STEM OPT Extension Information & Instructions

A 24-month STEM OPT Extension is available for F-1 students who have earned a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) field and who are employed by businesses enrolled in the E-Verify program.

STEM OPT Extension applications have (2) parts:

1. Students must obtain an "STEM Extension OPT Requested Form I-20" from the ISS Office at SUNY Poly.
2. Students must submit their completed "Application for STEM Extension OPT employment" to USCIS.

Students must request and obtain an I-20 with STEM Extension OPT Requested information listed on page 2 from the ISS Office prior to submitting any application to USCIS.

ELIGIBILITY FOR STEM OPT EXTENSION

- **Students must be currently participating in an approved post-completion OPT and properly maintaining F-1 status.**
- **Students must have successfully completed a degree from an accredited, SEVP-certified, U.S. institution in a program included on the** <u>DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List</u> **within the last 10 years.**
  - You can find your program CIP code on the first page of your I-20, under Program of Study.
  - Not all SUNY Poly degrees are eligible for the STEM extension. Be sure to double check your program code on the list above. Students must be working for or have accepted employment with a U.S. employer that are enrolled in <u>E-Verify</u> and the employment must be directly related to the students' major field of study. *You cannot be self-employed.*
- **Students must be employed FULL TIME at more than 20 hours per week.**
- **Students may not be self-employed.**
- **Students' employer must be registered with the federal <u>E-Verify</u> program.**
  - Your employer may learn more about this program and how to sign up <u>HERE</u>.

- **USCIS must receive your STEM Extension application package before the expiration of your current post-completion OPT or cap-gap, but no sooner than 90 days before that date.**
- **Students must submit the STEM OPT Extension application package to USCIS no later than 60 days from the date the OGI adviser recommended the STEM OPT in SEVIS and issued the I-20.**

WHEN TO APPLY

All applications for STEM OPT Extension must be received by USCIS within the following timeframe:

- **Before the last day of your current post-completion OPT** or cap-gap authorization
- **No sooner than 90 days prior to the end of your current post-completion OPT.**
    - *ISS cannot process STEM OPT Extension applications earlier than 90 days before a student's OPT end date. Do not submit this earlier than this deadline.*
- **Within 60 days from the date your STEM Extension OPT Requested Form I-20 was issued by ISS.**

APPLYING FOR THE STEM OPT EXTENSION

IMPORTANT

Make sure your SEVP Portal is updated with your current employment information prior to submitting your STEM OPT Extension Application to the ISS office.

- **Complete the STEM OPT Extension Request Form and upload all required documents.**
    - A copy of the completed Form I-983 signed by both you and your employer (electronic signatures are accepted).
        - For instructions on how to complete Form I-983, please visit the Study in the States OPT Hub. You should also keep a copy for your records.
            - Your Designated School Official's (DSO) name and contact information can be found on your Form I-20.
            - The "SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT" (including 3-digit suffix): BUF214F10259000 (also on your I-20).
    - A copy of your Diploma
    - A copy of your Transcript
    - A copy of your current EAD Card
    - A copy of your most recent I-94.
        - You may retrieve your I-94 online HERE.

Incomplete submissions, or uploaded documents which are not fully completed, will result in a denial of your request and require re-submission.

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IMPORTANT

In order to be fair to all students, applications to the ISS are processed in the order received and will not be expedited.

- **ISS processing time is up to 5-7 business days. Students will receive an email with their STEM OPT Extension Request Form I-20 attached.**
- **USCIS processing time can be up to 3-5 months. We encourage students to plan their applications accordingly.** Tips for filing forms with USCIS: https://www.uscis.gov/forms-filing-tips

*There is no need to contact the ISS to inquire about the status of your request or to inform us of your submission. We do not expedite requests and process them as quickly as possible, in the order it is received. Once your request is processed, you will be notified through the email address provided. *

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Review your STEM OPT Requested Form I-20 carefully to ensure all information is correct prior to submission to USCIS.

NEXT STEPS TO COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION

Review the following information carefully to complete your application to USCIS and lawfully maintain F-1 Student status following your STEM OPT Extension approval.

- **USCIS must receive this Form I-20 and your entire application for STEM OPT Extension:**
    - Within 60 days of the date printed on this Form I-20, and
    - Before the end of your current OPT authorization, as listed on your EAD card.

    ****USCIS is VERY strict with deadlines.****

    If you miss either of these deadlines your application will most likely be denied, and you may or may not be eligible to submit a second application once you receive this denial.

- **You may submit your application for STEM OPT Extension to USCIS either:**
    1) **Online (preferred by most students)**
        a. If you choose to submit your application to USCIS using their online application process:
            i. It is your responsibility to follow the instructions provided by USCIS *VERY* carefully.
            ii. Be sure to SIGN your Form I-20 before submitting your application.
            iii. Upload/attach all required documents before submitting application.
                1. You may not be able to attach more documents/change your application after submission.
                2. Do not submit your application until you have ALL required documents to complete this.
                    a. Incomplete applications may be denied by USCIS, and you likely will not have the opportunity to add documents at a later date.
    2) **By Mail**
        a. If you choose to submit your application for USCIS by mailing a physical application to them:
            i. It is your responsibility to follow the instructions provided by USCIS *VERY* carefully.
            ii. Find the filing address for your location online through USCIS

You may find the complete instructions for submitting your STEM OPT Extension application to USCIS below.
Please read these instructions carefully and make sure you are submitting all required documents as requested.

FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS HERE

Please read all instructions and information from USCIS carefully to ensure you are submitting a completed application.

AFTER YOU HAVE SUBMITTED YOUR APPLICATION TO USCIS

- USCIS may take 1-3 months to process your application
- You may continue your employment for up to 180 days after the end of your current OPT authorization, if you have properly filed your STEM OPT Extension application with USCIS, even if you do not have your STEM OPT Extension approval from USCIS.
- You may check the status of your application online using the USCIS Case Status Online.

AFTER YOU HAVE RECIEVED YOUR EAD CARD FROM USCIS

- *Submit a copy of your EAD card to HERE so we may add this to your records.*
- **You may only work during the dates listed on your EAD card.**
- **All employment must be related to your SUNY Poly program of study**
- **You must work over 20 hours per week to avoid accruing unemployment days**
  - o You may work multiple part time positions as long as your total hours per week is more than 20.
  - o All roles must be related to your SUNY Poly program of study.
- **You may accrue up to 150 days of unemployment during your *entire* OPT authorization period**
  - o The "150 days" are cumulative over the entire period of OPT, including your initial post completion and your STEM authorization period.
- **Students must report all employment changes within 10 days (click link for reporting form)**
  - o *You will no longer be able to change/enter employment information in the SEVP Portal*
  - o You must report ALL changes in employment, including:
    - ▪ New employment
    - ▪ End of previous employment
    - ▪ Changes to current employer (work address, supervisor, etc.)
  - o All changes must be accompanied with an updated Form I-983
- **Students must submit a "6 Month STEM OPT Report" every 6 months (click link for reporting form)**
  - o These reports are due *every 6 months* for the duration of the 24 month STEM OPT period
    - ▪ The first report must be submitted 6 months after the start date of your STEM OPT authorization (on your STEM EAD card)
  - o *This report must be submitted even if no changes in employment have occurred*
  - o This report must include page 5 of the I-983 at the 12 and 24 month submissions.
- **If you have been approved for a change of status to H1B,** notify the ISS as soon as possible.
  - o All students with approved/pending H1B status changes should use this form to submit a copy of the I797 Approval or Receipt Notice for review.

IMPORTANT

If you require a reprint of your Form I-20 following STEM OPT approval/employment information:

You may request a reprint of your Form I-20 HERE

Make sure you have submitted any employment information updates BEFORE requesting an updated Form I-20.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Study in the States** is an official website from the Department of Homeland Security that provides additional information for international students in the U.S.
    - The STEM OPT HUB is a free resource for all students applying for or currently engaged in STEM OPT Extension Employment.
        - There is information on this site specifically to guide students in the application process for STEM OPT, as well as for student employers who have questions about the requirements as an employer.
- **USCIS** provides detailed instructions and information about the I-765 Employment Application Document and procedures.
- Employment resources:
    - **Preventing discrimination in the workplace**
    - **Immigration and employee rights**
    - **Department of Labor: Fact Sheets**