current Form Edition Date
Copy of endorsed I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation, Designated School Official's (DSO) signature and student's signature.
Copy of valid passport and I-94
Copy of transcript showing STEM degree completion

Students should file the STEM OPT application within *60 days* of the date ISSS enters the recommendation for STEM OPT on the I-20. Failure to send application in a timely manner to USCIS will prevent students from receiving the STEM OPT EAD card. Student should make copy of the entire application for their records and keep the original signed I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation.

Courier completed petition to address listed on the USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>.

Please Note: Students should courier the application by FedEx, UPS, or DHS (**request a return receipt and tracking information**) so application can be tracked in case a Notice of Action (I-797) is not received within 45 days of posting it. See USCIS's website for further detail on [Direct Filing Addresses for Form I-765](#), including if sending application via USPS.

As of October 2, 2020 USCIS *may* start requiring "signature confirmation restricted delivery" for EAD cards that will require identification to be presented upon delivery.

SEVP POLICY GUIDANCE

Practical Training – Determining a Direct Relationship Between Employment and a Student’s Major Area of Study

On September 27, 2019, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued new policy guidance regarding Optional Practical Training (OPT). The guidance impacts both F-1 students who apply for and utilize OPT as well as Designated School Officials (DSOs) who authorize OPT and manage their institution’s F program.

- F-1 students applying for both 12-month OPT and a 24-month STEM OPT extension will need to provide a detailed explanation of how their OPT employment is directly related to their major area of study.
- DSOs are required to 1) review the explanation provided by students to ensure that there is a direct relationship between the OPT participant’s job and major area of study; 2) obtain additional documentation from the OPT participant if necessary to determine a direct relationship, and 3) retain both the explanation and any additional documentation.

ICE recognizes that you may not yet have a job offer at the time you apply for OPT. You have two options to report your employment information to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) once you do find a job.

SEVP PORTAL

You may use the SEVP Portal to report details about your employment after OPT is granted by USCIS. For information about how to create your SEVP Portal account, please visit the following Study in the States website: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/create-an-sevp-portal-account>.

The SEVP Portal includes fields where you can enter the employer name, start date, whether the position is full-time or part-time, and the employer address. All OPT participants must also provide a description of how their practical training opportunity related to their major area of study using the field entitled, “Relation to Field of Study: Explain how this job relates to the degree that qualified you for this OPT.” **Once on STEM OPT, F-1 students will no longer be able to report their employment through SEVP Portal. Please report employment updates directly through the ISSS Form described below. You may continue to update your address and biographical information in SEVP Portal.**

ISSS FORM

STEM OPT participants **must report** details about their employment directly to ISSS. Once USCIS grants your OPT, ISSS will send you a message instructing you to complete a form that includes fields to enter the employer name, start date, whether the position is full-time or part-time, the employer address, and a description of how your practical training opportunity relates to your major area of study.

EXPLAINING AND DOCUMENTING HOW YOUR JOB RELATES TO YOUR FIELD OF STUDY

Your goal is to show a logical explanation between the duties involved in the practical training opportunity and your major area of study.

Here are some sample explanations:

Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering: I work full-time as an Electrical Engineer at ABC Corp., a government’s contractor. In my job, I analyze client requirements for electrical systems and provide them with cost estimates of such systems. My work requires understanding of electrical circuit theory, which I studied in-depth at the University of XYZ.

SEVP POLICY GUIDANCE continued

Bachelor's degree in Business: I work full-time as a Loan Officer at a mortgage company, Happy Homes, where I meet with clients and evaluate, authorize, and recommend approval of loan applications. I use the knowledge that I gained in my credit analysis, sales and marketing classes, which were part of my degree program, on a daily basis.

Master's degree in Kinesiology: I work 25 hours per week in a health food store as a consultant for Self-Made, Inc., designing and teaching exercise classes that are incorporated into a customer's overall nutrition and exercise plan. My designs and customer instruction draw upon my studies and classwork in exercise therapy and physical reconditioning.

Below are examples of additional documentation that ISSS may request and that you should consider keeping in your personal records. You may be asked to provide evidence of the direct relationship between your studies and your OPT employment several years from now.

- 1) Detailed Job Description;
- 2) Degree Plan showing the required coursework to complete your degree;
- 3) Transcripts showing the courses you completed and the grades you received;
- 4) Course descriptions, and syllabi from your classes that provide details regarding learning objectives; and
- 5) Research papers, portfolios of work, or other evidence of projects completed.

WHAT IF I DON'T PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE EXPLANATION OR DOCUMENTATION?

- ISSS may not be able to issue you an I-20 authorizing OPT. Without this authorization, you won't be able to submit an application for OPT.
- The Student and Exchange Visitor Program may terminate your OPT and your F-1 status. Currently, SEVP is relying on Designated School Officials (DSOs) to determine if the explanation and documentation provided by students is adequate, but they can review this information at any time.
- You may be denied future immigration benefits, such as H1B or employment-based permanent residency, if it is later determined that your OPT should not have been authorized.

You should also be aware that the government may utilize a "crosswalk" website such as those maintained by the College Board, the Department of Labor, and the National Center for Education Statistics to confirm that your degree is a match for the job you are in. You'll find the College Board crosswalk website here - <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/majors-careers>.

The potential issue with this is if the position that your major links to isn't a "specialty occupation" under the H1B regulations, your employer's request for H-1B status for you could be denied in the future. So, both you and your employer want to be aware of this potential issue and take some care with both the job title and the job description of your OPT position.