

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING 24-month OPT STEM Extension – (c)(3)(C) FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

## **ELIGIBILITY:**

The 24-month OPT extension is available only to F-1 students currently authorized for and actively participating in an initial period of 12-month OPT who meet the following specific criteria:

- 1) Student must be participating in post-completion OPT and have a STEM eligible degree from an accredited, SEVIS-certified U.S. educational institution.
  - a. Prior STEM Eligible degrees may be considered if earned within last 10 years at a SEVIS certified U.S. institution and if employment while on STEM OPT will be related to this prior degree.
  - b. To check your STEM eligibility, find the CIP code listed on your I-20 and check the STEM Designated Degree Program List to see if your CIP code is listed there. If your CIP Code does not exactly match a code on this list, you are not eligible for an OPT extension. This STEM Designated Degree Program List is issued by the Department of Homeland Security; there is no flexibility to grant an OPT extension for a major that does not meet the CIP Code guidelines:  
<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension>
- 2) For graduate students – If you have not yet earned your degree, you must be done with coursework and in the phase of completing your thesis or dissertation to be eligible. Your degree must be earned before the end of your STEM OPT authorization.
- 3) Employer must be enrolled in E-Verify and have an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- 4) Student cannot be self-employed, and volunteer work also does not qualify (job must be paid). Student must be employed for at least 20 hours per week in a job directly related to STEM eligible degree.
- 5) Students are individually responsible for meeting and maintaining the requirements of STEM OPT. This application serves as a guide, but students are additionally responsible for knowing requirements as listed in **official** USCIS and DHS sources: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>

## **APPLICATION:**

You must plan in advance to complete the process. You are eligible to apply for a STEM extension 90 days before your OPT expires, and your application must arrive at USCIS *and* be received by USCIS before the end date on your EAD card. Please see Page 4 for the Application Checklist. Once all the required materials are submitted to ISSAS, an international student advisor will issue the I-20 requesting the extension. This must be signed by the international student advisor and you, and it must be included with the application upon submission to USCIS. This request must be made in advance of your OPT expiration date as listed on your EAD card. After receiving the I-20 from ISSAS, the application must be submitted by you to a USCIS Service Center (within 60 days of date OPT was requested for you by ISSAS in SEVIS) and may take 3-5 months to process, depending on which USCIS Service Center has been assigned to handle your case. You may continue to work for up to 180 days after the expiration of your OPT while your STEM extension is pending. USCIS should issue your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to you directly. The EAD is your photo identification that lists the dates in which you are authorized to work.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO READ:**

### **When Should I Apply for the OPT Extension?**

You must plan in advance to complete the process. The earliest you are eligible to apply for a STEM extension is 90 days before your 12-month OPT period expires, and your application must arrive at USCIS *and* be received by USCIS before the end date on your EAD card. The 24 months are automatic; ISSAS has no way to shorten or lengthen the amount, nor can you “save” any time to use for later or for future OPT.

### **Reporting Information**

While on OPT/STEM OPT you are still legally required to report certain information to the International Student & Study Abroad Services office. Changes to any of the following must be reported to the ISSAS office **within 10 days** of the event.

- Report changes in name, residential/mailling address, email address, and US phone number
- Report changes in employment information, including changes in number of hours worked, supervisor information, employment address, job title, EIN, etc. You must also report new employment.

- Report to ISSAS upon approval of your STEM OPT work authorization, even if there are no changes.
- Report changes to another immigration status
- Report if you will leave your OPT employment before your OPT end date

→ **Changes can be reported to ISSAS by using our online reporting forms:**

<https://www.ndsu.edu/international/iss/forms>.

*FAILURE TO MEET REPORTING REQUIREMENTS MAY RESULT IN THE AUTOMATIC TERMINATION OF YOUR OPT BY SEVIS.*

### **Validation Reports to International Student & Study Abroad Services Every 6 Months**

Every six months you are required by federal law to “check in” with ISSAS while on the STEM extension. To complete these check-ins, you will complete and submit the OPT reporting form found on the ISSAS website (linked to above). You will need to provide contact and employment information, even if there have been no changes. *The six month check-ins are in addition to reporting within 10 days any changes that occur, as detailed in the previous section. FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE 6 MONTH CHECK IN WILL RESULT IN THE AUTOMATIC TERMINATION OF YOUR OPT BY SEVIS.*

### **Updating the I-983**

Within 10 days of new employment, and at any time there is a material change in the terms and conditions of the I-983, a new Form I-983 Training Plan must be completed and submitted to ISSAS. Upon ending any employment, the “Final Evaluation on Student Progress” section of the I-983 must be completed and submitted to ISSAS within 10 days of ending employment. Failure to comply is considered a status violation and may jeopardize the current and future immigration status of the student.

### **Student Evaluations Included with the I-983**

Current instructions for the I-983 state that the “student submits the first self-assessment within twelve months and a final self-evaluation that recaps all the training and knowledge acquired during the complete training period.” The 12-month evaluation form is the “Evaluation on Student Progress” section of the I-983 and it must be submitted to ISSAS within the first 12 months of the STEM OPT start date. The 24-month evaluation is the “Final Evaluation on Student Progress” and it must be submitted to ISSAS within 10 days of the end of the 24-month STEM OPT period. Additionally, the final evaluation form must be submitted to ISSAS whenever leaving an employer while on STEM OPT. This is the full responsibility of the student and employer to complete, sign, and submit these to ISSAS on time. Failure to comply is considered a status violation and may jeopardize the current and future immigration status of the student.

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-and-the-form-i-983>

### **Travel signatures on your I-20**

The signature on page 2 of your I-20 is only valid for 6 months (not a year) while on OPT. Please plan in advance if you are departing the U.S. temporarily and need to obtain a travel signature on your I-20 for your re-entry.

### **What if I need to travel outside the U.S. while my STEM OPT extension is pending and my post-completion OPT is expired?**

We do not recommend travel until after your STEM OPT EAD Card has been approved. If you must travel and your original EAD has expired or will expire while you are outside the United States, you must wait to re-enter the U.S. until you have received the approval notice and EAD card.

### **How Can My Employer Sign Up for E-Verify?**

To find out more about E-Verify, your employer should visit the following website: <http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify>. An employer's participation in E-Verify is voluntary and is currently free to employers. To participate, an employer must register online and accept the electronic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that details the responsibilities of SSA, DHS, and the employer.

### **Can I Still Get an Extension if My Employer Does Not Sign Up for E-Verify?**

No. USCIS will not approve any extension applications where the employer is not participating in E-Verify.

### **Can I Change Employers Once I Apply for an Extension?**

Once the extension is approved, you may change to work for a different employer who is also enrolled in E-Verify. You must notify the International Student & Study Abroad Services office when this occurs. However, ISSAS does not recommend you

change employers while the extension is pending. You may not work for any employer during the extension period who is not enrolled in E-Verify. Please note: STEM OPT employment must be related to the STEM eligible degree on which you are basing your request for STEM OPT work authorization.

### **What Happens if I Become Unemployed While on OPT?**

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 cumulative days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial 12-month post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 24-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during the total 36-month OPT period. If you are unemployed for more than the permitted lengths of time you must consider your OPT to be automatically cancelled and your F-1 status ended. *Note that volunteer and self-employed positions do NOT qualify for the extension.*

### **Can I work after my OPT expires while I'm waiting for my card to arrive?**

Yes, as long as you have filed your STEM OPT Extension in a timely manner **and** you have received the receipt notice, you may continue to work for up to 180 days after your OPT expires while you are waiting for your card. However, if you choose to travel outside of the U.S., and plan to enter after your OPT expires, you must have your new OPT card (showing the extended dates) before re-entering. It should take approximately 3-5 months for your EAD card to arrive at the address you indicated on the I-765, although it could take longer, depending on which USCIS Service Center has been assigned to your case.

### **Am I eligible for STEM OPT Extension a second time?**

Students who had already obtained one STEM OPT extension may possibly be eligible for a second STEM OPT extension (i.e., a total of two lifetime STEM OPT extensions) only after earning another qualifying STEM degree at a higher degree level *and* after obtaining a new initial grant of standard 12-month post-completion practical training based on that higher degree. The second period of STEM OPT cannot be added on to the first period of STEM OPT and cannot be based on the same degree that was used for STEM OPT previously.

**Do you have questions about the I-765?** Please thoroughly read all instructions on the I-765. It is important that you submit ALL pages even if some pages do not apply to you. **Part 6 of the I-765:** Per the instruction pages given you must complete Part 6 as it applies to you regarding any previously issued SEVIS numbers, and any CPT or OPT issued at any level of study (at NDSU and at other institutions you have attended). For example, you could reference **Page 3, Part 2, Item 26 for any old SEVIS number information.**

3.a. Page Number	3.b. Part Number	3.c. Item Number
3	2	26

3.d. \*Example only!!\*

SEVIS ID: N000XX.....

Level: Bachelor's

CPT: 01/01/2019 - 05/15/2019  
(part-time)

List all previously issued SEVIS numbers, all periods of CPT and OPT and the academic level at which it was authorized. Since there are no specific instructions on how to complete this section with this information, we suggest typing in the blank lines using the following information: SEVIS Number, degree level; CPT/OPT (including dates and part-time/fulltime). If you held another SEVIS Number, repeat the appropriate information in #4, etcetera.

*[Please note these page numbers, part numbers and item numbers only reference the I-765 edition dated 8/25/2020 and are subject to change without notice with new iterations of the I-765 form.]*

**\*\*\*If you mailed your application and it was lost in the mail or delayed by a mailing service; Or, if you file your OPT (or STEM OPT) application and it is rejected for any reason (such as an incorrect payment/fee), you must inform your international student advisor immediately.**

- In these situations, if you are still eligible to reapply for OPT, we will cancel and re-request your OPT in SEVIS so that your OPT request date is current, and you should submit your application to USCIS again.
- Failure to notify us about a rejection could lead to you no longer being eligible for the OPT employment benefit you are seeking.
- You must submit your STEM application online **within 60 days** of the date OPT was recommended on your SEVIS record (not always the same date the I-20 was printed) and before your initial 12 month OPT expires.
- In summary, always apply online as soon as possible after receiving your I-20 with OPT recommended on it.

## 24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION - APPLICATION CHECKLIST

### → STEP 1 – Complete the DocuSign form for requesting STEM OPT

- **Before beginning the form, be ready with the following information:**
  - Your completed OPT STEM Training Form I-983 (have a scan/copy of it ready to upload in the form): <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview>
  - Your name and other contact information; job title and number of hours per week; a description of how the employment is directly related to your coursework and program of study; Name/contact information of employer including their E-Verify number and Employer Identification Number (EIN); supervisor's contact information
- How to complete the DocuSign form
  - 1) Please fill in your name and email address to begin filling out the form.
  - 2) Please fill out this form ONLY ONCE.
  - 3) Important - If you need to gather more information and finish the form later, use the "Finish Later" option.
  - 4) If you have any questions about this form, please contact your international student advisor.
- If you are ready to begin the form, it is located here: <https://www.ndsu.edu/international/iss/forms>

### → STEP 2 – Allow 7-10 days for processing. An advisor will review your OPT history and paperwork.

### → STEP 3 – An international student advisor will contact you when your new OPT I-20 has been issued. You will receive one (1) new I-20. Sign and keep for yourself (scan a copy for uploading to your online I-765). Collect the following documents and be ready to upload them to your online I-765.

- One (1) signed I-20 as mentioned above (physically sign and then scan a color copy to upload)
- Online I-765 (Found at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>)
- A copy of your NDSU transcript (official or unofficial – however, an official transcript is preferred)
- \$410.00 fee [this is done online via ACH or Credit Card through pay.gov when you file online]
- Copy of form I-94 Departure Record
- Copy of the photo and biography page of your passport
- Copy of all previous EAD cards (front and back). This can supplement Part 6 of the I-765 form.
- Two digital passport-sized photos taken in the United States within the past 30 days

**Please note:** The application may take a varying amount of months to process, depending on posted processing times that can change at any time. If the decision has taken longer than the posted time for processing, please contact the national USCIS Contact Center (1-800-375-5283) to request an update on your case. If you want to know the current average processing times, please visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and enter "Processing Times" into the search bar at the top of the website or visit this link: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>.