

17-month F-1 OPT extension for students with STEM degrees

During the initial period of 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT), certain government-designated STEM degree-holders (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in the following fields may be eligible for an additional 17 months of OPT, for a total of 29 months.

- Actuarial Science
- Computer Science Applications
- Engineering
- Engineering Technologies
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences
- Mathematics and Statistics
- Physical Sciences
- Science Technologies
- Medical Scientist (MS, PhD)
- Nutrition Sciences

The degree programs that qualify for a STEM extension are listed at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>. Note that the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code is printed next to “Primary Major” under the student name on page 3 of the Columbia I-20.

Requirements for 17-month STEM extensions:

- Student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of Columbia University administered OPT and working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to the student’s major area of study.
- Student must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- Student must have a job or job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system. (E-Verify information at <http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify>)
- Student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension
- Columbia University ISSO must recommend the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS, after verifying a student's eligibility, certifying that the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, and ensuring that the student is aware of his or her responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- Student must apply for the 17-month extension on Form I-765 with fee. Students who timely file an application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.
- Employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the ISSO by email to js33@columbia.edu. An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the employer's consent.

Validation and reporting requirements during STEM extension:

Students with an approved 17-month OPT extension must make a validation report to the ISSO every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when

1. the student's F-1 status ends,
2. the student changes educational levels at the same school,
3. the student transfers to another school,
4. the 17-month OPT extension ends

The validation report must include:

1. student's full name
2. current residence address and mailing address if different from residence address
3. name and address of the current employer
4. date student began working for the current employer

In addition to the validation reports, students on a STEM extension must notify the ISSO within 10 days of:

1. any change of name or residence or mailing address
2. any change of employer, giving the name and address of the new employer
3. any change to the name and address of this employer
4. any interruption of this employment

Use the online form at https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/STEM_Reporting_Form.html to submit the validation report and the other changes listed above.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) updated the comprehensive OPT information and FAQs on 4/2010. STEM extension information is found under section 8.

http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf

Application Process

The following items are required to apply for a STEM extension:

- a completed STEM extension application (see below).
- a completed I-765 form (Go to <http://www.uscis.gov/I-765>)
- your I-94 card
- your EAD card
- \$200 STEM extension trainee administrative fee, paid online at <https://lexington.columbia.edu/isso/trainee> the Trainee Administration Fee web page. The fee must be paid before the I-20 with ISSO's recommendation for the STEM extension is released to you. Payment by credit card is preferred but cash will be accepted.

The ISSO will issue a new I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension starting on the day following the expiration of your current EAD and ending 17 months later.

Application Period:

The I-765 and supporting documents must be sent to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regional office having jurisdiction over your address of residence. The earliest USCIS may receive the application is 120 days before the end date of your initial period of OPT and the latest is the date your EAD expires.

Extension of Work Authorization:

Students who timely file an application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment.

Travel:

Although you may continue to work while the OPT extension application is pending, you will not be able to return to the US after a trip abroad after the first EAD has expired and before you receive the EAD for the 17-month extension. As always, you will need to have an unexpired passport valid for 6 months into the future and an unexpired F-1 visa in your passport to return from a trip abroad in F-1 status.

Checklist for the application to USCIS

1. I-765 Application for Employment Eligibility
Question 16: Eligibility code is (c)(3)(C)
Question 17: List your degree and major as it appears on page 3 of your I-20, and your employer name and number as listed in the government's E-verify program.
2. Required I-765 fee of \$380, payable to US Department of Homeland Security by bank check, money order or personal check. Write "USCIS I-765" in the memo line of the check or money order. Please note that a money order is more difficult to track than a check.
3. Photocopy of I-94 card, front and back.
4. Photocopy of your current EAD card (both sides) and any previous EAD cards (if applicable)
5. Photocopy of your most recent diploma that shows the degree name and the date awarded.
6. Official or unofficial transcript as evidence of your program of study being in a government-designated STEM field
7. Two [passport-style photos](http://travel.state.gov/pdf/Photo-Quality-Requirements.pdf) (<http://travel.state.gov/pdf/Photo-Quality-Requirements.pdf>) meeting specifications of the link and taken within 30 days of filing the application.
8. Photocopy of page 1 and 3 of I-20 recommending the STEM extension, endorsed by the ISSO on page 3. USCIS must receive the application within 30 days of ISSO's endorsement.
9. Photocopy of the identification page(s) of your passport, including photo and expiration date
10. Mail your application to the USCIS Service Center having jurisdiction over the place of residence you have written in Item 3 of the I-765. If you live in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania or any other state in the Northeast region, send the application to:

U.S. Postal Service (USPS)
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Courier service (FedEx, UPS)
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business Suite 401
Lewisville, TX 75067

The USCIS will send the EAD card to the address indicated on the I-765 form. The address must be within the jurisdiction of USCIS Regional Service Center to which the application is submitted or it will not be processed. If your address in Item 3 on the I-765 is or will be outside the Northeast region at the time you expect to receive the EAD, speak with an ISSO advisor before mailing your application.

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F-1 OPT 17-month STEM Extension Request Form

Family Name: _____ **First Name:** _____

SEVIS number (top right of your I-20): _____

Email address: _____

Alternate Email address, if any: _____

Current address in the US:

Name and address of employer:

Name and phone number of supervisor:

Student's Signature _____

Date _____