OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING 17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

Who is eligible for the 17-month OPT extension?
F-1 students with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees in fields listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List are eligible for the 17-month OPT extension. Your degree is determined by the major listed in section 5 of your I-20. If you are not sure if you are in a STEM field, please contact the Office of International Student and Scholar Services.

What requirements must I meet to be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension?
1) You must be currently authorized for Post-Completion OPT and working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to your field of study.
2) You must have successfully completed a bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree in a field on the STEM Designated Degree Program list. A SEVIS-certified U.S. college or university must have conferred your degree.
3) At the time of application for the 17-month extension, you must have a job or a job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify system.
4) You must not have previously received a 17-month OPT STEM extension at any degree level.

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). It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. Contact your employer to determine if they are in E-Verify. ISSS does not have access to this information.

What must the employer do so that F-1 students can receive the 17-month OPT extension?
The employer must be registered in E-Verify and give its E-Verify number to the student.
The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the International Student & Scholar Office of the student’s former school within 48 hours.

When should I apply for the 17-month OPT extension?
We recommend that you apply for the 17-month extension 90 days prior to the expiration of your EAD card to allow sufficient time for USCIS processing and background checks. Your application must be received by the USCIS before your current OPT expires.

How long is the OPT application process?
Processing time at the USCIS is estimated to be 90 days. However, processing times vary widely depending on the time of year and the workload at the USCIS Lockbox to which you send your application.
After I receive my EAD card, what must I do?
- Every 6 months, complete the OPT Data Form available on the ISSS website at http://www.albany.edu/isss/pdf/Forms/OPT/FILLABLEOPT20DATA20FORM.pdf
- Keep the “Help USCIS Serve You Better” EAD card cover sheet. (If you ever need to request another card, you should submit this sheet.)
- Notify ISSS about the following information:
  - Any change in your name
  - Any change in your residential address (within ten days)
  - Any change of employer or employer’s address
  - Any interruption of employment lasting longer than 10 days
  - Any change in your immigration status (e.g. change to H-1B)

Do I have to maintain employment?
The Interim Final OPT Rule published on April 8, 2008 permits F-1 students who are authorized for the 17-month OPT extension to be unemployed for a maximum of 120 days during their entire OPT period. Students are required to report any change of employment within a week of the change. Employment must also be confirmed every 6 months. USCIS can terminate a student who has been unemployed for more than 120 days. Students who have been unemployed for more than 90 consecutive days will have their I-20 automatically terminated.

Can I Travel while my application is pending?
Travel outside of the U.S. while your application is pending can be risky. Please consult with ISSS if you need to travel while your application is pending.
OPT STEM Extension Application Procedures

Step One – Submit to ISSS:
1. Fill out the OPT Data Form available on line at http://www.albany.edu/isss/pdf/Forms/OPT/FILLABLE_OPT%20DATA%20FORM.pdf
2. Fill out the attached OPT STEM Extension Request
4. A copy of current EAD card
5. Fax, e-mail, mail, or drop off the Data Form, Extension Request and completed Form I-765 to ISSS.
   a. It takes 5 business days for an ISSS advisor to process your request. A new I-20 with a recommendation for your OPT extension will be created. The new I-20 will be mailed to you as per your instruction on the OPT Extension Request.

Step Two - Submit to USCIS:
1. Submit the following documents to USCIS in order to receive a new Employment Authorization Document card. This must be done within 30 days of the creation of the I-20:
   i. Original Form I-765
   ii. Form G-1145E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance
   iii. A photocopy of page 1 and page 3 of the new I-20 with the ISSS advisor’s recommendation for STEM Extension Optional Practical Training on page 3.
   iv. A photocopy of either: both sides of your I-94 card, or a print out of your I-94 number from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html
   v. A copy of the photo page (identification page) of your passport. Also include any extra pages that record extensions of the validity of your passport.
   vi. A copy of the F1 visa page of your passport (even if the visa has expired)
   vii. A copy of ALL previous I-20s that have been issued to you (pages 1 and 3 only)
   viii. A copy of your previous OPT EAD card
   ix. You must provide one of the following: photocopy of your diploma, official transcript, or unofficial transcript giving evidence that you have graduated from you academic program.
   x. Two passport type photographs with WHITE background. Print your name and I-94 card number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of the I-765.
   **DO NOT CUT THE PHOTOS!**
   xi. Official job offer letter on company letterhead with a employer’s signature.
   xii. Fee of $380. Checks may be made payable to the Department of Homeland Security. You may send a money order or a personal check drawn on a U.S. bank, NO CASH. Attach the check to the front of the I-765.
2. Copy the entire application for your records.
3. Staple all above documents together and send them by certified mail with a return receipt OR express mail (so that you have a tracking number) to the U.S. Service Center with jurisdiction over your current residence.

Step Three:
1. You will receive a notice (Form I-797) from the USCIS.
2. Track the status of your application and current processing times through USCIS, using the Receipt Notice mailed within 2-3 weeks: https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp
3. Authorization is granted by the EAD card (Employment Authorization Document):
   i. The EAD will be mailed only to the address listed on Form I-765. Government mail cannot be forwarded, so you must notify USCIS immediately if your residential address changes.
   ii. **You may continue working up to 180 days after your 12-month OPT expires**, while the STEM Extension is pending. Provide a copy of your Receipt Notice to your employer.
I-765 Instructions

To Complete the I-765 Form

A. I am applying for: Check first box “renewal”; fill out lines 1 through 17; sign and date.

B. #3 Return Address: This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 3 ½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the USCIS envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the card is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your card will be returned. *Federal Mail is not forwarded. If the address given on the Form I-765 is not valid your EAD will be sent back to USCIS by the post office and you will need to do a new application and pay the application fee again.

C. #10 Alien Registration Number: You can use your I-94 number found on the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport) OR the A# listed on your current OPT card.

D. #11 Previous employment authorization: Because you are applying for a 17 month extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information.

E. #16 Eligibility Categories: for the 17 month extension of OPT write: ( c ) ( 3 ) ( C )

F. #17 Complete this section with your degree field as listed on your I-20 and your employer’s “E-Verify” number.

G. Certification: Remember to sign and date the I-765.

Important Note

The USCIS must receive the documents **within 30 days of the issuance of your I-20** with 17-month extension recommendation and the signature on your Form I-765. Be sure to photocopy your entire OPT application for your personal records.

Where do I send my EAD Card Application?

We recommend that you send your application to USCIS by a method that can be tracked, such as Certified mail or Express mail.

If you live in:  

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

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

USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For Express mail and courier deliveries:

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

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 U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:

USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

For Express mail and courier deliveries:

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

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OPT STEM Extension Request Form

Eligibility for the 17-month OPT Extension:

- Students who are currently engaged in post-completion OPT; and
- Who have earned a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a STEM CIP that is approved by DHS; and
- Who has a job or job offer from an E-Verify employer

**Note: The OPT STEM Extension is only available to each student one time. A student who is approved for an OPT STEM Extension can never apply for it again.**

Student Information

Family (Last) Name_________________________  Given (First) Name_________________________

UAlbany ID#_________________________  SEVIS# _________________________________

E-mail: _________________________________________  Phone: __________________________________

Current EAD Card approval dates: ____________________ to ____________________

Employer Information

Employer’s name & address EXACTLY as registered with E-Verify:
__________________________________________________________  Student’s work location if different than employer’s E-Verify address:
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Student’s Supervisor: Name & Title: _______________________  Supervisor’s phone number: ___________________  Supervisor’s email ________________________

Shipping Information

Please indicate how you would like to receive your I-20

_____ I will come to the ISSS office to get my I-20

_____ Please send my I-20 via regular US Mail (not trackable) to the following address:

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

_____ I would like to pay to have my I-20 sent express mail. I have order mailing through eShip Global’s University Express Mail Service at www.eshipglobal.com.