



# **All About the OPT STEM Extension**




# What is the STEM OPT Extension?

- ❑ Students in eligible STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) majors may apply for a 24-month extension during Post-Completion OPT, if they qualify. STEM majors must appear on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's [STEM-Designated Degree Program List](#).
- ❑ Available to students who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher in a STEM eligible field from a SEVP-certified and accredited school.
- ❑ Allowed twice in a lifetime. Students may be eligible for a second extension after earning another qualifying STEM degree at a higher degree level.




# When Can I Do STEM OPT?

- You can participate in STEM OPT when you have completed your STEM degree and are in a period of Post-Completion 12 month OPT.
  - You may apply up to 90 days before your initial post-completion OPT period ends. USCIS must have your STEM application BEFORE your initial OPT period expires.
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# What are the Qualifications for a STEM Extension?

- ❑ You must be participating in paying employment in your field of study. No volunteer work is allowed.
- ❑ You must be working a minimum of 21 hours/week. (There is no maximum hour limit.)
- ❑ You must have accumulated **no more** than 90 days of unemployment during your initial OPT work year.
- ❑ You must have reported all employment and unemployment periods during your initial OPT year.
- ❑ You must have reported all changes of local address, name, and employer information during your initial OPT year.
- ❑ You must be working for an E-Verify employer.



# What is the Process to Apply for STEM extension?

1. Before requesting a STEM extension, the student and the employer must complete, sign, and submit the [Form I-983 Training Plan](#) (available on the USCIS website under Forms).
  1. The employer must be enrolled in USCIS's E-Verify employment eligibility program
  2. Student must be a bona fide employee of the employer signing the I-983.
  3. The I-983 must include information that clearly describes how the training opportunity has a direct relationship to the student's STEM degree.
2. Complete the [Request for OPT STEM Extension](#) form on International Education's website
3. Call the International Education office and make an appointment with the DSO to discuss your STEM extension application.



- Bring the following to your appointment:

- Check or Money Order for \$410 payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (do not abbreviate)

- Two (2) color passport photos with your name written on the back.

- Copy of your STEM degree



- Copy of your Initial OPT EAD card


- We will complete the following during the appointment:

- G-1145

- I-765

- I-20 with OPT STEM extension recommendation


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- You will leave the appointment with:
    - The original application packet and the address to send it
    - A reminder list of do's and don'ts for STEM OPT
    - A copy of the application packet
  
  - When your application is received by USCIS, you will get a Receipt Notice. When the EAD card is issued, it will be sent to our office. We will contact you, and you may choose to get the card in person or have it mailed to you.



# While you are on the STEM extension....obey these rules!

- ❑ You may accrue a total of 60 days on the STEM extension. (With the 90 days from your initial OPT period, this is a total of 150 days.)
- ❑ You may change employers. However, you must file an I-983 for each employer within 10 days of employment.
- ❑ If the terms of your employment change, you must file a new I-983
  - ❑ EIN changes
  - ❑ Salary is reduced
  - ❑ Hours are significantly reduced
  - ❑ Site change
  - ❑ Any change that renders the training plan inaccurate
- ❑ No volunteer work is allowed.
- ❑ You must work a minimum of 21 hours per week.
- ❑ Employment must relate directly to your field of study.





# While you are on the STEM extension...obey these rules!

- ❑ You may not pursue a degree on OPT.
- ❑ Report to DSO every 6 months with following information:
  - ❑ Legal name (if changed)
  - ❑ Residential address and mailing address
  - ❑ Employer name and address
- ❑ Your I-20 should now be signed for travel each 6 months. If you are outside of Denton, you may request a new I-20 with travel signature and we will mail it to you. Allow at least 2 weeks for delivery.
- ❑ DO NOT travel outside the U.S. if you have applied for the STEM extension and your status is Pending.
- ❑ If you have your EAD card, you may travel with valid passport, EAD, letter from your employer, and valid visa.
- ❑ Do NOT attempt to renew your F-1 visa without a job on STEM OPT.



# What Your Employer Must Do

- ❑ Be enrolled in USCIS's E-Verify program.
- ❑ Assist with the I-983 Training Plan, and verify:
  - ❑ They have sufficient resources and trained personnel to provide appropriate training in connections with the specified opportunity.
  - ❑ The STEM OPT student will not replace a full or part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. worker.
  - ❑ The opportunity will help students attain their training objectives.
  - ❑ Sign the self-evaluation at the 12 months mid-point and final evaluation at 24 months.
- ❑ Employer must report to TWU's DSO within 5 days the termination or departure of a student on the STEM extension if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the STEM OPT.



# Can I Work While I Wait for the STEM Extension?

You may continue to work for 180 days after the original USCIS Employment Authorization Document (EAD) expires if:

- ❑ You timely filed your STEM Extension application and it was received by USCIS before the original EAD expired.
- ❑ Your application with USCIS is Pending.



# Can I get the OPT STEM Extension for a previous STEM degree?

A previous STEM degree may qualify for a STEM extension if:

- ❑ Qualifying STEM degree was at the bachelor, master, or doctoral level
- ❑ Student must be in valid period of 12-month post-completion OPT
- ❑ Student has not already had a STEM OPT extension of any duration based on the qualifying STEM degree.
- ❑ The previous STEM degree is currently found on the [STEM-Designated Degree Program List](#)
- ❑ Qualifying STEM degree was earned within the 10 previous years of the date the DSO recommends the STEM OPT extension.
- ❑ Student will be, or is, working for an employer enrolled in the E-Verify program.
  
- ❑ School where the student earned the STEM degree is currently:
  - ❑ SEVIS-certified
  - ❑ Accredited by a U.S. Department of Education accrediting organization



# **Example of an OPT Extension for a Previous STEM Degree**

If a student earns a B.S. in Biology and then an MBA and is on a 12-month post-completion OPT period for the MBA, the student may apply for the STEM Extension based on the B.S. in Biology if they did not already use the STEM extension for the B.S. and their job is related to Biology.



# Life After the STEM OPT

## Extension

After the 24 month STEM extension, you will have a 60 day grace period. During these 60 days, you must do one of the following:

- 1. Change Levels:** You must apply, be admitted, and get a new I-20 before the end of the 60 day grace period. Must begin attendance within 5 months.
- 2. Transfer Schools:** You must receive a new I-20 from the new school before your 60 day grace period is over. If you transfer to a new school while your OPT is still valid, the remainder of your OPT will be cancelled on the day of the SEVIS “Release.”
- 3. Change Status:** OPT is often a transition to an H1B visa and your status may be extended. Contact International Education for more information if your employer files an H1B application for you.
- 4. Go Home.**