Optional Practical Training (OPT) 24-Month STEM Extension:
Frequently Asked Questions
Students in F-1 Status

Who is eligible for the OPT 24-month STEM extension?
- You are currently in a 12-month period of post-completion OPT
- Your employer during the 24-month extension period is enrolled in the E-Verify Program
  - For more information: [http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify](http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify)
- Your degree program is included on the list of STEM Designated Degree Programs
  - Code for degree program is located in program of study section under Major 1 of the I-20 (code format: xx.xxxx)

Who is not eligible for this type of request?
- Students who majored in programs that are not included on the list of STEM majors
- Students who have received a STEM extension at a higher educational degree level or have already used two periods of STEM extension OPT
- Students whose period of OPT has ended

How is the time determined for the OPT 24-month STEM extension?
- Additional 24-months from the end date listed on your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) for your current 12-month OPT

Can I request more than one OPT STEM extension?
- Yes, students are permitted two STEM extensions over their lifetime, as long as 2nd STEM extension is based on a higher educational level.

What are the reporting requirements during the OPT 24-month extension?
- Students must update address and e-mail every 6 months and within 10 days of a change
- Students must submit evaluation within 12 months of the approved starting date on EAD
- Students must submit concluding evaluation upon completion of extension

When is the earliest I can apply for this request?
- 90 days prior to the expiration of OPT on your post-completion OPT EAD

When can an OPT 24-month extension application arrive at U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)?
- Up to 90 days prior to the end date on your post-completion OPT EAD
- Must be received by USCIS Service Center no later than the last day of your post-completion OPT EAD

What is the approximate timeline from submission of this request to ISSO to receipt of EAD?
- 10 working days    ISSO processing
- 2 calendar days    Mailing time (if using FedEx)
- 90 calendar days   USCIS processing
- 15 calendar days   Issuance and mailing of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- 5 calendar days    Mailing time to you if you are no longer in Ames

How do I submit the e-form request?
- This is an electronic process completed by logging in to CyStart using your ISU NetID and password.
- CyStart  F-1 Student Services  Optional Practical Training (OPT) 24-Month Extension

What documents must I submit as part of the e-form request?
- **OPT 24-Month Extension Request e-form**
  - Upload Form I-983 training plan completed by student and employer
  - If extension is based on a previous degree, upload diploma, transcripts, and previous I-20
- **If working at ISU during the 24-month extension, your hiring or host department must complete:**
  - **ISU Employment Verification** section of the OPT 24-Month Extension Request e-form
    - *Note:* You will not see this section, as it appears only to the ISU department you identify after your request is forwarded to that department
  - Letter of Intent in .pdf format (for paid positions)
  - Export Control Sheet in .pdf format (for paid and unpaid positions)
  - **Volunteer Agreement** in .pdf format (for unpaid position)

What is the Form I-983 (Training Plan)?
- For more information, see https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview
- Must be submitted to ISSO via CyStart in order to receive an OPT STEM Extension recommendation I-20

What more can you tell me about the required photographs?
- Must be taken within the 30 days prior to the date USCIS receives your OPT application
- For more information, see http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/photos/digital-image-requirements.html

What is the approximate timeline for ISSO to process this request?
- 10 working days after the **Optional Practical Training (OPT) 24-Month Extension** e-form has been submitted in CyStart

How will I know if my e-form request has been approved?
- ISSO will send an e-mail to both your ISU and alternate e-mail addresses

Do I need to meet an ISSO advisor to prepare the final application for USCIS?
- No, you will meet with another staff member in ISSO
  - Please follow the instructions provided in the e-mail sent to you by ISSO
What documents must I bring to ISSO to complete my application?

*If you cannot come to ISSO, you may mail your application to ISSO for review.*

- $380 personal check, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the 30 days prior to the date USCIS receives your OPT application
- Printed copy of the completed Form I-765 (typed)
- Printed copy of the completed Form G-1145 (typed)
- Copy of either ISU diploma or ISU transcript which lists your major and degree earned
- Copy of each of the following immigration documents:
  - Previous EAD(s) from USCIS
  - Previous I-20 form(s) with OPT recommendations
  - I-94 card, front and back (please make sure the entry stamp is visible on the copy) or print out of electronic I-94
  - Passport identity page (if expiration date of passport is on a different page, also copy that page)
  - Passport page with most recent F-1 visa (or most recent visa if current visa is not F-1)

Who should I contact to ask if ISSO has mailed my application?

- ISSO Receptionist, 515-294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

What steps should I take if I choose to mail the final application myself?

- Wait for the new OPT 24-Month Extension I-20 to be sent to you by mail
  - When you receive the I-20, complete the information in section 11 using a blue ink pen.
  - Make a copy of pages 1 and 3 and submit the copy of the I-20 with the final application
    - You should keep the original I-20 with OPT STEM recommendation
- Put the final application together in the order listed below, ensuring the check is on top
- Proof the final application one last time to ensure dates are correct, signatures are included, etc.
- Mail the application to the ISSO for review. We will send the application back with revisions
  - Include copies of all documents included in the final application as ISSO would need to reference these if the USCIS sends a Request for Evidence (RFE) to follow-up on your OPT application
    - If changes are necessary, please make the changes prior to mailing
  - Once ISSO confirms your application is complete and accurate, you may mail it.

What documents must I submit to USCIS as part of the final application?

- $380 personal check, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the 30 days prior to the date USCIS receives your OPT application with SEVIS numbers written softly on the back
- Printed copy of the completed Form I-765 (typed)
- Printed copy of the completed Form G-1145 (typed)
- Copy of pages 1 and 2 of new I-20 with OPT 24-month STEM extension recommendation on page 2
- Copy of ISU diploma or ISU transcript which lists your major and degree earned
- One copy of each of the following immigration documents:
  - Previous EAD(s) from USCIS
  - Previous I-20 form(s) with OPT recommendations
- I-94 card, front and back of original or print out of electronic I-94
- Passport identity page
- Passport page showing expiration date of passport
- Passport page with most recent F-1 visa (or most recent visa if current visa is not F-1)

**How should I mail the final application if I choose to mail it myself?**

- ISSO recommends using FedEx for mailing

**Where should I mail my final application if I choose to mail it myself?**

- Find where to send the application [here](#).

**How will I know if USCIS has received my application?**

- USCIS will send you an e-mail (see sample below) and/or text message
- USCIS will send ISSO the official I-797 Receipt Notice
  - This assumes the ISSO address was used as the mailing address on the Form I-765

**Sample e-mail message:**

Your case has been accepted and routed to the USCIS Nebraska Service Center for processing. Within 7-10 days by standard mail you will receive your official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) with your Receipt Number LINxxxxxxxxxx. With the official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) you may visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) where you can check the status of your case using My Case Status. We suggest you wait until you have received your Form I-797 before checking My Case Status.

This confirmation provides notification of the date USCIS received your case. This notice does NOT grant any immigration status or benefit. You MAY NOT present this notice as evidence that you have been granted any immigration status or benefit. Further, this notice does NOT constitute evidence that your case remains pending with USCIS. The current status of your case must be verified with USCIS.

**PLEASE DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE**

**When will I receive the e-mail or text message from USCIS?**

- Approximately 2 – 3 weeks after your application is received by USCIS

**What if I don’t get the e-mail or text message from USCIS?**

- Contact the ISSO at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

**How do I know when my 90-day processing time begins?**

- The Received Date on the I-797 Receipt Notice represents the beginning of the 90 days

**How do I check the status of my application?**

- Go to the Case Status box at [https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)
- Enter the receipt number listed in your e-mail or text message

**What is the average time from when the decision is made by USCIS and when the EAD arrives at ISSO?**
- USCIS has indicated it can take up to 30 days before your EAD is produced and mailed
- ISSO generally receives the EAD within 7-10 days after it is mailed from the USCIS contractor

**What if I notice my name is incorrect—either misspelled, portion missing, or order reversed—when I review my receipt notice?**
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

**What if I want to change the dates of my OPT 24-month extension?**
- The dates of your 24-month OPT extension are non-negotiable. The begin date will be the day after your current EAD expires and the end date will be 24-months from this date.

**What if my request is still pending and it is more than 90 days from the receipt date?**
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

**What if I want to withdraw my application?**
- Contact an ISSO advisor at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu
- Request to withdraw must be made prior to the start date on the EAD
- You will not receive a refund of the $380 application fee

**How will I know my EAD has arrived at ISSO?**
- ISSO will send you an e-mail message to your ISU and alternate e-mail accounts

**Who should I contact if I don’t hear from ISSO and it has been more than 21 days since the USCIS Case Status system indicates a decision has been made on my application?**
- ISSO at 294-1120 or isso@iastate.edu

**What do I need to do to pick up my EAD from ISSO?**
- You may come yourself
  - Please bring a photo ID such as your passport, ISU Card, or driver’s license
- You may designate someone else to pick up your EAD
  - You must provide ISSO with a written and signed authorization that specifies a specific person to pick up your EAD. Please include the individual’s name and ISU ID number. The person picking up the EAD must have photo I.D.

**What if I am no longer in Ames and need to collect the EAD?**
- Complete a **Mailing Authorization** e-form request
- Designate someone else to pick up your EAD
  - You must provide ISSO with a written and signed authorization that specifies a specific person to pick up your EAD. Please include the individuals name and ISU ID number. The person picking up the EAD must have photo I.D.

**What additional steps must I take if I will be working at ISU during the 24-month extension?**
- Attend an ISSO Scholar Check-In Session
  - Register for a check-in by calling the ISSO at 515-294-1120
Complete Form I-9 if you will be getting paid by ISU

Can I take classes during OPT?
- The regulations indicate your OPT is automatically terminated when you begin study at another educational level

Can I travel outside of the U.S. after my post-completion OPT EAD has expired and my OPT STEM extension application is pending?
- No, you cannot travel abroad during this time period

How many days of unemployment are allowed during the OPT 24-month extension?
- Receive an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days of unemployment

What if a student goes over 150 days of unemployment?
- Refer to the U.S. ICE document located at:

What types of positions are considered employment for the OPT 24-month extension?
- Refer to the U.S. ICE document located at:

What else should I know about the OPT 24-month extension?
- All employers during the 24-month extension must be enrolled in the E-Verify Program

Disclaimer: This Frequently Asked Questions document is intended for general information and guidance. Please consult with an International Student and Scholar Advisor in the International Students and Scholars Office regarding your individual request.