STEM OPT

Overview

Recipients of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in certain STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields may be eligible for a one-time 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (total up to 29 months). The 17-month Stem OPT is approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As with regular post-completion OPT, the student will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) showing the dates students can work legally in the United States.

- Only one 17-month STEM OPT is granted PER LIFETIME regardless of additional degrees awarded or level of degrees.
- New STEM OPT EAD card begins the day after the expiration of the 12 month EAD card and ends 17 months later, no matter the date of adjudication.
- 17-month extension will be granted in one EAD card period and cannot be split into smaller periods.
- It is possible to change employers during the 17 months. The new employment must meet the STEM extension requirements.
- Students whose applications are received before the EAD card expires will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending until they receive the final decision from USCIS or for 180 days, whichever comes first. It is possible to change employment while application is pending, as long as the new employment meets STEM OPT requirements.
- If extension application is denied, student will still have the 60-day grace period after expiration of the 12-month EAD card.

STEM OPT Requirements

- Must currently be on post-completion 12-month OPT
- Must have a job offer from an employer registered with E-verify
- Employment Requirements:
  1. Paid or unpaid
  2. At least 20 hours per week
  3. Directly related to field of study and appropriate to degree level
  4. Report any termination of employment within 48 hours to ISS.
Types of Eligible Employment

- **Multiple employers** – Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student’s degree program.
- **Short-term multiple employers** – Students may work for multiple short-term employers but cannot work more than one full-time job.
- **Work for hire** – This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship.
- **Self-employed business owner** – Students on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must work full-time. The student must be able to prove to DHS that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student’s degree program.
- **Employment through an employment agency**

Applying for STEM OPT

1. Submit a STEM OPT Request Form to ISS.
2. ISS will mail you a STEM OPT I-20.
3. Mail application materials to USCIS within 120 days before your OPT end date.

*See the STEM OPT Checklist for more details.*

Period of Unemployment to Maintain Status

- An additional 30 days of unemployment time will be available during the STEM OPT extension, combined with the 90 days granted during initial 12-month. The total allowed is 120 days during the possible 29 months.
- ISS strongly recommends that students keep evidence for each job regarding the position held, dates of position, the job title, supervisor name and contact information and a description of the job.
Reporting Requirements of STEM OPT

Reporting Requirement #1
While working on your STEM OPT Extension, you are required by immigration regulations to report certain information to International Student Services by 6 and 12 months intervals (from the start date of your STEM OPT).

To report: [www.se.edu/iss](http://www.se.edu/iss) → Current Students → Employment → OPT Reporting

- Name
- SEVIS Number (N############)
- Home Address
- Employer’s Address
- Employment Start Date

*If ISS does not receive your information by the deadline, your F-1 SEVIS record will automatically be TERMINATED with a reason of “Failure to Report while on OPT”, and you will no longer be considered in valid F-1 immigration status.*

Reporting Requirement #2
Report to ISS within 10 days of any change of:

To report: [www.se.edu/iss](http://www.se.edu/iss) → Current Students → Employment → OPT Reporting

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name
- Employer address
- Interruption or loss of employment
- Intention to transfer to another school or change degree level

Travel while on STEM OPT
Required documents to re-enter the U.S. while on STEM OPT:
- STEM extension OPT I-20 endorsed for travel; travel endorsement cannot be more than six months old
- Valid F-1 visa stamp
- Valid passport
- STEM OPT Extension EAD card
- Job offer letter or statement of employment from company