

NOTE: This information is for certain science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree holders who are about to finish their regular 12 months of OPT and wish to request additional 17 months of OPT.

## General Information

On April 8, 2008, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published the interim final rule that changes several key aspects of F-1 optional practical training. One of the key changes impacts **certain** STEM degree holders. Effective April 8, 2008, the 12-month limit on F-1 OPT may be extended by 17 months, for a total of 29 months, for certain STEM degree holders.

## Eligibility Requirements

- The student must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- The F-1 student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a US employer in a job directly related to the student's STEM major area of study.
- The student must have a job offer from an employer registered with the [E-Verify](#) employment verification system at the time of application for the 17-month OPT extension. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her employer is registered with E-Verify.
- The student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- The Designated School Official (DSO) at ISSS must recommend the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS, after verifying the student's eligibility, certifying that the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, and ensuring that the student is aware of his or her responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- The student who timely files a non-frivolous application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

## Employer's Responsibility

The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of an STEM OPT employee to the University of Pennsylvania International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) via email ([oipadm@oip.upenn.edu](mailto:oipadm@oip.upenn.edu) with the subject line, "STEM OPT Employer Update") or through any other means or process identified by DHS if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. Such reporting must be made within 48 hours of the event. 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.

## Qualifying STEM Fields

- Actuarial Science. CIP Code 52.1304
- Computer Science Applications: CIP Codes 11.xxxx (except Data Entry/Microcomputer Applications, which are CIP Codes 11.06xx)
- Engineering. CIP Codes 14.xxxx
- Engineering Technologies. CIP Codes 15.xxxx
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences. CIP Codes 26.xxxx
- Mathematics and Statistics. CIP Codes 27.xxxx
- Military Technologies. CIP Codes 29.xxxx
- Physical Sciences. CIP Codes 40.xxxx
- Science Technologies. CIP Codes 41.xxxx
- Medical Scientist (MS, PhD). CIP Code 51.1401

A full list of CIP Codes is available online at [Classification of Instructional Programs \(CIP 2000\)](#). DHS will announce any future changes to the list at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis>.

## Reporting Requirements While on OPT

STEM degree holders on the 17-month OPT extension are required to report to ISSS within 10 days of any change of:

- legal name
- residential or mailing address
- employer name
- employer address
- change or loss of employment

Students are also required to make a validation report to the ISSS **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 17-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. This six-month validation report is due to the ISSS within 10 business days of each reporting date. Changes and validation reports should be made via email to [Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu)

## Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. STEM degree holders granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total of 29-month OPT period.

## OPT Filing Window

A qualifying STEM degree holder will be able to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the current OPT end date. However, the OPT application must be submitted to the USCIS within 30 days of the date on which ISSS issues an OPT I-20. Processing times for OPT applications can be found on the [USCIS web site](#). In general, expect that the OPT application will take three months to be approved.

## Duration of OPT Employment Authorization

The employment authorization period for the 17-month OPT extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization, and ends 17 months later, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved. For the 17-month STEM extension, employment must be traditional paid employment.

## Application Process

### Step One

Request an I-20 recommending OPT from ISSS. You may request an OPT I-20 by seeing an ISSS advisor with the following items, or by dropping off the following at the ISSS reception desk:

- OPT Extension Request for STEM Degree Holders
- Copies of current and previous I-20(s)
- Copies of passport pages (biographic data, photo, and expiration date)
- Copy of current I-94 card (front and back)
- Copy of current OPT/EAD card if you have not already provided to ISSS

### NOTE: ISSS is not responsible for making copies.

If you are no longer in the Philadelphia area, you may scan and email ([Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu)), or fax (215/573-9587) your STEM OPT Extension Request to ISSS. Please put "ATTN: STEM OPT Extension" on the subject line of your email or on the fax cover sheet.

Upon verifying the student's eligibility and determining whether the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program list, an ISSS advisor will prepare an I-20 recommending OPT on the employment page.

### Step Two

Pick up the OPT I-20 at the ISSS reception desk after three business days.

### Step Three

Mail the following OPT application to USCIS which has jurisdiction over the address listed on Form I-765:

- Completed Form I-765 (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>) including your employer's E-Verify information
  - For post-completion OPT, enter "c 3 C" under Item 16.
  - Type or print legibly.
- I-765 Application Fee (<http://www.uscis.gov/i-765>), payable to the US Department of Homeland Security
- Photocopy of the qualifying STEM degree transcripts or diploma (if it states the major)
- Photocopy of all previous and current I-20s, including a copy of the new OPT I-20
- Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back)
- Photocopy of passport (biographical data, photo, and expiration date)
- Two US passport-style photos (*lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil*)

Check all documents for completeness and accuracy. Be sure sign Forms I-20 and I-765. Make a complete copy of your application for your records. ISSS does not maintain copies of OPT applications.

The Vermont Service Center has jurisdiction over the following states: *Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virgin Islands, Virginia, and West Virginia.* If the state you put on form I-765 in item 3 is not in this list, [refer to the I-765 Instructions](#).

### US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Vermont Service Center

75 Lower Welden Street

Saint Albans, Vermont 05479-0001

Phone: 800-375-5283

We recommend that you mail your application by Federal Express Mail or by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, so you will have a record of its delivery.

## Travel Information

It is prudent to consult an ISSS advisor prior to leaving the US as immigration regulations can change at any time. Currently the following are required to return to the US:

- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except Canadian and Bermudian citizens)
- Your OPT I-20 endorsed for reentry by an ISSS advisor within the last six months
- Your valid EAD for OPT
- Evidence of employment such as a job offer or employment verification letter

If you do **not** have all of these documents listed above or plan to leave the US while your OPT application is pending with USCIS, you should consult an ISSS advisor before traveling abroad. 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, non-frivolous H-1B petition requesting 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 would 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 ISSS via fax at 215-573-9587 along with a cover sheet stating, "**Cap-Gap Extension I-20 Request:**"

- 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
- For a wait-listed H-1B petition: A copy of the wait list letter from USCIS to the employer
- For a receipted or approved H-1B petition: A copy of the Form I-797 and/or the I-797 receipt number

Students on cap-gap extensions must continue to report all changes of name and address, and interruptions of employment, just like other students on OPT.

## Special Notes

- If you later decide **not** to mail your OPT application (Form I-765 plus supporting documentation) to USCIS for any reason, you must notify an ISSS advisor immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS as well. Failure to inform an ISSS advisor that you are not applying for OPT can cause problems in the future.
- Please email ([Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu)) or fax (215-898-2622) a copy of your OPT card to ISSS immediately upon receipt.
- While OPT is pending, we strongly advise you against changing the address listed on Form I-765 as USCIS has not been able to process change of address notifications properly. Changing your address while OPT is still pending may result in filing a new OPT application with a new fee. We suggest to 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 US Postal Service will not forward USCIS mail.
- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please inform ISSS immediately.
- Your OPT 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 OPT/EAD card, please inform ISSS immediately.



International Student and Scholar Services

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Extension Request for STEM Degree Holders

F-1

To Be Completed by STEM Degree Holder Who Is Currently on a 12-Month Period of OPT

Name: (Family/Last) (Given/First) (Middle)

Major(s): Degree(s):

Date of Birth: Month: Day: Year:

Date of STEM Degree Completion: Month: Day: Year:

Current OPT End Date: Month: Day: Year: (recommendation will be for 17 months from this date)

Phone: Email:

Residential Address:

Mailing Address if different:

Employer's Name:

Employer's Address:

Statement of Understanding

- I have thoroughly read and understood the 17-month OPT Extension for STEM degree holders information provided.
I have not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
I have maintained valid F-1 status since I began my study at the University of Pennsylvania.
My employment is directly related to the qualifying STEM degree/field listed above.
I understand that it is not advisable to change employers while the OPT STEM Extension is pending at USCIS, and that I am to consult with an attorney regarding the effect of changing to an employer that is not the employer named on the I-765.
I understand that while on the 17-month OPT STEM extension, I am only allowed to be employed by employers who are registered with E-Verify.
I understand that I must report to ISSS (via Oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu) any change to the following within 10 days:
legal name
residential or mailing address
employer name
employer address
change or loss of employment
I understand that I am required to make a validation report to the ISSS every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when my F-1 status ends; I change educational levels within Penn; I wish to transfer to another school; or the 17-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. I understand that the validation is a confirmation that my name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment are current and accurate. This six-month validation report is due to the ISSS within 10 business days of each reporting date. Such validation reporting should be made via email to oipadm@pobox.upenn.edu.
I understand that accruing an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total of 29-month OPT period will result in a violation of the requirements to remain in valid F-1 status.

Student's Signature: Date: