

24 MONTH OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) EXTENSION FOR F-1 STUDENTS WITH A STEM DEGREE

What is a STEM degree?

This is a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM). A list of STEM degrees can be found on the web page

<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf>

Who is eligible for the OPT extension?

- Student completed all degree requirements (or for thesis/dissertation students, completed all coursework) and currently is engaged in a valid period of post-completion OPT.
- Student has a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in a STEM program.
- Student must have a job or a job offer from an E-Verify employer. This means that the employer is currently registered and is in good standing with the USCIS E-Verify program. The employer must also have an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN). The employer must guarantee that you will work at least 20 hours per week and provide you with formal training and learning objectives.

When to apply for the OPT extension?

The student may file by mail or online. The application must be filed **90 days before** the expiration date of the current OPT. All documents for the extension must reach USCIS before the OPT ending date and within 60 days of issuing the I-20 for the STEM OPT Extension.

When does the period of extension start?

The student's period of STEM extension starts right after the ending date of the current OPT. If the student has a timely filed OPT extension application that is pending with USCIS, the student's work authorization is automatically extended for up to 180 days.

Can the student change employers while the STEM extension is pending?

The student may start working for a new employer if the new employer is registered with E-Verify and has an EIN number. The student must submit a new I-983 and STEM OPT Reporting Form to the International Center. We will then issue an updated I-20. We will email a copy of your new I-20 and EIN number to the Potomac Service Center so that your record can be updated.

Can the student travel while the STEM extension application is pending?

Yes, with a valid F-1 visa and STEM OPT I-20 endorsed for reentry within the last six months. Also carry your EAD card and proof of employment. If you need to renew your F-1 visa while abroad, be prepared to also provide the consular official with proof that your STEM extension application was timely filed.

What types of employment are allowed?

Students authorized for the STEM extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer, in a paid position directly related to the student's STEM degree. Students may have multiple jobs, but all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

What do I need to report if I change employers while on the STEM extension?

Submit to the International Center:

- 1) STEM OPT reporting form
- 2) New I-983 completed with the new employer
- 3) Final evaluation (see page 5 of the I-983) completed with previous employer
- 4) Ask previous employer to send an email to immigration@uakron.edu regarding the termination of employment

After you submit these documents, our office will issue you a new I-20 reflecting the change.

What are the limits of the unemployment period?

Students who receive a STEM extension may have up to 150 days of unemployment counting from the starting date indicated on the EAD for initial OPT. Each day during the period of OPT when the student does not have qualified employment counts as a day of unemployment.

What if the period of unemployment exceeds the limit?

A student who exceeds the unemployment period has violated the visa status unless he/she has taken one of the following steps (while the student is still in valid status):

- Applied to continue education by changing the level or transferring to another school.
- Departed the United States.
- Took action to otherwise maintain legal status.

What does the student have to report to the International Center during the STEM OPT period?

Within 10 days: a student must report the following:

- Employment information: the date of starting or changing employment, employer's name and address, and loss of employment
- Change in any of the following: the student's legal name, the student's residential or mailing address, the student's e-mail address or phone number

Data Validation Reports, or "Six month reports" Every six months starting from the start date of STEM OPT. Use our STEM OPT reporting form. Must be submitted within 10 days before or after the due date. Include:

- The student's full legal name
- Current mailing and residential address
- Name and address of the current employer
- Employment start date for the current employer

'Evaluation on Student Progress' due after the first year of the OPT extension (see page 5 of the I-983)

'Final Evaluation on Student Progress' due after the second year of the OPT extension (see page 5 of the I-983)

Reporting can be done by completing our STEM OPT Reporting Form (and the Evaluation Form, page 5 of the I-983, when required) and scanning/emailing it to us.

Material Changes or Modifications to I-983. If a material change to or deviation from the training plan described in the I-983 occurs, the student and employer must sign a modified I-983 and submit it to the International Center at the earliest available opportunity. Examples of such changes are a change in Employer Identification Number, reduction in compensation not tied to a reduction in hours worked, any significant decrease in hours per week the student is working, any decrease in hours below 20 hours per week, or any deviation that renders the information on the I-983 inaccurate.

The employer must report the following to the International Center:

The employer must notify the school when the student's employment is terminated. The employer must send an email to the International Center (immigration@uakron.edu). The email must include the student's name and the date of termination. The report must be sent within 5 business days upon termination.

The student must inform the employer about this requirement.

Please see the following websites for more information:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>

<https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-opt>

Process to Apply for STEM OPT Extension

Obtain a STEM OPT I-20 from our office. In order for us to issue the “STEM OPT Extension” I-20, submit the following documents to the International Center (scan is acceptable):

1. Application for STEM OPT extension (page 5 of this packet).
2. A copy of your Degree Certificate.
3. A copy of EAD issued for your current OPT (front and back).
4. Form I-983 – can be found here:
<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983.pdf>

Upon receipt of the documents above, the “STEM OPT Extension” I-20 will be issued and sent to you. The I-983 is for our office only. **Do not send the I-983 to USCIS.**

List of documents that must be submitted to USCIS

1. (Optional) Form G-1145 “E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance”. You may download this form from the USCIS website. Here is a link to the form [Form G-1145](#). **This form is not needed if filing online.**
2. Form I-765. Here is a link to the form [Form I-765](#). Be sure to use the latest version! Eligibility category: (c) (3) (C). If a required field does not apply to you, then indicate “not applicable” or “N/A” in that field.
3. Filing Fee of \$410.00. Check or money order must be made payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Place this check/money order on the top of your packet. If you wish to pay by credit card, complete Form G-1450. Here is a link to the form, [Form G-1450](#) Authorization for Credit Card Transactions. **To file online, pay by credit or debit card, or electronic withdrawal from savings or checking account (do not use Form G-1450 if filing online).**
4. Copy of previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) – front and back.
5. A copy of your Degree Certificate
6. A copy of transcript (unofficial copy of transcript is fine)
7. 2 recent, passport-style photographs taken no earlier than 30 days before submission of the OPT application. **Lightly** print your name and A-number (the USCIS number on the front of your current EAD) on the back of each photo with a pencil or a pen. **If filing online, upload one photo.** Follow the passport photo requirements on the U.S. Department of State website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/requirements/photos.html>.
8. Copy **of the I-20 issued for STEM OPT extension**
9. Optional: copies (excluding instructions page) of all your I-20s, since the arrival date to the USA as an F-1 student
10. A copy of your passport picture page and passport expiration date.
11. A copy of the Form I-94 admission number/record. You may download the form from the website <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94>.
12. Copy of your F-1 visa
13. Recommended: Letter from employer that includes job duties and specifies if you are a part-time or full-time employee.

The USCIS processing time is about three months, so be sure to give yourself enough time.

You may continue working for up to 180 days beyond the end date of your current EAD provided that USCIS receives your documents

- (1) before the expiration date of your current EAD, AND
- (2) within 60 days of the issue date of the “STEM OPT” I-20.

Where to mail the STEM OPT packet – paper filing:

Students should mail their STEM OPT packets to the Chicago Lockbox:

USCIS Chicago Lockbox

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS

PO Box 805373

Chicago, IL 60680

FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

USCIS

Attn: I-765 C03

131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor

Chicago, IL 60603-5517

Please note: As USCIS can make unexpected changes, this link will have the most up-to-date and accurate information regarding the USCIS filing address: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>

Filing for STEM OPT online:

Tips:

- You must obtain your STEM OPT I-20 before filing!
- Submit all the documents at the time of filing.
- Once payment is accepted, your application is considered filed.
- File a few days before your OPT expires, at the latest, to allow time for the payment to be processed.

USCIS Resources:

File online: www.uscis.gov/file-online

Create online account: www.myaccount.uscis.gov

Form I-765: www.uscis.gov/i-765

I-765 evidence checklist www.uscis.gov/forms/filing-guidance/checklist-of-required-initial-evidence-for-form-i-765-for-informational-purposes-only

The University of Akron
International Center

APPLICATION FOR THE 24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION

Information about you:

Your Name: Last _____ First _____

Your UA ID# _____ Date of Birth _____ E-mail address _____ Phone # _____

Your Current Address _____

Your Major/Program _____ Level of Education (B.S., M.S, Ph.D.) _____

Program Completed? Yes _____ NO _____ Degree Received? Yes _____ NO _____

Starting/Ending dates of the OPT as indicated on your EAD _____

Information about your employment (you are employed or have a job offer):

The Company's Name _____ E-Verify ID# _____ EIN Number _____

The Company's Address _____

Your Title/Position _____ Your Business E-mail Address/Phone # _____

Has an H-1B petition been filed for you? Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, what is the result? _____
Pending/Approved/Denied/ Withdrawn

Information about your supervisor:

Name _____ Title/Position _____

E-mail Address _____ Phone Number _____

Please provide a short statement about how your employment relates to your degree: _____

Student Certification: I have read and agree to comply with STEM OPT Extension rules and reporting requirements. It is my responsibility to maintain my F-1 status while on the STEM OPT extension.

Signature _____ Date _____