The Basics

The STEM OPT extension is a 24-month period of practical training that directly relates to an F-1 student’s program of study in an approved STEM field. Students on Post-Completion OPT may apply for STEM OPT after obtaining a STEM OPT I-20 from the ISSO, gathering additional documents, and sending an application to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for employment authorization.

STEM OPT requires more reporting than Post-Completion OPT and has stricter employment requirements. For example, during STEM OPT you can only work for an E-Verify employer and you and your employer will maintain an I-983 training plan. While on STEM OPT, you must report to the ISSO every 6 months to maintain your status.

Eligibility:
• You must currently be on Post-Completion OPT.
• You must have earned a STEM degree.
• The extension may be based upon your most recent STEM degree or upon a STEM degree that was conferred within the past 10 years.
• You must have qualifying employment:
  • Employer must be in E-Verify
  • Employment must be compensated
  • The student and employer must have a “bona fide” employer-employee relationship
  • Employment must be directly related to the STEM degree
  • Employment must be full-time (at least 20 hours per week)

FAQs

What is the I-983?
The I-983 is a training plan completed by you and your employer. It may be audited by Department of Homeland Security, so it is important to keep your I-983 up to date. This is a “living document” that you and your employer will update throughout your STEM OPT period. Each time it is updated, you will submit a copy to the ISSO.

When can I apply?
You can apply for your STEM I-20 and submit your application to USCIS up to 90 days before Post-Completion OPT expires. USCIS must receive your application before your Post-Completion OPT end date. You cannot apply during your grace period.

What is the 180-day extension?
If your STEM OPT application is timely filed, your OPT authorization will extend up to 180 days past your EAD end date. During that time, you must meet job requirements for STEM OPT extension. Your STEM OPT receipt notice and Post-Completion EAD card are your proof of continued work authorization.
Maintaining Status

Limits on Unemployment

While on Post-Completion OPT, you are allowed a maximum period of 90 days of unemployment. During the 24-month STEM OPT Extension, you are allowed an additional 60 days of unemployment. Unemployment days are cumulative, and any unused days of unemployment during Post-Completion OPT carry over to your STEM OPT period.

Unemployment days are each day (including weekends) that you do not have qualifying employment.

Travel with Pending Application

It’s risky to travel while you have a pending application with USCIS. If USCIS sends a request for evidence or other correspondence, it can be very difficult to respond from outside the U.S. If you travel while your application is pending, pay attention to your OPT EAD end date. You may travel and return to the U.S. before the OPT end date has passed.

However, if your Post-Completion OPT end date has passed and you do not have your STEM OPT EAD card yet, you may have difficulty re-entering the U.S.

Options after STEM OPT

After the OPT end date, there is a 60-day grace period in which you can:

- Start another academic program at UT Dallas
- Transfer to another school
- Change to another visa category
- Leave the U.S. (Notify the ISSO of your departure through OPT reporting)

Reporting Requirements

During the STEM OPT period, you have additional reporting requirements. In addition to reporting changes in employment and personal information, you must submit validation reports every 6 months, even if your information has not changed. For the 12-month and 24-month validations, you must also complete the self-evaluation on page 5 of your I-983.

You also must maintain your I-983 and report material changes. When your employment information changes, you will report to ISSO and include a copy of your updated I-983. Detailed reporting instructions can be found online at https://www.utdallas.edu/ic/isso/opt-extension/.

Qualifying Employment: Bona Fide Employer-Employee Relationship

STEM OPT employment is more limited than Post-Completion OPT employment. One of the STEM OPT requirements is that the employer must maintain a “bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student.” This means that the employer cannot be an employer in name only. The employer that signs the Form I-983 must also be the one that provides training to the F-1 student.

While STEM OPT participants may engage in training at a work site other than the employer’s principal place of business, all of the training obligations must still be met. USCIS has indicated that certain types of employment may not be able to demonstrate a bona fide employer-employee relationship. These types of employment include:

- Multiple employer arrangements
- Sole proprietorships
- Employment through “temp” agencies
- Employment through consulting firms that provide labor for hire

Keep in mind that Department of Homeland Security can conduct site visits and has said they will review on a case-by-case basis whether the student is a bona fide employee of the employer signing the training plan.
Guide to STEM OPT Extension

Mailing Instructions

Verify your Information

You should check your I-20 to ensure your information is correct. Your OPT recommendation must be dated within the past 60 days when received by USCIS or the application will be denied. The OPT STEM Extension start date on page 2 of your I-20 should reflect the day after your initial period of OPT ends. The end date should be 24 months later. It is YOUR responsibility to ensure your application is complete and correct before mailing it to USCIS.

Assemble your Application

□ Form G-1145: Optional form. Authorizes USCIS to email or text status updates.
□ $410 filing fee: Payable by check, money order or Form G-1450 (for credit card). No starter checks. Must have name and address printed on check. Write your I-94 number at the top of the check/money order. Enter purchaser’s address and signature on Money Order. Can have a different address than I-765. Make payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Check uscis.gov/I-765 for most up-to-date details.
□ Original Form I-765: If corrections are needed, fill out a new form. Use current version: uscis.gov/i-765. Use black ink and sign by hand. If a question does not apply to you, type or print “N/A” unless otherwise directed.
□ Copy of STEM OPT I-20: pages 1 and 2, signed by you and ISSO advisor. Must be dated within the past 60 days when received by USCIS or the application will be denied. Check recommendation date on page 1 in remarks section.
□ Copy of Passport ID page: showing picture and expiration date. If passport will expire in next 6 months, renew passport before sending application or submit proof of renewal application to USCIS.
□ Copy of most recent I-94: paper copy front and back, or print out from CBP website: cbp.gov/I94. If I-94 information is incorrect contact Deferred Inspection Office: utdallas.edu/ isso/files/Deferred-Inspection-Office.pdf
□ Copy of F-1 visa or Change of Status Approval Notice: visa can be expired.
□ Copies of former OPT EADs: Front and back.
□ Copy of diploma: Related to this period of STEM OPT, or UT Dallas official transcript showing degree conferred.
□ Proof of Employment: Copy of your job offer letter or other proof of employment [ex: employment verification letter from your employer or the prior three months’ pay stubs].

Mail your Application

You must mail your application to USCIS, and they must receive it no later than the last day of your 60-day grace period. Do not attempt to deliver your application in person. It must be mailed. You can use regular U.S. Postal Service or a courier service like FedEx, DHL, or UPS. The ISSO recommends getting a tracking number for your shipment.
For mailing addresses, visit our webpage: utdallas.edu/ic/ isso/USCISapplications/.
Top Tips

I-765

Check your I-765 before mailing it. It is your responsibility to make sure you are submitting a complete, correct application. Here are the most common issues to check for. For detailed instructions, see I-765 instructions at: uscis.gov/i-765.

• Always use most up-to-date version of the form, available at uscis.gov/i-765
• The eligibility category for STEM OPT is (C)(3)(C).
• On page 1 Part 1, check the box for “renewal”.
• For question 28.a, you should include your degree level, degree name and CIP code as listed on your I-20. If you need more space, you can add additional information in Part 6.
• Sign the I-765 by hand with a black ink pen.
• Always submit your original I-765, not a copy
• For the question about your employer’s E-Verify number, make sure to include the E-Verify number and not the EIN (tax) number. These are different codes. Check with your employer if you’re not sure what to put.

I-983

You and your employer will fill out the I-983 together. You cannot fill out this form by yourself. There are sections for you, the student, to complete and sections for the employer to complete. Here are the most common issues to check for. For detailed instructions, see https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/additional-resources/form-i-983-overview.

• The supervisor and work site listed on your STEM OPT Request and subsequent STEM OPT Reporting Forms should match Section 5 of the I-983.
• The supervisor listed in Section 5 of the I-983 does not have to be the same person who signs Section 3 and Section 6 of the I-983.
• Page 1 of the I-983 asks for your “Employment Authorization Number.” This is the 9-digit “USCIS #” on your EAD card.
• If you exceed the character limit to type an answer, you may handwrite it instead.

Check your UT Dallas email

The ISSO will send important information to your UT Dallas email address. All F-1 students on STEM OPT should maintain access to their UT Dallas email address through the end of the STEM OPT period.
If you’re having difficulty accessing your UT Dallas email, contact the Office of Information Technology office: utdallas.edu/oit/helpdesk/.