24-Month Extension
Optional Practical Training
OPT

Version 03/16/2017
ISSO Information

International Students and Scholars Office

Contact Info:
isso@iastate.edu
515-294-1120
www.isso.iastate.edu

ISSO Address:
Iowa State University
3248 Memorial Union
2229 Lincoln Way
Ames, IA 50014-1097
International Student Advisors
Designated School Officials (DSO)

• Ashley Huth – Design, Vet Med, and Inter-disciplinary Studies
• Katherine Lundberg – Mechanical, Electrical, and Computer Engineering
• Jessica Fincham – College of Engineering (excluding Mechanical, Electrical, and Computer Engineering)
• Elliot Uhl – College of Business, Human Sciences, and Agriculture and Life Sciences
• Teresa Witcher – College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Agenda

• 24-Month OPT Extension
  • Changes to the STEM extension
  • Eligibility requirements
  • Preparing Application
  • Reporting Requirements During STEM OPT
STEM Extension Information
Resources for OPT Requests
What is the OPT STEM Extension?

• Extension of Optional Practical Training for students who have completed a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) fields

• Benefit of F-1 status immediately following a period of post-completion OPT

• Allows students to continue engaging in practical experience that is directly related to their major after they complete their degree requirements

• Valid for 24 months (after initial 12 months of OPT)
STEM Extension Overview

• 24 month extension
• Two extensions in lifetime
  • The second extension must be at a higher level than the first
• Extension can be based on previous STEM degree
  • Must follow period of post-completion OPT
• Student and employer must complete Form I-983 Training Plan
• Application can reach USCIS
  • No earlier than 90 days before post-completion OPT EAD end date
  • No later than post-completion OPT EAD end date
• Maximum 150 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT and STEM OPT combined
• Additional reporting requirements
Eligibility
Mandatory Degree Requirements

The degree that is the basis for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension must be:

- From a SEVP-certified U.S. educational institution
- Listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List
- At the Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctorate level

Student is eligible immediately following post-completion OPT and after completing all course requirements

- Excluding creative component/thesis/dissertation
Previous Degree Requirements

• The STEM OPT may be based on a previously obtained STEM degree that was:
  o Conferred within the past 10 years
  o From a U.S. educational institution that is SEVP-certified
  o Included on the current STEM Designated Degree Program List

• Each degree may only be used once as the basis of a 24-Month STEM OPT extension

• Must be in a period of post-completion OPT when applying

• All requirements must be met at the time of the Designated School Official’s (DSO) STEM OPT recommendation
Employment Requirements

- Employment on STEM OPT must be directly related to the STEM major
- Employment on STEM OPT must happen immediately after a period of post-completion OPT
- Employer must be E-Verified
- **Must be paid** employment for a **minimum of 20 hours** per week
- Employee and employer must complete the Form I-983 Training Plan
  - Bona fide employer, employee relationship must exist
  - Employer agrees to report the termination/departure of an OPT student to ISSO within 5 days of the termination/departure
Compensation and Time Requirements

• Must be commensurate with terms and conditions applicable to the employer’s similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment

• Required to work at least 20 hours per week for each employer
  • Excluding time off taken consistent with leave-related policies

• Not allowed to volunteer while on STEM OPT

• Must disclose any adjustments on an updated Form I-983
Form I-983, Training Plan

- Form I-983 is used to:
  - Identify goals for the STEM opportunity and specific knowledge, skills, and techniques that will be gained
  - Explain how goals will be achieved
  - Describe methods of oversight and supervision
  - Explain how the training is directly related to the student’s qualifying STEM degree
  - Obtain a performance evaluation (after 12 and 24 months)

- Completed Form I-983 must be submitted before the DSO may recommend an OPT Extension
  - ICE and/or USCIS may request a copy. Must be kept updated.

- New Form I-983 required when starting with a new employer or when changes are made with current employer
  - Student must submit a new Form I-983 within 10 days of change
Application Process
Application Timeline

• To be eligible for STEM OPT, the application:
  • Must be received and receipted by USCIS on or before the end date of the post-completion OPT EAD
  • Must be received by USCIS no earlier than 90 days before the end date of the post-completion OPT EAD

• USCIS may take over 90 days to process the application

• If application is timely and properly filed, student may continue working up to 180 days beyond post-completion OPT end date while the application is pending
  ➢ USCIS will issue a Receipt Notice which you may use to complete Form I-9 with your employer to authorize this 180 day period of employment

• Work performed after post-completion OPT EAD end date must be directly related to STEM major used as the basis for the 24-month STEM extension
Submitting STEM OPT Request

• To apply for STEM OPT, first request new I-20 by logging into CyStart through the ISSO website. Use the Limited Services option to login.
Submitting STEM OPT Request

• Next, complete the OPT STEM Extension e-form found under the F-1 Student Services tab.

**ISSO will create your new STEM OPT I-20 within 10 working days of submitting the request.**
Collecting STEM OPT I-20
You will receive the following e-mail from ISSO:

From: Stapes, Elizabeth M [ISS]
Subject: STEM OPT I-20 Created

Dear OPT Applicant,

Your OPT I-20 is ready for you to pick up. You can pick it up at the ISSO (3248, Memorial Union) during our normal business hours.

Your STEM OPT application will only be considered if it is received by USCIS:
No later than 60 days after your STEM OPT I-20 was created
No earlier than 90 days before your current OPT EAD end date
No later than your current OPT EAD end date

If you would like ISSO to review and mail your application:
Bring ALL of the completed documents listed below to Room 3248 Memorial Union on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday between 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. or between 1:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. for review with an ISSO staff member.
The review is done on a walk-in basis, and you do not need an appointment.

If you will not have ISSO review your application:
Upload a scanned copy of your final packet in the OPT Application Upload e-form in CyStart.
You can find where to mail your OPT application at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses#Lockbox%20Addresses. (If you use ISSO’s address on your Form I-765, you will need to mail your application to the Phoenix Lockbox)

Documents needed for OPT application:
$410 personal check or money order, made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Two identical, passport style photographs taken within the past 30 days (we recommend Walgreens)
Printed original of the completed Form I-765 (must be typed and signed)
Printed original of the completed Form G-1145 (must be typed)
Copy of I-20 with OPT STEM authorization signed by DSO within the past 30 days of when USCIS receives it
Copy of official ISU transcript
Copy of diploma, optional
Copy of I-94 record (access record at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html)
Copy of your passport identity page (showing picture, name, and date of birth)
Copy of your passport page with most recent F-1 visa
Letter of employment from STEM employer
Copy of all I-20 forms with prior OPT endorsements, if any
Copy of all previous EAD(s) from USCIS (front and back), if any

If you are not able to pick up your OPT I-20 from ISSO, you can:
Submit the Mailing Authorization e-form in CyStart to request ISSO to mail your I-20 to you (if you have not done so already), OR
Authorize a friend to pick up your OPT I-20 by emailing their name to lstapes@iastate.edu
Required
24-Month STEM OPT Application Documents
Required Application Materials

- Check or Money Order for $410 to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”
- 2 identical passport photos taken within 30 days
- Typed Form I-765
- Typed Form G-1145
- Copy of new signed STEM OPT Recommendation I-20
- Letter of employment
- Copy of official transcript
- Copy of diploma (optional)
- Copy of all previous EADs
- Copy of all previous OPT Recommendation I-20s
- Copy of electronic or paper I-94 record
- Copy of passport pages with biographical info and expiration date
- Copy of visa
Check or Money Order

Personal Check or Money Order for $410
- Make Payable to: U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Write I-765 and your SEVIS number in the Memo section
- If the address on your check is not current, cross out and write in correct address.

![Check Example]
Photos

• 2 color photos
  – Write SEVIS number lightly in black pen on the back of both pictures

• Taken within past 30 days

• U.S.-quality-passport photos

• Complete specifications:

   http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html
I-765: Sample and Template

https://www.Iso.iastate.edu/info-for-f-1-students
I-765: Sample and Template
New I-20 with STEM OPT Recommendation

Recommendation indicated on page 2 of new I-20

• Requested begin and end date
Degree and Employment Information

• Copy of official transcript

• Copy of diploma (optional)
  – Indicating education level and field of study

• Letter of employment
  – Offer letter (if starting in the future) or letter confirming your employment with the company (if currently employed)
  – On company letterhead

• Copy of all previous EADs
I-94 Record

- Paper or Electronic copy
- Retrieve electronic copy from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home
Passport and Visa Copies

• Biographic information
  – Photo, date of birth, country of birth

• Passport expiration date
  – Sometimes on a different page

• Most recent U.S. Visa page
Sending STEM OPT Application to USCIS
Mailing Final Application

• ISSO recommends that you allow us to mail your application
  – ISSO uses FedEx 2-day or overnight delivery
  – Your U-Bill will be charged the actual cost of mailing

• If you choose to mail it yourself
  – Lockbox mailing location is based on address listed on Form I-765
  – Review instructions on https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses
Electronic Receipt Notice

• You will receive an electronic receipt notice from USCIS by email and text if you complete the G-1145 form.
  
  – This commonly takes to 2-3 weeks
  
  – You can check the status of your case with information in the e-mail
  
  – Sample e-mail message:

    Your case has been accepted and routed to the USCIS Potomac 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 YSCxxxxxxxxx. With the official Receipt Notice (Form I-797) you may visit 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
Paper Receipt Notice

- You will receive a paper receipt notice from USCIS.

  - USCIS sends a paper I-797 Receipt Notice to the mailing address listed on the I-765
    - May take 2 – 4 weeks

  - 90 day processing starts from I-797 received date

  - ISSO will email you a copy when I-797 is received
Case Status

- Use www.uscis.gov (click “Check your Case Status”)
  - Might stay on “Case Was Received” for 2-3 months
Pending STEM OPT Application

While your STEM OPT application is pending with USCIS:

• You remain in legal, F-1 status

• You may continue working for 180 days past end date on EAD card, as long as STEM OPT application was timely and properly filed
  – USCIS will issue a Receipt Notice which you may use to complete Form I-9 with your employer to authorize this 180 day period of employment
Application Process Overview

1. Verify that you are eligible for the STEM OPT Extension
2. Complete Form I-983 Training Plan with employer
3. Complete the STEM OPT e-form on Cystart
4. Compile all required application materials
5. ISSO will email you when your STEM OPT I-20 is created
6. Bring or send application materials to ISSO for review
7. Completed application is mailed to USCIS
8. Receive a receipt notice within 2-3 weeks after submission from USCIS
9. If STEM OPT is approved, USCIS will mail your new EAD to the address listed on your Form I-765
   • If you listed ISSO on the Form I-765, ISSO will email you regarding EAD collection
Reporting Requirements During STEM OPT
Report to ISSO:

• Must **update ISSO within 10 days** of a change to:
  • Legal name
  • Living address
  • Employer
  • Employer address
  • Employer name
  • Loss of employment

• If you change employers, new employer must be enrolled in E-verify and complete an I-983 training plan within 10 days of starting

• Required to complete a **validation report for ISSO every 6 months** while on STEM OPT Extension
  • Due within 10 business days of each reporting date
  • Complete validation report through CyStart
Changes to the Form I-983

• Student and employer are required to submit a modified Form I-983 to DSO, if any changes are made

• Material changes and deviations include:
  – Any change of Employer Identification Number
  – Any reduction in compensation that is not tied to reduction in hours worked
  – Any significant decrease in hours worked per week
  – Any decrease in hours worked below the minimum 20 hour weekly requirement
  – Any change that makes the I-983 inaccurate

Department of Homeland Security may conduct a **site visit** to any employer
Form I-983, Evaluation Requirements

Student must submit self-evaluations of their progress toward the training goals outlined in Form I-983, signed by student and employer.

- Initial evaluation must be completed within **12 months** and concluding evaluation within **24 months**
  - Due within 10 days following the conclusion of the reporting period

- Changes to the Form I-983, Training Plan must be reported to the DSO
  - Student must submit a modified Form I-983 through CyStart “OPT Reporting Requirements” e-form
Periodes of Unemployment

- Allowed up to 150 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT and STEM OPT combined
  - Count unemployment days between start date on post-completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and end date of STEM OPT
  - Count all days, including weekends and holidays, during unemployment
  - Count any week employed less than 20 hours as a week of unemployment
  - Count days outside the U.S., if unemployed

- Considered a violation of F-1 status to go over 150 days of unemployment
  - Student is required to keep track of unemployment periods
Travel During STEM OPT Extension

• Students are able to travel while on an approved 24-month STEM OPT Extension

• Students with a pending 24-month STEM OPT Extension application and an expired post-completion OPT EAD should not travel

• Recommended documents when traveling:
  • STEM OPT I-20 with travel signature within 6 months of reentry date
  • Passport with at least 6 months of validity
  • Valid F-1 visa to reenter
  • STEM OPT EAD card
  • Letter of employment
Questions?

Please email ISSO at isso@iastate.edu or make an appointment with an International Student Advisor.