



## 24-MONTH OPT STEM EXTENSION INSTRUCTIONS

### Eligibility Requirements

- Student is currently authorized for post-completion OPT and is working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to his/her field of study at the time of application.
- The degree that was the basis for the student's current period of OPT is a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree listed on the current [STEM Designated Degree Program List](#). A minor field of study cannot serve as the basis for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.
- Student has had fewer than 90 days of unemployment while on OPT.
- Student is employed by or has a job-offer from an employer registered with the "E-Verify" employment verification system.

There is a lifetime limit of **two** periods of 24-month STEM OPT; each occurring after a higher degree level has been obtained. A STEM degree obtained at a U.S. university prior to your current degree may be the basis for a STEM extension under certain circumstances.

### Prior Degree

If you would like your STEM OPT participation to be based on a previously-obtained STEM degree, and not on the degree upon which your current post-completion OPT was granted, you will need to check “yes” to the question on Form I-983 that asks if your STEM OPT extension is “Based on Prior Degree?”

To use a prior degree to qualify for the STEM OPT extension:

- Most recent degree (need not to be STEM) must be from an accredited SEVP certified school
- Student must have received their prior, qualifying STEM degree (at the bachelor's level or higher) within 10 years preceding the date of application for the STEM OPT extension with USCIS
- The qualifying STEM degree needs to be on DHS's STEM List at the time the student submits their application for 24-months extension

### When to Apply

A qualifying STEM degree holder may file the 24-month extension application within 90 days before the current OPT end date. However, the OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the date on which UW-Platteville issues the new I-20 recommending the 24-month extension. In general, a 24-month extension application will take three months to be approved. However, a student's work authorization is extended for up to 180 days while the 24-month extension application is pending. Note, however, that employment must conform to STEM conditions during this interim extension period, including the requirement that the student work only for an E-Verify employer.

### Duration of STEM OPT Employment Authorization

The employment authorization period for the 24-month extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization and ends 24 months thereafter, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.



## Employer's Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements

Employers play a key role in maintaining and strengthening the integrity of the STEM OPT extension program. Although compliance with the program's various reporting requirements predominately apply to students and DSOs, there are instances where STEM OPT employers must assist in tracking the STEM OPT students and their practical training progress. Below are the specific instances in which employers are required to fulfill reporting requirements.

- **Complete and Certify the Form I-983.** The STEM OPT employer must work with the student to complete the Form I-983. Specifically, STEM OPT employers are responsible for completing Section 3 to Section 6 on the Form I-983. The form is not complete until the employer has signed and certified it in the designated areas.
- **Evaluation on Student Progress.** The STEM OPT employer must review the student's annual self-evaluation on their own progress and sign it to attest to its accuracy. Please note: the first evaluation on Form I-983 is to be completed after the student's first year on STEM OPT, and the final evaluation on Form I-983 is to be filled out at the end of the student's STEM OPT employment. Once signed the I-983 evaluation is signed, the employer must return the evaluation to the student, who will provide it to their DSO for recordkeeping.
- **Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983.** Employers must work with the STEM OPT student to report to [iss@uwplatt.edu](mailto:iss@uwplatt.edu) any material changes to, or material deviations from, the student's formal training plan, by filling out a new Form I-983.
- **Loss of Employment.** The employer must agree to report within 48 hours the termination or departure of a STEM OPT employee to UW-Platteville International Student Services Office via email ([iss@uwplatt.edu](mailto:iss@uwplatt.edu)) with the subject line, "STEM OPT Employer Update" if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. An employer shall consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left the employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the consent of the employer, whichever occurs earlier. The employer should provide the student's name, SEVIS ID (if available), and the date the student's employment ended.

For more specific details regarding the employer's responsibility, please go to <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-stem-opt-reporting-requirements>.

### Employer Site Visits

Please [click here](#) for more information on site visits by the Department of Homeland Security to employer locations that train STEM OPT students.

### Why STEM OPT is Good for Small Business

Please [click here](#) to read more about the potential impact that the STEM OPT extension regulation could have on small businesses.



## Students and the Form I-983

- Before applying to USCIS for a STEM OPT extension, a STEM OPT student must download, complete, sign and submit the Form I-983 to their DSO.
- The STEM OPT student and their prospective employer must work together to complete this form
- Students are responsible for facilitating the completion of this form, submitting it with their STEM OPT application and returning it to their DSO, who will keep it in the student's record. DHS maintains the discretion to request and review all documentation for eligibility concerns.
- Students need to properly capture information about their academic history in STEM on the Form I-983.

### Instructions for UW-Platteville Students Completing Form I-983

Please see <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983Instructions.pdf> for detailed instructions on how to complete Form I-983. Information specific to UW-Platteville students completing the I-983 form is available on the ISSS webpage at <https://www.uwplatt.edu/iss/opt-stem-extension>.

## Application Process

### Step One: Request STEM OPT I-20 from ISSS

- Log in to your [online ISSS account](https://www.uwplatt.edu/iss). (To access your online ISSS account, go to [www.uwplatt.edu/iss](https://www.uwplatt.edu/iss). Click on "ISSS Log In.")
- Log in to your online ISSS account with your ISSS account username and password.
- Once you are logged in, click on "Search Programs." (left side of page in black box underneath "Your Home Page")
- In the dropdown box next to "Show:", select "Requests" and click "Search."
- Click on the authorization (i.e. STEM OPT Extension) for which you would like to apply.
- Click on "Apply Now" and select the year for which you will be receiving the authorization.
- Click on "STEM OPT Extension" under "Applications."
- Complete all of the required STEM OPT extension forms, action items, and learning content. Click "Submit" after you have completed each form.
- Documents that you must upload to the "STEM OPT Extension" application page on your online ISSS account include:
  - STEM Extension Request Form
  - the **original** I-983 Form. Please go to <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview-to-access-the-i-983> form and for information on how to complete the I-983.
  - a **copy** of your completed Form I-765 (see instructions at <https://www.uwplatt.edu/iss/opt-stem-extension>)
  - a **copy** of your **most recent** I-94
  - a **copy** of your passport ID page, showing your photo and passport expiration date (there must be at least 6 months left on your passport). If you have had your passport extended, send a copy of the page showing the extension as well.
  - a **copy** of your current EAD card (both sides) and any previous EAD cards (if applicable)
  - Letter from your employer for USCIS. The letter should be on company letterhead and include: 1) Description of how the employment directly relates to the STEM degree; 2) Statement that employer will report your termination or departure from company to ISSS Office; 3) Company's E-verify number; 4) Your job title, brief job description, your employment start and end dates, and current salary.



\*Please allow 5 business days for ISSS to process your I-20 after the materials above are received. Before ISSS processes your I-20, you must also submit your mailing request (see instructions below).

**Step Two: Request to Have Your STEM OPT I-20 Mailed to You from ISSS**

You may request to have your STEM OPT I-20 mailed to you using one of the following shipping methods listed below:

**Option #1: Regular Mail (USPS):** Domestic regular mail (delivery within the U.S.) normally takes 2-5 days at no cost to you. There is no tracking method available for this option.

**Instructions:** [Click here](#) to request that your I-20 be mailed to you via regular USPS mail.

**Option #2: Express Mail Shipping:** International (3-5 days\*) and domestic (1-3 days\*) delivery, package tracking number, charges apply. Please request a pre-paid Fedex mailing label through eShipGlobal. Your order tracking and shipment information will only be available from eShipGlobal; FedEx will not have this information available from their websites.

**Instructions:** [Click here](#) for instructions on requesting a pre-paid mailing label through eShipGlobal.

**Option #3: Pick-Up in Person:** You may also choose to pick up your new I-20 in person.

**Step Three: Mail your STEM OPT Application to USCIS**

Refer to the [Form I-765 filing instructions](#), for complete details on what you must send in your application packet. Mail the following items to the USCIS Service Center which has jurisdiction over the address listed on Form I-765:

- Completed [Form G-1145](#) (attach to the top of your application packet)
- Completed Form [I-765](#) including your employer's E-Verify information
- Check or money order for the [I-765 Application Fee](#), payable to the *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*. The fee was \$410 as of December 23, 2016. Include your SEVIS number in the memo line on the check.
- Photocopy of current Form I-94
- Photocopy of any previously issued EAD cards (front and back)
- Evidence that your degree meets the STEM degree/major requirements. **ONLY ONE** of the following must be submitted with your application:
  - Official transcript (Request from Registrar's Office)
  - Copy of the diploma that shows your degree level and program of study
- Two U.S. passport-style photos taken within 30 days of filing your application (Photograph instructions are found on the Form I-765 instructions under Required Documentation. Also, lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil.)
- Photocopy of pages 1-3 of all previous and current I-20(s), including a photocopy of the new OPT STEM Extension I-20
- Photocopy of passport (photocopy of photo page, renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections etc.)
- Photocopy of visa
- Letter from employer (see above for instructions on what to include in letter)



***IMPORTANT:***

- Please consult the UW-Platteville ISSS Office prior to e-filing I-765 via the USCIS website.
- Check all documents for completeness and accuracy.
- Be sure to sign Forms I-20 and I-765, and make sure your Form I-983 is signed by both you and your employer.
- Make a complete copy of your STEM Extension application for your records.
- Your application packet must be received by the USCIS WITHIN 60 days of the date shown on your new I-20, so we suggest that you prepare all of your application materials before requesting an I-20 from us. After verifying your eligibility for a STEM extension, ISSS staff will enter a recommendation for the extension in SEVIS, and issue you a new Form I-20 showing this recommendation. You will provide a copy of this new I-20 in your STEM Extension application packet to USCIS.

**Step Four**

**Mailing addresses. USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox facilities**

***If you live in:***

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

***Mail your application to:***  
**USCIS Phoenix Lockbox**

***For Express mail and FedEx deliveries:***  
***(Recommended)***

USCIS  
Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S  
Suite 100  
Phoenix, AZ 85034

***For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:***

USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036

***If you live in:***

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia

***Mail your application to:***  
**USCIS Dallas Lockbox**

***For Express mail and courier deliveries:***  
***(Recommended)***

USCIS  
Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121  
Business Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067

***For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:***

USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266



For more information, please see the [I-765 Instructions](#) on the USCIS website. People filing at the lockbox can sign up to receive an email and/or text message confirming that the application was accepted by adding [Form G-1145](#) as the first page of the OPT application. We recommend that you mail your application by express mail such as Federal Express or UPS, or by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, so you will have a record of its delivery.

### **Step 5**

- Please email [iss@uwplatt.edu](mailto:iss@uwplatt.edu) a copy of your new EAD card authorizing the STEM Extension to UW-Platteville ISSS immediately upon receipt. During your 24-month extension, report within 10 days any changes in your name/address, employer name/address, unemployment days or change/loss of employment to [iss@uwplatt.edu](mailto:iss@uwplatt.edu).
- Complete the STEM OPT Validation Report Form in your online ISSS account **every 6 months**. See “Reporting Requirements While on 24-Month Extension” below for more information.
- Upload an annual self-evaluation using your Form I-983 to your online ISSS account. The student must complete the first “Evaluation of Student Progress” portion of the Form I-983 within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date. At the end of the STEM OPT extension, a student must conduct a second, final assessment. Once the evaluations are complete, the student must collect signatures from their employer and return the form to the DSO, who will keep it in the student’s physical student record. Please see <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-and-the-form-i-983> for more information.

### **Special Notes**

- If you later decide not to mail your OPT/24-month extension application (Form I-765 plus supporting documentation) to USCIS for any reason, you must notify the UW-Platteville ISSS office immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT/extension recommendation in SEVIS. Failure to inform a UW-Platteville ISSS office advisor that you are not applying for OPT/24-month extension can cause problems in the future.
- Please meet with a UW-Platteville ISSS office advisor if you have not received an I-797 Receipt Notice with a case number from USCIS within 2-6 weeks from the date that your 24-month extension application was received at USCIS. Please bring/send a copy of delivery confirmation.
- While the extension is pending, we strongly advise you against changing the address listed on Form I-765. Changing your address while the 24-month extension is still pending may result in your being required to file a new OPT application with a new fee if your documents are lost. We suggest that you use the address of someone who can receive mail on your behalf – remember to put “c/o”, followed by the person’s name and address, on Line 3 of Form I-765. The U.S. Postal Service will not forward USCIS mail.
- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please consult the UW-Platteville ISSS Office.
- Your OPT and/or 24-month extension will be automatically terminated when you begin study at another educational level or transfer to another school.
- If you find any errors by USCIS on your new EAD card, please inform the UW-Platteville ISSS office immediately.
- Immediately inform the UW-Platteville ISSS office of any immigration status change.

### **After you have applied for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension:**

- You may continue your OPT employment while your extension request is pending for up to 180 days; OR
- After you have received the EAD:



- You may not accumulate a total of more than 150 days of unemployment, including unemployment during Post-Completion OPT.
- Any employment during the 24-month STEM OPT Extension period must be with an employer registered with the E-Verify program.

## Reporting Requirements While on STEM OPT Extension:

The information/documents listed below must be reported to either the UW-Platteville International Student and Scholar Services Office or to the SEVP Portal within 10 working days of receiving/changing/updating them.

1. **Validating SEVIS Information.** STEM degree holders on the 24-month extension are required to complete the **STEM OPT Validation Report Form** in their online ISSS account to notify UW-Platteville International Student Services Office **within 10 days** of any change of:
  - legal name
  - residential or mailing address
  - employer name
  - employer address
  - change or loss of employment
  - employer non-compliance

Another option is to update your address, phone number or employer information directly via the **SEVP Portal** (see below for more details). Please note: **Students may not add or delete STEM OPT employers in the SEVP Portal**, because students must submit a new Form I-983 to the ISSS Office with the new employer information.

Students are also required to submit a **STEM OPT Validation Report Form** in their online ISSS account **every six months** starting from the date the extension begins and ending when the student's F-1 status ends, the student changes educational levels at the same school, the student transfers to another school, or the 24-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. The validation is a confirmation that the student's name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment are current and accurate.

### SEVP Portal

The SEVP Portal allows F-1 students on OPT or STEM OPT to do the following without relying on the ISSS Office to update the information:

- View details about your post-completion or STEM OPT
- Report changes to your address, telephone and employer information
- View and update data on all your employers in one place
- Any data updates you make in the portal will be sent directly to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

Use of the portal is voluntary, so if you prefer to update your information in your online ISSS account so that the ISSS Office updates your information in SEVIS, you may continue doing so. If you have any questions about the portal or need assistance, call the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400. For more information, please see the [SEVP Portal Help](#) section on Study in the States website.

2. **Annual Self Evaluations.** Each STEM OPT student must upload an annual self-evaluation about the progress of the training experience in their online ISSS account in the “STEM OPT Extension” application under “Forms.”



The student must complete the first “Evaluation of Student Progress” portion of the Form I-983 within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date. At the end of the STEM OPT extension, a student must conduct a second, final assessment on the final page of their Form I-983. Once the evaluations are complete, the student must collect signatures from their employer and upload them in their online ISSS account in the “STEM OPT Extension” application under “Forms.” Please see <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-and-the-form-i-983> for more information on how to complete the annual self-evaluation.

- 3. Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983.** Each STEM OPT student must report to their DSO any material changes to, or material deviations from, the student's formal training plan.

Material changes or deviations from the original Form I-983 may include, but are not limited to:

- Any change of the employer’s EIN.
- Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
- Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity.
- Changes to the employer’s commitments or student’s learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983.

So long as the STEM OPT student and employer meet the regulatory requirements and the modified Form I-983 meets the specified requirements, the student’s employment authorization will not cease based on a change to the plan.

- 4. Changing Employers.** When a STEM OPT student changes employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins to work for pay. The student must also submit a new Form I-983 to their DSO within 10 days of starting the new practical training opportunity.

When a student begins a new practical training opportunity with a new employer less than 10 days after leaving the student’s prior employer, the student may fulfill all reporting obligations (loss of employment and new training plan) by submitting a new Form I-983.

In cases where the period of time between employers is longer than 10 days, the student must first report the loss of employment to the DSO and later submit a new Form I-983.

- 5. Employer non-compliance.** If a STEM OPT student believes that their STEM OPT employer is not complying with the terms and conditions of the 24-month STEM OPT extension regulations, the [Form I-983 instructions](#), and the completed [Form I-983](#) on file with their DSO, the student may:

- Contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by following the instructions found on [ICE.gov](https://ice.dhs.gov).
- Report violations through this Homeland Security Investigations tip submission [form](#).

There are a number of enforcement and oversight mechanisms to help ensure compliance, including reporting requirements, employer site visits, periodic evaluation of a student’s training and required notification of any material changes to or deviations from the Training Plan.

Please note that if a student believes that their employer is not complying with the 24-month STEM OPT extension regulations and Form I-983 instructions, the student should leave that practical training





opportunity and report their unemployment to the DSO. A period of student unemployment, caused by an employer's failure to comply with program requirements, on its own will not affect the STEM OPT student's status so long as the student reports changes in employment status and adheres to the overall unemployment limits.

- 6. Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status.** During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students approved for post-completion OPT may not accrue more than an aggregate of 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12-month OPT period. Students approved for the 24-month extension are allowed an additional 60 days of unemployment. Thus, STEM degree holders granted a 24-month extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during the total 36-month OPT period.

## Traveling while on 24-Month Extension

It is advised that you consult the UW-Platteville ISSS Office prior to leaving the U.S. as immigration regulations can change at any time.

DHS clarifies in the preamble to the final rule that,

“Students on STEM OPT extensions (including those whose application for a STEM OPT extension is pending) may travel abroad and seek reentry to the United States in F-1 status during the STEM OPT extension period if they have a valid F-1 visa that permits multiple entries and a current Form I-20 Certificate of Eligibility endorsed for reentry by the DSO within the last six months. The student's status is determined by CBP upon admission to the United States or through a USCIS adjudication of a change-of-status petition.”

Students should not travel outside the U.S. if his/her EAD expires and the 24-month extension request is pending. For more information, see: [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq\\_f2.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm).

**Please note:** Your EAD will have a notation “not valid for reentry to US.” This is printed on all EAD cards issued for OPT and simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for reentry to the US.

## H-1B Cap-Gap Extension

Duration of F-1 status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting a change of nonimmigrant status with an employment start date of October 1 of the following federal fiscal year (October thru September). The extension of duration of status and work authorization will automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

To request an updated I-20 for cap-gap extension, please provide the following evidence to UW-Platteville ISSS Office via fax at 215-573-9587 along with a cover sheet stating, "Cap-Gap Extension I-20 Request":

- Copy of current I-94 card, front and back
- Copy of EAD card
- For a receipted or approved H-1B petition: A copy of the Form I-797
- For a wait-listed H-1B petition: A copy of the wait list letter from USCIS to the employer
- For a properly filed H-1B petition: A statement from the employer that the student is the beneficiary listed on a properly filed H-1B petition and proof of delivery to a USCIS Service Center showing the date of receipt



Students on cap-gap extensions must also continue to report all changes of name and address, and interruptions of employment.

The final rule makes two important clarifications to the cap-gap benefit regarding travel and petition eligibility:

**Travel.** During the cap-gap period, a student can travel and reenter the United States provided:

- The student has a valid F-1 visa at the time of reentry;
- The student has a Form I-20 that reflects the cap-gap benefit and that has been properly endorsed with the DSO's travel signature; and
- The H-1B petition filed on behalf of the student has been approved before the student travels (i.e., under longstanding INS/DHS policy, an applicant who departs the United States while a change of status application is pending is deemed to have abandoned the change of status application; in such a case, the student's cap-gap benefit would likewise end)

**Cap-subject employers only.** DHS clarifies in the preamble to the final rule that only H-1B petitions filed by cap-subject employers can serve as the basis for F-1 cap-gap extension benefits. An H-1B petition filed by a cap-exempt employer like an institution of higher education, therefore, would not impart cap-gap treatment to a student. In the preamble to the final rule, DHS rationalized that such petitions did not justify the cap-gap benefit, since cap-exempt employers can file an H-1B petition at any time, whereas given the demand for H-1B slots, cap-subject employers must file their petitions requesting a future October 1 start date.