

24 Month STEM OPT Extension Guidelines

Students who graduate with a degree in a qualifying STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) who meet additional employment criteria may qualify for a 24-month STEM OPT extension. Students may apply for the STEM OPT extension up to two times, but the second STEM OPT extension can only be based on degree study earned at a higher level than the degree on which the first STEM OPT extension was based (e.g. one STEM extension based on Master's, and a second based on PhD, but not the other way around). Non-STEM graduates who completed a STEM degree from another U.S. accredited institution within the past ten years are eligible to apply for a STEM extension based on that previous degree, assuming they have not already done a STEM OPT extension based on that degree level. The STEM OPT Extension is an extension of current, active post-completion OPT.

STEM OPT EXTENSION ELIGIBILITY:

1. Students must **be actively participating in post-completion OPT** and submit their STEM application to USCIS BEFORE their OPT expires. USCIS will accept STEM OPT extension applications no earlier than 90 days prior to OPT expiration date.
2. Students must have **earned a degree or have completed all degree requirements except for thesis or dissertation in a STEM field**, to apply for the STEM OPT extension. However, if the STEM OPT application is based on a *past* degree, the degree must have been completed within the past 10 years and the degree must be granted by an accredited institution. Non-STEM UConn grads participating in post-completion OPT with a previous STEM degree are eligible to apply, if they have not already applied for a STEM extension based on that degree. For a list of STEM eligible major fields visit: <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf>
3. Student must be employed by an employer fully participating in the **E-Verify** program, and have an **IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN)**. For more information on E-Verify visit: www.uscis.gov/e-verify
4. Student and Employer must fill out and submit **Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students)** detailing the relationship between the STEM OPT employment, the academic degree earned and the learning goals of the F-1 student. For more information visit: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-and-the-form-i-983>. If employed through a staffing or temp agency, the I-983 must be completed by the client providing the training opportunity, not by the staffing agency.
5. Certain employment arrangements may not be eligible for a STEM OPT Extension. These include:
 - a. Self-employment
 - b. Unpaid internships and volunteer work.

STEM OPT EMPLOYMENT RULES:

1. Student must notify ISSS of any changes in name, address, employer information or employment status any time it changes. Go to www.iss.uconn.edu and scroll down to "Submit OPT Employment Information".
2. Student must submit **6-month validation reports to ISSS** (4 times over course of STEM OPT) confirming name, address, employer information and employment status. Go to www.iss.uconn.edu and scroll down to "Submit OPT Employment Information".
3. Students are permitted only 60 days of unemployment during STEM OPT extension. (150 days total between 12-month post-completion OPT and STEM OPT periods). The student's SEVIS record is subject to termination after 150 days of unemployment.

4. As a part of the **Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students)**, students must conduct a 12-month and a 24-month self-evaluation of the training program, reviewed and approved by employer. Page 5 of the Form I-983 must be submitted to ISSS with the 6-month validation reports submitted at the 12- and 24-month marks.
5. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is permitted to conduct employer site visits to confirm that I-983 goals are being met.

STEM OPT EXTENSION APPLICATION PROCEDURES:

Step 1 -Submit STEM OPT application to ISSS:

Submit the following documents to ISSS.

- a. STEM OPT Extension Application Form (ISSS 356) (available online at www.issu.uconn.edu)
- b. Form I-765. Download at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Tips for completing Form I-765 can be found below. We will return this to you.
- c. Completed Form I-983 - Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. Leave the “DSO Name and Contact Information” blank. We will fill this in for you. Instructions for completing I-983.
- d. Copy of UConn diploma or official transcript. If thesis pending, we will need confirmation from your academic advisor that you have only the thesis/dissertation left to complete.
- e. If STEM OPT Extension is not based on UConn degree: Copy of STEM diploma from accredited U.S. university (conferred within last 10 years)
- f. Copy of all previous Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)
- g. Receipt for payment of **24 Month STEM OPT SEVIS Maintenance Fee**. This fee must be paid online through the UConn Bursar website: <http://bursar.uconn.edu/uconn-payment-store/>. Click on “International Student and Scholar Services” and scroll down to “12 Month OPT SEVIS Maintenance Fee”. After paying the \$300 fee, you must print a receipt and include this with your application documents to ISSS.

Tips for Completing Form I-765

- The form is available as a fillable form online at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. Download and type the form online, then print and sign in **blue ink**.
- **“I am applying for...”** Check “Permission to accept employment” if this is an initial 12-month OPT application. Check “Renewal of my permission to accept employment” if this is a 24-month STEM OPT extension of your current OPT.
- **Question #3:** Your Receipt Notice and EAD will be mailed to the address you provide. If you are not sure where you will be living in the future months, you may use International Student and Scholar Service’s office address: 2011 Hillside Rd., Unit 1083, Storrs, CT 06269. If you will move to a new address, please note that the U.S. Postal Service will not forward this mail, even if you file a change of address form with the U.S. Postal Service. If you use a personal address and you move before your EAD is issued, you must update your address with both the [USPS](http://usps.com) and with [USCIS](http://uscis.gov) (see instructions for those with pending applications).
- **Questions #9.a. - #13.b.:** (Social Security Administration) If your request for employment authorization is approved, the SSA may assign you an SSN and issue you a Social Security card, or issue you a replacement card. If you want the SSA to assign you a Social Security number and issue you a Social Security card, or issue you a new or replacement Social Security card, then answer “Yes” to both **#10 and #11**. You must also provide your father’s and mother’s family and given names at birth in **#12.a. - #13.b.** SSA will use **#12.a. - #13.b.** in issuing you an SSN card. You are not required to request an SSN using this application. Completing **#10 - #13.b. is optional**. However, you must have an SSN properly assigned in your name to work in the United States.

NOTE: If your employer uses E-Verify to confirm new employees' eligibility to legally work in the United States, the information you provide on Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, will be compared to data in SSA and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) databases. Employees must have an SSN in order for E-Verify to confirm their eligibility to legally work in the United States.

- **Question #14:** Use the number from your I-94 admission record, which can be printed at www.cbp.gov . If you have changed to F-1 status within the U.S., and have not traveled since, you may find your I-94 number on your I-797 approval notice. Include a copy of your Approval Notice (I-797).
- **Question #15:** This is asking if you have ever applied for an EAD from USCIS. Check "Yes" if you have applied for an EAD in the past while in F-1 status or any other visa type held in the U.S. even if the EAD was denied or withdrawn. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or on-campus employment is not authorized through USCIS; check "No" if you have only received CPT or on-campus employment in the past.
- **Questions #16, 17, 18, 19:** Use the information from your most recent entry stamp in your passport. In some cases you may have made a short trip to Canada or Mexico, which is not reflected by your current entry stamp. This is standard, and it will be ok to use the information from your entry stamp if you don't know the actual date of entry from your last trip. In item 15, write out "F-1 Student", not just "Student".
- **Question #20:** Use one of the three following codes:
 - Pre-completion OPT: (c)(3)(A)
 - Post-completion OPT: (c)(3)(B)
 - 24-month extension for STEM graduates: (c)(3)(C)
- **Question #21:** Degree, Major, Employer Name and E-Verify # **only if you are applying for STEM OPT Extension (C 3 C)**, otherwise leave blank
- **Question #22 & #23:** Leave blank. This question is not for F-1 students.
- **Certification:** Sign the form in blue ink.

Step 2 - File your OPT application with USCIS:

After reviewing the OPT Application, ISSS will issue the following documents:

- 1) Updated Form I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation and STEM employer information on page 2
- 2) Form I-765 with any suggested revisions
- 3) Instructions for filing STEM OPT with USCIS, listing all application materials and USCIS mailing address

Documents to submit to USCIS:

1. Form G-1145, if you want to receive email/text message application status updates. Get this form online at <https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>
2. Two recent color passport style photographs (write name and SEVIS ID number softly in pencil or felt pen on back of photos). See I-765 Filing Instructions for further photo details <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
3. \$410.00 in the form of a personal check or money order made to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (a personal check is preferable)
4. Completed I-765, typed and printed and signed in blue ink. Download form at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
5. Photocopy of the Form I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation on page 2. Make sure that you sign the bottom of your form before making a photocopy
6. Photocopy of all previous forms I-20. Make sure that you signed all previous forms I-20.
7. Print out of I-94 admission record (from www.cbp.gov website) or photocopy of I-94 card (front and back) if you have a paper I-94 attached to your passport or attached to an I-797 approval notice (if you changed status to F-1 within the U.S.)
8. Photocopy of any previous Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)
9. Photocopy of your most recent visa stamp (the visa can be expired and/or of a different visa category other than F-1)
10. Photocopy of biographical page(s) of the passport, with expiration date – If your passport will expire within 6 months from the time of filing your OPT application with USCIS, you should renew it with your home country's embassy or consulate before you submit your OPT application

Note: Please be sure to make a photocopy of all your paperwork for your records before mailing your application.

Step 3 – After Filing Application with USCIS:

Receive I-797 (Receipt Notice): The USCIS Lockbox will forward your application to a USCIS Service Center for processing. Several weeks after receiving your application, USCIS will send you a Receipt Notice (I-797). This will list the Service Center where your application is being processed, the date your application was officially received, and a case number in reference to your application. Carefully review the notice to make sure your name is spelled correctly on the I-797. If it is not, contact the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) number listed on your receipt notice, as well as a DSO/International Advisor at ISSS, immediately.

Receive I-797 (Approval Notice): After processing your OPT application, USCIS will send you an approval notice (I-797). This is a notification on your application status, NOT your work authorization/permission. USCIS processing time for OPT is up to 90 days.

Receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD): You will receive an EAD separately in the mail from USCIS. This is your proof of employment authorization. You may not start working until you receive your EAD and the start date becomes effective. EADs cannot be forwarded by the post office, so if you move or change your mailing address you MUST notify USCIS with the updated address for EAD mailing.

Step 4 – Mandatory Reporting Requirements during STEM OPT Extension

Submit Employment Information to ISSS online by filling out the OPT Information Form: Go to www.issu.uconn.edu and scroll down to **Submit OPT Employment Information**, to fill out the OPT Information Form. All students on OPT and STEM OPT Extension must report their current address of residence, employer's name and address and employment status to ISSS as soon as you receive your EAD, so that a DSO/International Advisor can report the information in SEVIS.

Students MUST submit this form every time their address or employment information changes. This is a regulatory requirement and failure to comply is a violation of your F-1 status. Students must update ISSS to ensure that they do not accrue more than 150 days of unemployment. **Failure to update ISSS with your employment information will lead to termination of your SEVIS record.**

Submit Validation Reports to ISSS Every Six Months: Students on STEM OPT **must** complete a new OPT Information Form on the ISSS website at the 6, 12, 18 and 24 month points of their STEM OPT Extension, even if no changes have occurred to the employment situation or address. Go to www.issu.uconn.edu and scroll down to **Submit OPT Employment Information**, to fill out the OPT Information Form.

Submit Form I-983 Self-Evaluation Reports to ISSS: Along with your 12-month and 24-month OPT Information Form updates, you must submit your I-983 Self-Evaluation Reports to ISSS. Go to www.issu.uconn.edu and scroll down to **Submit OPT Employment Information**, to fill out the OPT Information Form and upload a scanned copy of the I-983 12/24 month self-evaluation.

Points to Consider:

- Provided you have timely filed your application and it was received by USCIS before your current 12 Month OPT Expiration date, you may continue to work beyond your 12 month OPT expiration date for up to 6 months while your STEM OPT application is pending.
- You cannot choose your 24 Month STEM OPT extension dates. USCIS will issue your EAD with an expiration date 24 months beyond your 12 month OPT expiration date.
- All employment conducted during the STEM OPT Extension must be in your field of study, with an E-Verify approved employer and a new I-983 must be completed and submitted to USCIS for each employer.
- After STEM Extension OPT ends, you have a 60-day grace period to prepare for departure, transfer to a new institution or apply to change status (if eligible).
- It is not advisable to travel outside the U.S. while your STEM OPT application is pending approval with USCIS.