F-1 OPT Extension for Students with STEM Degrees

24-month STEM OPT extension, effective on May 10, 2016

As of May 10, 2016, applicants for the STEM OPT extension may be eligible for an additional 24 months, for a total of 36 months. Prior to this date, the STEM Extension was for 17 months.

Other Changes
Eligibility for a second STEM OPT Extension after a second STEM degree at a higher degree level

Eligibility based on a previously-obtained STEM degree at a lower degree level. If you are currently in a non-STEM degree program (or on post-completion OPT based on it) and you have not used the STEM extension, you may be able to apply for the STEM extension under the following conditions:

- You must have received both degrees from currently accredited and SEVP-certified institutions
- Your previous degree cannot have been conferred more than 10 years before the time of application
- Your previous degree is assigned a STEM eligible code found on the STEM Designated Degree Program List [PDF] at the time of application
- Your practical training opportunity is directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree
- Your employer meets the criteria for the 24-month STEM extension

Comparison of the regulations for the 17-month and 24-month STEM OPT extension


Transition Plan for students who applied for the 17-month STEM OPT extension before May 10, 2016

Students with an approved 17-month STEM extension on May 10th.

You have two options. In both cases, it will count as one period of STEM OPT and you will be eligible for one more period of OPT after completing a degree at a higher level

Option 1. Continue your 17-month STEM OPT employment until it ends without applying for an extension. You continue to be subject to the provisions of the 17-month rule.

Option 2. Apply for an additional 7 months if you meet the following criteria

- You must have at least 150 days of STEM OPT remaining on the day USCIS receives your application to extend your STEM OPT
- The application deadline is August 8, 2016
- You and your employer will need to comply with the new regulations including the I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students

Apply for this as soon as possible if you are eligible!

If you meet the conditions, you will need to apply for a STEM OPT extension I-20 from the ISSO and then send a STEM OPT I-765 application with the USCIS fee and supporting documents. You will not need to pay an additional OPT administrative fee to the ISSO.
**Students with a 17-month STEM OPT extension application still PENDING on May 10th. What happens now?**

USCIS will not process a 17-month STEM OPT Extension after May 10th. They will send you a request for evidence (RFE) to allow you to demonstrate that you are eligible for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.

You will need to send the RFE back to USCIS with a new I-20 issued by the ISSO after you have provided the I-983 Training Plan completed by you and your employer. Your I-20 will have a recommendation for a 24-month OPT extension. You will not need to pay an additional OPT administrative fee or refile a I-765 application with a USCIS fee.

The degree programs that qualify for a 24-month STEM OPT extension are listed at https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf

**Is your degree program eligible?** Check to see if your program’s CIP code is on the list of degrees that qualify. The **CIP code** (Classification of Instructional Programs) is printed on page 1 of your I-20 under Program of Study information, under Major 1 and also under Major 2 if there is a second major.

**Eligibility for a 24-month STEM OPT extension**

- Must currently be engaged in post-completion OPT administered by Columbia, working for a US employer in a job directly related to your major field of study
- Must have reported OPT employment using the online report form here [http://tinyurl.com/optreportform](http://tinyurl.com/optreportform) and not have had more than 90 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT
- Successfully completed a Bachelor’s, Master’s, or doctoral degree in a field on the STEM CIP Code List.
- Must have a job or job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system. (E-Verify information is available at [http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify](http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify)).
- Must submit an I-983 Training program completed by both employer and student
- Agree to report updated name, address, and place of employment and continuation of employment to ISSO every six months via [http://tinyurl.com/ isso-stem-report](http://tinyurl.com/ isso-stem-report)
- Must submit an annual self-evaluation to report progress on training plan

**Application Period**

You must apply **no earlier than 90 days before the end** date of your initial period of OPT, although you may apply later. USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of your STEM I-20 issuance date and before your current EAD expires and you must build in time for ISSO processing.
Special Note for Students with Current 17 month STEM EAD: Apply for a 7-month extension
If you are on a current period of approved 17-month STEM extension you may apply for an additional 7 months between May 10, 2016 and August 8, 2016. The SEVIS system is being updated to handle the changes and should be available May 16th. You must have at least 150 days of STEM OPT remaining on your current EAD card at the time of filing with USCIS. Don’t wait until the last minute! Apply for this as soon as you can if you are eligible! You must follow the same application procedures listed below.

Obtaining the STEM extension authorization is a 3-step process:

1. Pay the $280 OPT Administrative fee and complete the required application documents. Submit to ISSO either in person or via email to isso-opt@columbia.edu.
2. ISSO will review your application and issue you an I-20 with the STEM extension recommendation.
3. Mail a complete STEM extension application to USCIS.

How to Apply

Step 1: Pay the $280 Trainee Administrative Fee at https://lexington.columbia.edu/isso/trainee and submit the documents listed below to isso-opt@columbia.edu as a single PDF file attachment.

Email Instructions: Scan your documents into ONE file in PDF format only and attach to an email to isso-opt@columbia.edu. You will receive an automated reply from the ISSO confirming that your email was received.

isso-opt@columbia.edu is a dedicated address for document submission. The ISSO will not reply to any messages included with your documents or to any other messages sent to this email address.

Required for Application to the ISSO for a STEM OPT I-20
1. completed STEM extension application (at the end of these instructions)
2. completed I-765 form (Go to http://www.uscis.gov/I-765 )
   a. Above box 1 on top of form, I am applying for: check box for renewal of my permission....
   b. Question 16: Eligibility code is (c)(3)(C)
   c. Question 17: List your degree and major as it appears on page 1 of your I-20 under Program of Study and your employer name and number as listed in the government’s E-Verify program. This number is normally obtained from the Human Resources department of your employer and consists of 5 or 6 digits
3. I-94 from the online I-94 site.
4. copy of EAD (front and back)
5. Complete I-983 form (pages 1 – 4 only) 
I-983 instructions
Section 1
   • SEVIS School Code is NYC214F0018600
   • Designated School Official (DSO). This is the ISSO advisor who will be processing your STEM OPT application. Leave it blank and the advisor will fill it in before returning it to you

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• Qualifying Major and CIP code. Your CIP code is printed on your I-20 under Program of Study Major(s)
• Employment Authorization Number is the “A number” on your EAD

**STEP 2:** ISSO will review application and if eligible, will issue a new I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension starting on the day after the expiration of your current EAD. The processing time may take up to 10 business days. We will notify you by email when your new I-20 is ready. You may pick it up or request regular mail or FedEx delivery (at no extra cost).

**STEP 3: Mail your STEM OPT Extension Application to USCIS:**

1. **USCIS Service Center must receive your application** before your current OPT expires and within 60 days of the date the STEM OPT extension I-20 is issued to you. If it isn’t, your application will be denied by USCIS, and your $380 fee will be not returned or refunded to you.
2. **Signatures** are important! Remember to sign and date the new I-20 in BLUE ink only! Your application will be returned due to an unsigned I-20, check or I-765 form.
3. Your **address** on the I-765 is important! Mail from the government is not forwarded even if you file a change of address with the postal service.
4. **Send your application to USCIS** by courier service such as FedEx to provide you with proof that your application was submitted in a timely manner.
5. Students who listed a mailing address on the I-765 with New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, or Pennsylvania must send the application to:

   **Courier service (FedEx, UPS)**

   USCIS  
   Attn: AOS  
   2501 S. State Hwy. 121  
   Lewisville, TX 75067

If you use a mailing address in another state, go to the I-765 site at: [http://www.uscis.gov/i-765](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765) to find out where to file your application.

**Checklist for the Application to USCIS:**

1. **Form G-1145** - This form is for USCIS to notify you by email and/or text message that they have accepted your application.
2. **Completed Form I-765** – original, not a photocopy, signed in blue ink
3. **Required $380 fee** payable to Department of Homeland Security by personal check, Bank check, or money order. Write “USCIS I-765” in the memo line. Please note, a money order is more difficult to track than a check
4. **Photocopies** (not originals) of all previously issued I-20s (as you did for your post-completion OPT application PLUS a photocopy of page 1 and 2 of I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension, endorsed by the ISSO on page two
5. **Photocopy** of your unexpired passport ID page
7. **Photocopy** of both sides of any previously issued EAD card, including your current EAD card.

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9. Two US passport-style photos. Photos should not be more than 30-days old when the application is filed. See photo specifications at [Department of State](https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/visa-information-bulletin/2016/05/photographs.html). Write your name lightly on the back of each picture in pencil.

10. Photocopy of your most recent diploma that shows the degree name and the date awarded.

11. Official or unofficial transcript as evidence of your degree program of study in a STEM CIP Code field.

### Receiving your EAD Card:

- **Processing time:** USCIS will generally take 2-3 months to process an I-765 application. After you receive the “Notice of Action” with the 13 digit receipt number, you can check the status of your pending application online on the USCIS web site at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do). Contact the ISSO if your application has been pending for more than 75 days from the date of receipt on the “Notice of Action” receipt form.
- USCIS will send all related mail including the receipt notice, approval notice and EAD to the address indicated on the I-765 form.
- If you change your address during the processing time, there is a way to update USCIS online using the USCIS [Change of Address](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do) site but we cannot guarantee its efficacy.
- Contact the ISSO if you receive any correspondence, such as a Request for Evidence (RFE), from USCIS about your application.
- The employment authorization start date of your EAD will be the day after the end date listed on your post-completion OPT EAD and will end 24 months later.

### Extension of Work Authorization

If you filed an application on time for a STEM extension, you will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision is made or for 180 days, whichever comes first. (Employer may refer to p. 21 of [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/m-274.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/m-274.pdf))

### Travel

Although you may continue to work while the STEM extension application is pending, you will not be able to return to the US from a trip abroad after the first EAD has expired and before you receive the EAD for the STEM extension. You will need to have the following to return from a trip abroad:

- an unexpired passport valid for at least 6 months into the future
- an unexpired F-1 visa (except Canadians)
- your STEM I-20 with travel signature dated within the 6 months preceding the date of your return to the US
- STEM EAD card
- employer letter

### Validation and Reporting Requirements during STEM Extension

You are limited to a total of 150 days during which you may be unemployed during the entire period of post-completion OPT and the STEM extension (90 + 60).

### Student Reporting Requirements

Must report to the ISSO **every six months** during the period of the STEM OPT extension, with your

- full name
- current residence address and mailing address if different from residence address
- name and address of your current employer
- date you began working for the current employer

Must report any changes within 10 days in items above and any interruption of this employment.

Use the online form at [https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isko/STEM_ReportinGF_Form.html](https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isko/STEM_ReportinGF_Form.html) to submit the validation report and the other changes listed above.

**Your STEM OPT Employer’s Obligations**
[https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-stem-opt-reporting-requirements](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-stem-opt-reporting-requirements)
- Sign and certify form I-983 Training Plan
- Review your annual self-evaluation and sign to certify accuracy
- Work with you to report any changes to the formal training plan
- Report to the ISSO within 5 business days if your employment is terminated or you otherwise leave the job
- Agree to possible on-site visits by DHS (Department of Homeland Security)
  [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employer-site-visits](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employer-site-visits)

**Want more information?**

**Final Rule on STEM OPT Extension & Cap-Gap Extension** (“Improving and Expanding Training Opportunities for F-1 Nonimmigrant Students with STEM Degrees and Cap-Gap Relief for All Eligible F-1 Students; Final Rule”)  

**Department of Homeland Security “Study in the States” STEM OPT Hub:**  
[https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub)
- The STEM OPT transition plan
- Overview and Tutorial for Form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students:
  [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview)

**PDF of Form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students:**  
Family Name ___________________________ First Name ___________________________

CU UNI ___________________________ Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy) ___________________________

School ___________________________ Major ___________________________

Degree earned ___________________________

Passport Expiration Date (mm/dd/yyyy): ___________________________

Visa Expiration Date (mm/dd/yyyy): ___________________________

Preferred Email Address ___________________________ Phone Number ___________________________

Dates on EAD From (mm/dd/yyyy): ________________ To (mm/dd/yyyy) ___________________________

How would you like to receive your STEM I-20? (Check one):

 QQ Pickup at ISSO
 QQ FedEx to Current Address in the US (at no extra cost)
 QQ FedEx to work (at no extra cost)
 QQ Regular mail

Current address in the US: ___________________________

Street Address

City ___________________________ State ___________________________ Zip ___________________________

Name and address of employer: ___________________________

Street Address

City ___________________________ State ___________________________ Zip ___________________________

Name and phone number of supervisor: ___________________________

Student’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
F-1 Student Certification of STEM Eligibility based on prior degree at another school

- Only complete this form if you are applying for the extension based on a prior degree not awarded by Columbia University.
- Attach a copy of previous diploma and transcript listing the degree and major.
- Review complete OPT STEM Extension instructions here: http://tinyurl.com/24-stem

(A) To be completed by the student:

Family name: ______________________________________ Given Name: ______________________________________
Date of birth: (mm/dd/yyyy) ___________________ CU UNI: ______ Current SEVIS ID number: _______________________
List any prior SEVIS ID numbers used: _________________________________________________________________________
I authorize a DSO at _________________________________ (previous school) to complete section B to release my non-immigrant status and educational information to Columbia University.

Signature: ______________________________________ Date: ________________________________
Email address: ___________________________ Phone: ______________________________________

(B) To be completed by the international student adviser (DSO) at previous school:

SEVIS School name: ____________________________ Location (city, state): ______________________________
SEVIS School Code: ____________________________ Student’s major: ________________________________
Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code: __________________ Date degree was earned: ____________________
Degree earned (check one): □ Associate’s □ Bachelor’s □ Master’s □ Doctorate

Was the student authorized for Optional Practical Training and/or STEM extension at this degree level? □ Yes □ No

OPT Dates: __________________________________________________________________________________________
STEM Dates: _________________________________________________________________________________________
To the best of your knowledge, did the student maintain valid F-1 status for the duration of their program and any periods of authorized

OPT/STEM? □ Yes □ No If no, briefly explain the circumstances: ________________________________

Adviser name and title: _______________________________________________________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________ Date: ________________________________
Phone number: ___________________________ Email address: ________________________________

Please return the completed form to the student for submission of a complete OPT STEM Extension request to isso-opt@columbia.edu