

Florida Atlantic University ~ Division of Student Affairs ~ International Student and Scholar Services

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STEM EXTENSION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

What is STEM Extension OPT?

STEM Extension OPT is a 17-months extension of Post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 visa holders who are currently engaged in approved 12-months Post-completion OPT based on specific Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degree programs as designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

What is E-Verify?

E-Verify is an Internet based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. It is currently free and employers may register online at <https://www.vis-dhs.com/EmployerRegistration/StartPage.aspx?JS=YES>.

Who is eligible for STEM Extension OPT?

To qualify, F-1 individual must meet the following criteria:

- Completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List, (Refer to FAU Stem Degrees list)
- Currently engaged in post-completion OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to the student's major area of study,
- Be employed by or have a job offer from an E-Verify employer,
- Have not accrued more than 90 days of unemployment during approved OPT period, and
- Have never received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.

When can the STEM OPT application be submitted?

An application for STEM OPT extension may be filed anytime after the approval and before expiration of initial post-completion OPT. The F-1 individual must ensure the Form I-765, the required supporting evidence, and the fee payment reaches the proper USCIS Service Center before his or her current OPT expires. **USCIS recommends that students file within 90 - 120 days of the expiration date of the current OPT.**

Students who timely file an application for the 17-month STEM OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until the I-765 application is adjudicated or for up to 180 days, whichever comes first. However, regardless of when the STEM OPT authorization is received, the STEM OPT extension period will expire 17 months after the end of the initial post-completion OPT authorization. The total post-completion OPT period (initial and STEM OPT) combined cannot exceed 29 months.

What are the DSO responsibilities when recommending a STEM OPT extension for a student?

The DSO (ISSS Advisor), before recommending a STEM extension in SEVIS, will confirm the following:

- The student's education level shown in SEVIS is bachelor's, master's, or doctoral
- The name of the student's major shown in SEVIS is on the [STEM Designated Degree Program List](#)
- SEVIS shows the student is on an approved period of OPT that has not expired
- The employer's name and address entered into SEVIS are entered exactly as provided by the student

While the DSO must ensure that the student knows that he or she must work for an [E-Verify employer](#), the DSO is not responsible for verifying an employer's registration with E-Verify.

What documents will meet the USCIS requirements on the Form I-765 for a copy of the student's degree?

The student may provide either official transcripts or a copy of the diploma showing the level and program of study.

What does the applicant need to know about the employer in order to complete the Form I-765 when applying for the STEM extension?

The student must have the employer's name as listed in E-Verify and the employer's E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number and must be listed in item #17 of the I-765 form.

What counts as time unemployed?

Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment. The only exception is that periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed. Students who receive a 17-month STEM OPT extension are given an additional 30 days of unemployment for a total of 120 days over their entire post-completion OPT period (a 29-month period).

How does travel outside the United States impact the period of unemployment?

If the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the United States while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits. If a student travels while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the United States will not count as unemployment.

What types of employment are allowed for students during an OPT STEM extension?

Students authorized an OPT STEM extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to the student's STEM degree. STEM students may work multiple jobs, but all the employers must be enrolled in E-Verify. Students on a STEM extension are allowed to volunteer, incidental to their status. This means that volunteer work is allowed but does not count as employment for the purpose of maintaining F-1 status.

When does the student's period of STEM extension OPT start?

If the student has properly filed for a STEM extension, the student's period of STEM extension OPT starts the day after the expiration of the student's original period of optional practical training.

Can the student work with an expired employment authorization document while a STEM extension is pending?

Yes. 8 CFR 214.2(f)(11)(i)(C) and 8 CFR 247a(12)(c)(6)(iv) automatically extends the student's work authorization for up to 180 days while the student's STEM extension application is pending.

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

Yes. However, if the STEM extension period has started, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must [report the change in employment](#) to his or her DSO.

Can the student travel outside of the United States if his or her employment authorization document expires and the OPT extension request is pending?

No. The student must wait to receive the new employment authorization document.

What are the student's responsibilities while on STEM extension OPT?

- Work in a paid position for an E-Verify employer at least 20 hours per week.
- Work in a position related to the STEM degree
- Report to their DSO within 10 days of: Legal name changes A change in residential or mailing address Changes in employer, giving the employer name and employer address Loss of employment
- Send the DSO a validation report every six months starting from the date the STEM extension starts and ending when the student's F-1 status ends or the STEM extension ends, whichever is first. The validation report must include the student's: Full legal name SEVIS identification number (if requested by the school)
- Current mailing and residential address Name and address of the current employer Date the student began working for the current employer
- Work in a paid position only for E-Verify employer(s)
- Do not exceed 120 days of unemployment time during the entire period of post-completion OPT (regular post-completion OPT and STEM extension OPT).

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STEM EXTENSION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLICATION FORM

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT

Last Name _____ First Name _____ Student ID Z _____
FAU Email _____ Telephone _____
Degree Level _____ Major(s) _____
Post-completion OPT was approved from _____ to _____.
Pre-completion OPT was approved from _____ to _____.
Student's Signature _____ Date: _____

STEM OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- ___ Employer's Letter
- ___ Completed Optional Practical Training Application Form (this form).
- ___ Form I-765. Question 16 code: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf>
17-month post-completion OPT Extension for STEM students: (C) (3) (C);
- ___ USCIS filing fee of \$380.
Money Order or Cashier's Check payable to: "US Citizenship and Immigration Services"
- ___ Two passport-size photographs placed in a see-through "zip lock"-type bag; lightly print your name and I-94 number on the back of the photos
- ___ Two sets of copies of academic transcripts showing degree awarded and major/filed of study and copy of diploma, *if already issued*
- ___ Two copies of passport identification/signature and expiration pages
- ___ Two copies of most recent F-1 visa (or change of status approval notice if no F-1 visa)
- ___ Two copies (front and back) of most recent I-94 card
- ___ Two copies of any previous EAD card(s) obtained during your F-1 status

FAU Majors Eligible for STEM EXTENSION

Biochemistry	Geomatics Engineering
Bio-Engineering	Information Engineering Technology
Biology	
Biotechnology	Marine Biology
Chemistry	Mathematics
Civil Engineering	Mechanical Engineering
Computer Engineering	Microbiology
Computer Science	Molecular Biology
Electrical Engineering	Ocean Engineering
Geology	Physics