FAU
FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

International Services
777 Glades Road, DP-49
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Tel: (561) 297-3049 Fax: (561) 297-2446
www.fau.edu/isss ~ isss@fau.edu

# STEM Extension Optional Practical Training

*Frequently Asked Questions*

**What is STEM Extension OPT?**

STEM Extension OPT is a 24-month extension of Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 visa holders who are currently engaged in approved 12-month Post-completion OPT based on specific **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**athematics (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.

**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 DHS STEM Designated Degree Program)
  - 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

**When can the STEM OPT application be submitted?**

An application for STEM OPT extension may be filed any time after the approval, but preferably at least 120 days after standard OPT effective date, and before expiration of initial post completion OPT. However, **USCIS recommends that students file within 90 - 120 days of the expiration date of the current OPT.**

The F-1 individual must ensure the Form I-765, the required supporting evidence, and the fee payment reach the appropriate USCIS Service Center before their current OPT expires.

Students who timely file an application for the 24-month STEM OPT extension will be able to continue employment for up to 180 days, while the extension application is pending, until the I-765 application is adjudicated, whichever comes first. However, regardless of when the STEM OPT authorization is received, the STEM OPT extension period will expire 24 months after the end of the initial post-completion OPT authorization. The total post-completion OPT period (initial and STEM OPT) combined cannot exceed 36 months.

**What documents should be provided to USCIS to show eligible for the 24-month OPT STEM extension?**

You 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 and e-verify and company identify numbers.

**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. This must be listed in item #17 of the I-765 form.

**What is the form I-983?**

The Form I-983 is a formal training plan which should clearly articulate the STEM OPT student's learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives. Before a STEM OPT student may apply for a STEM OPT extension, a student and their employer must complete and sign Form I-983 and submit it to the student's DSO. Students may not act as their own employer or as the signatory for the employer for the purposes of the 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 those periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job. This will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed. Students who receive a 24-month STEM OPT extension are given an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days over their entire post-completion OPT period (36-months).

**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 90/150-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 with authorized for 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) The student's work authorization is automatically extended 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 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: (1) legal name change (2) change in residential or mailing address (3)change in employer - giving the employer's name and employer's address, loss of employment
- Send the DSO an employment validation report every six months during the STEM extension period.
- The validation report must include residential address and current employer's name and address, and start date of current employment
- Work in a paid position for only E-Verify employer(s)
- To be eligible for the STEM extension, student should not have been unemployed for 90 days while in the standard OPT program
- Do not exceed 150 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 Form

| Student Information | | |
|---|---|---|
| Last Name: | First Name: | Student ID#: Z |
| Other Email: | Telephone: | Degree Level: |
| Major(s): | Minor(s): | |
| Employer EIN: | Employer E-verify #: | |
| ☐ Pre-completion OPT was approved from | Start Date: | End Date: |
| ☐ Post-completion OPT was approved from | Start Date: | End Date: |

| **Student Signature**: | **Date**: |
|---|---|

**STEM OPT Application Checklist**

- ☐ IS STEM Extension Optional Practical Training Form (this form)
- ☐ Form I-765 (make sure you follow the next steps carefully on Form I-765)
  **Section 3:** Use ISSS mailing Address (FAU 777 Glades Road DP-49, Boca Raton, FL 33431-0991
  **Section 11:** Mark "yes" (write center that you applied for current OPT & dates on EAD card)
  **Section 16:** STEM OPT extension: (C) (3) (C)
- ☐ Form I-983 to be completed by student and employer and filed with IS department.
- ☐ Employer's Letter
- ☐ USCIS filing fee of $410.00 (Money Order or Cashier's Check payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**)
- ☐ Two U.S. passport-size photographs (taken within 30 days prior to submitting the packet to ISSS; Print your name and I-94 number on the back of the photos and place them in a zip-lock bag)
- ☐ Copy of academic transcript showing degree awarded and major/field of study and copy of diploma.
- ☐ Copy of passport pages with biographical/identification information, signature and validity dates
- ☐ Copy of the most recent F-1 visa (or approval notice for change of status to F-1)
- ☐ Copy of most recent I-94 record (found at www.cbp.gov/I94); if most recent I-94 is a card, include front and back
- ☐ Copy of any previous EAD card(s) obtained during your F-1 status (front and back)

Please confirm that your major is eligible for the 24-month STEM extension. For a complete list of majors, view the Department of Homeland Security's DHS STEM Designated Degree Program CIP Codes.