OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
24-Month STEM OPT Extension Application
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 receipted 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 ISSAS approval, the application is submitted by you to a USCIS Service Center and may take up to 90 days to process. 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.

Very important:
We do not recommend students e-file the I-765 form for the STEM Extension. Applying online may lead to delays with your application including an additional required biometrics appointment, special requests through the SEVIS Help Desk by the ISSAS Office that may require days and sometimes weeks, and a Request for Evidence (RFE) from USCIS. RFEs will likely delay the processing of your application by USCIS as the processing time is stopped when they issue the request to you and is begun again only when they receive your response to the RFE. Please apply using this application and the paper I-765 as noted in the instructions on page 4. Biometrics appointments are currently not required if you apply through the International Student & Study Abroad Services (ISSAS) Office.
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 receipted 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/mailing 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 form:
https://www.ndsu.edu/international/immigration/for_f_1_students/off_campus/

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. 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 assessment within twelve months and a final 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.

What is E-Verify?
E-Verify is a free and simple to use Web-based system that electronically verifies the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. E-Verify is a partnership between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) oversees the program. E-Verify works by allowing participating employers to electronically compare employee information taken from the Form I-9 (the paper-based employee eligibility verification form used for all new hires) against more than 425 million records in SSA’s database and more than 60 million records in DHS immigration databases. Results are returned in seconds.

How Can My Employer Sign Up?
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 months for your EAD card to arrive at the address you indicated on the I-765, although it could take longer.

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.
24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION
APPLICATION CHECKLIST

➔ STEP 1 – Submit the following documents to the ISSAS office.
If you are not in Fargo, please scan and email these pages to your advisor for processing.

☐ OPT STEM Extension Employment Information form (Page 5)
☐ OPT STEM Extension Student Responsibility Statement (Page 6)
☐ OPT STEM Training Form I-983
   https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

➔ 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 STEM OPT Extension I-20 has been issued. You will get two (2) new I-20s. Sign both, and keep one for yourself. This is now your current I-20. Mail the other I-20 immediately with the following application materials to USCIS:

☐ I-765 (Found at www.uscis.gov)
  ▪ Do not type your name in the signature line – you must sign your name in pen.
  ▪ Enter the code of (c) (3) (c) in item #16 – designates application for a STEM-eligible extension
  ▪ Enter the appropriate “CIP” code in item #17 that shows your degree is eligible:
    https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension

☐ Form G-1145 (Found at www.uscis.gov)
  ▪ For electronic notifications from USCIS of your case status by text message/email.

☐ Letter from your employer (on letterhead paper) stating how your employment relates to your degree.

☐ A copy of your NDSU transcript (official or unofficial – however, an official transcript is preferred)

☐ $410.00 check or money order payable to Department of Homeland Security.

☐ Copy of form I-94 Departure Record (front and back)

☐ Copy of the photo and biography page of your passport

☐ Copy of all previous EAD cards (front and back)

☐ Two passport-sized photos taken in the United States within the past 30 days

Mailing your application: See the I-765 instructions under the section titled “Where to File?” Where you mail the application will depend on the state in which you live (according to the address you put on the I-765). USCIS must receive the application package before the expiration of the current post-completion OPT, and no later than 60 days from the date the I-20 recommending STEM OPT was issued.
With this form, I confirm that I wish to apply for a 24-month OPT STEM Extension and that I meet all the requirements as listed in this application packet and have carefully reviewed official sources of information, including information found at the STEM OPT Hub on the Study in the States website.

Have you been authorized for STEM OPT previously?  □ No  □ Yes (If yes, attach previous STEM OPT I-20 and EAD)

Your Information
Your name: _____________________________________________   Job title:  ___________________________________
Your personal phone number(s): ___________________________ Number of work hours/week: _____________
Your work e-mail address: ____________________________ Other e-mail address: __________________________
Your current address: ________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

□ I am currently not living in Fargo and want the International Student & Study Abroad Services office to mail the new I-20 to me at my address as listed directly above. Be sure this address is current.

□ I am currently in Fargo and want to pick up my I-20 from the International Student & Study Abroad Services office when it is ready.

In the box below, please describe how the above listed employment is directly related to your coursework and program of study:

My academic level: □ Undergraduate   □ Graduate

Employer contact information
Name of employer: _______________________________________
Address: ________________________________
______________________________
E-verify number: ___________________________ Employer EIN: ________________________________
*Also please put E-verify number in #17 on the I-765 form.

Your supervisor’s contact information
Supervisor’s Full name, E-mail address and Phone number:
____________________________________________________________________________
24-MONTH OPT STEM EXTENSION STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

By submitting this OPT application, I agree that the information provided in this application is true and accurate. I understand the rules and regulations concerning my participation in OPT and confirm all of the following:

- With this application, I certify that I have read all pages of this application in full and have submitted all required documents to the ISSAS as listed in Step 1. If my application was not complete, the time needed to process my application will be delayed. I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure my application is complete.
- My application will be filed in a timely manner. I understand that my OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the date on which ISSAS issued my OPT I-20. In addition, my application must arrive at USCIS before my original period of OPT expires. If it arrives after the date when my OPT expires, I understand that my application may be rejected by USCIS because it was not properly filed in a timely manner.
- I understand that once my application has been mailed to USCIS, it is not possible to cancel or edit the STEM OPT recommendation on my I-20.
- I certify that my STEM extension employer is E-Verified and that my degree is eligible for a STEM Extension.
- I understand that if my home address, contact information, employment information, or immigration status changes, I will update ISSAS within 10 days of the change.
- I understand that USCIS does not forward mail. If I have any change in home address, in addition to reporting it to ISSAS, I will update it directly with USCIS.
- Students on the STEM OPT extension are required to report their employment every 6 months. I understand and agree to meet this requirement in a timely manner. I understand that failure to do so may result in auto-termination of OPT.
- I will provide ISSAS with a copy of my EAD card when I receive it and report employment upon receiving it. I understand that failure to report upon authorization may result in the auto-termination of my OPT by SEVIS.
- I agree to seek employment directly related to my degree of study as listed on my I-20 and understand this is my responsibility to determine whether or not a prospective job is directly related to my degree.
- If my 24-month application is approved, I understand that during the entire period of regular OPT and my STEM extensions, I cannot accrue more than a total of 150 days of unemployment.
- I understand that if I decide to travel while on OPT I must have a valid I-20 signed by a DSO within six months before reentering the U.S., an unexpired EAD, a valid passport, a valid employment letter, and a valid F-1 visa stamp to be readmitted to the U.S. The employment letter should contain salary information, a statement that the employment is temporary, and verification that I will be employed after returning from travel.
- I understand that if I choose to begin a new program of study during my OPT STEM Extension, my OPT will end when the SEVIS record for the new program is activated. I will consult with my international student advisor if I have any questions about the timing of this process.
- If I have any questions about the status of my OPT STEM Extension application after I have mailed it to USCIS, I will contact USCIS to resolve my application issues and understand that ISSAS cannot provide me with updates on my application status at that point.
- If I receive a Request for Evidence from USCIS on my OPT application, I agree to mail the documents requested to USCIS in a timely manner, otherwise my application will be rejected.
- I understand that failure to comply with any of the above conditions could result in loss of my F-1 status.
- I have spoken with my employer about the Form I-983 and understand my employer’s responsibilities during my STEM OPT employment. I understand ISSAS cannot assist with completion of the form I-983, nor holds responsibility for the employer’s reporting responsibilities, and simply keeps the form in my immigration record as per the federal rule.
- I am individually responsible for meeting and maintaining the requirements of STEM OPT. I am aware that the information in this application serves as a guide, but that I am additionally responsible for knowing STEM OPT requirements as listed in official USCIS and DHS sources. I will not consult unofficial sources such as online blogs.

______________________________________  _____________  
Student Signature                    Date

-KEEP A COPY OF THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS-