STEM
Optional Practical Training Extension Instructions
2019 - 2020

Office of International Services (OIS)
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General STEM OPT Extension Information
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What is STEM OPT Extension?

Eligible F-1 students with certain STEM bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degrees who finish their program of study and participate in an initial period of regular post-completion OPT (often for 12 months) have the option to apply for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.

For more information, see the [STEM OPT Extension Overview](#) on the Study in the States website.
Who is Eligible to Apply for STEM OPT Extension?

• Must currently be on post-completion OPT and meeting all OPT employment requirements

• Have earned a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree listed on the [STEM Designated Degree Programs List](#). The CIP code (XX.XXXX) can be found on the I-20 under “Major”

• Must file a [Form I-983](#) with employer that is [E-Verified](#)
  • Must be paid – volunteer or unpaid is not authorized
  • Must be 20 hours or more per week
  • Must be a bona-fide employer-employee relationship (as defined [here](#) by USCIS)
  • Must be directly related to field of study & appropriate to degree level obtained

See [Study in the States](#) for additional guidance on employer requirements
Applying for STEM OPT Extension Based on a Previously Obtained Degree*

*Most USC students apply based on their current degree
Applying for STEM OPT Extension Based on a Previously Obtained Degree*

*Most USC students apply based on their current degree

If one of these scenarios applies to you, you will need to file based on a previously obtained degree. Otherwise, proceed to Application Filing Period.

**EXAMPLE 1**
Tommy is on OPT based on a Master’s degree in Business Administration from USC. He previously received a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics at UCLA. Tommy may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension based on his UCLA Bachelor’s degree.

**EXAMPLE 2**
Tanya is on OPT based on a Master’s degree in Sociology from USC. She previously received a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Science at USC. Tanya may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension based on her USC Bachelor’s degree.

**EXAMPLE 3**
Trudy is on OPT based on a PhD degree in Biomedical Engineering from USC. While she was getting her PhD, she also obtained a Master’s degree in Electrical Engineering. Her I-20 with USC was always for Biomedical Engineering, but she has a job opportunity that is primarily related to her Electrical Engineering degree. Trudy may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension based on her USC Master’s degree.
Applying for STEM OPT Extension Based on a Previously Obtained Degree*: Eligibility Requirements

*Most USC students apply based on their current degree

- The prior degree is a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree listed on the STEM Designated Degree Programs List. The CIP code (XX.XXXX) can be found on the I-20 under “Major”.

- Student must meet all other STEM OPT Eligibility Requirements

See Study in the States for additional guidance on eligibility requirements
Application Filing Period
When Should Students Apply for STEM OPT Extension?

• Regulations permit students to apply as early as *90 days prior* to the OPT EAD expiration date

  • Once issued the STEM OPT Extension I-20, USCIS must receive STEM OPT Extension application *within 60 days* of the “Date Issued” on Page 1 of the STEM OPT Extension I-20

⚠️ USCIS must **receive** completed STEM OPT applications **BEFORE** the OPT EAD expiration date

• USCIS will **deny** any applications that are received before or after the filing period—no exceptions
Continuing Employment After Filing for STEM OPT Extension

- Students whose applications are received by USCIS before the OPT EAD expired will be able to continue employment while the STEM OPT Extension application is pending

  - Students may work until they receive the final decision from USCIS on the application (i.e. approved or denied) OR for 180 days, whichever comes first
STEM OPT Extension Start and End Date

The start date of STEM OPT Extension is the day after the 12-month OPT EAD expiration date, and ends 24 months later.

EXAMPLE
Tommy graduated in Fall 2017 and started his 12-month OPT on 12/14/2017. His OPT EAD expires on 12/13/2018. Tommy’s STEM OPT Extension will start on 12/14/2018 and end on 12/13/2020.
Things to Consider Before Applying for STEM OPT Extension

• **Plan ahead!** The entire STEM OPT Extension application process – from STEM OPT Extension I-20 request to receipt of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS – will take approximately *three to four months*

! **OIS OPT I-20 Processing Time:** 7 Business Days  
**USCIS OPT Application Processing Time:** 3.5 to 5.5 months*

*As of 1/2019. Always check [https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/) for most up-to-date processing times. Select “I-765…” & “Potomac Service Center” from the drop-down menus
Things to Consider Before Applying for STEM OPT Extension

Continued:

• **STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Fee** – Students must pay the $200 STEM OPT Extension Administration Fee via the OIS OPT I-20 Request System
  - This fee is non-refundable and must be paid upon submission in order for OIS to begin processing the STEM OPT Extension I-20
Student’s Responsibilities While on STEM OPT Extension
STEM OPT Extension Reporting Requirements

While on STEM OPT Extension, students are required to:

• Report changes to their US address and telephone information via the online SEVP Portal within 10 business days
  • For guidance on the SEVP Portal, please visit the Study in the States website

• Report any changes to their employment situation (i.e. start a new job, quit current job, laid off from current job, unemployed) via the OIS STEM OPT Extension Employment Reporting System within 10 business days

Failing to report STEM OPT employment information and/or US address updates in a timely manner may result in termination of your SEVIS record by USCIS.
STEM OPT Extension Reporting Requirements

Continued:

- Must submit six-month validity reports
  - Must report employment information to OIS every six months using the online OIS STEM OPT Employment Reporting System
    - Reporting is required even if there are no changes to employment

- Must submit self-evaluations (12-month, 24-month/final)
  - Must submit a Evaluation of Student Progress from the I-983 Form after year one and year two of their approved STEM OPT Extension period
    - Student conducts a self-evaluation and employer signs the form. Student submits all pages of I-983 (including the signed evaluation) to OPTSTEM@usc.edu
    - For more information about the annual self-evaluation, please visit the Students and the Form I-983 page
STEM OPT Extension Reporting Requirements

Continued:

• Must submit a revised **I-983 Form** if there are any “material changes” to the terms and conditions of the original I-983, such as:
  • Any change of the employer’s EIN.
  • Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
  • Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity.
  • Changes to the employer’s commitments or student’s learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983.

• The revised I-983 form must be emailed to **OPTSTEM@usc.edu** within 10 days of the change

• Student must report to OIS within 10 days of changing employers – see next slide for further instructions
Changing Employers During STEM OPT Extension
Changing Employers While STEM OPT Extension Application is Pending with USCIS

OIS **strongly advises against** changing employers while STEM OPT is pending to avoid any complications, delays, or potential denials with USCIS. However, if the change of employers is inevitable, OIS advises students to:

1) Notify OIS and request an updated I-20

2) Mail updated I-20 and supporting documents to USCIS*

**Must have copy of I-797 Receipt Notice from original STEM OPT application in order to proceed**
Changing Employers While STEM OPT Extension Application is Pending with USCIS

Continued:

STEP 1
• Log in to the OIS STEM OPT Employment Reporting System
  • Enter the previous employment information with the corrected end date
  • Enter new employment information

STEP 2
• Email the following to OPTSTEM@usc.edu:
  • In email subject line write: STEM OPT Change of Employer: Last Name, First Name – SEVIS ID #

  Attach the following documents in PDF format:
  • Completed Request for 24-Month STEM OPT Extension Change of Employer I-20
  • Completed Form I-983 for new employer
    • See USC’s Sample STEM OPT Extension I-983 for guidance
  • Completed Form I-983 for previous employer (pages 1-5)
    • Include signed final self-evaluation on page 5
  • eShipGlobal Payment Confirmation, if applicable

Once all information has been received and reviewed by DSO, a new I-20 will be issued to student. Please allow 7 business days for OIS to process change of employer I-20 requests.
Changing Employers While STEM OPT Extension Application is Pending with USCIS

Continued:

• Upon receipt of the new I-20 (remember to sign and date), mail the following documents to USCIS* immediately:

  1) Updated Form I-765 – see here for instructions
  2) Copy of new I-20 (pages 1-2)
  3) Cover letter stating that the correspondence is to provide updated employer information for a Form I-765 that has already been filed and is pending review with receipt number [insert receipt number].

* Refer to USCIS office address on the I-797 Receipt Notice. Indicate the I-797 receipt number (starting with WAC, YSC, etc.) in all correspondence by writing this number on the top of each document.
Changing Employers While on Approved STEM OPT Extension

Students who change employers need to notify OIS within 10 days of the change and request an updated I-20.

STEP 1
• Log in to the OIS STEM OPT Employment Reporting System
  • Enter/submit the previous employment information with the corrected end date
  • Enter/submit new employment information

STEP 2
• Email the following to OPTSTEM@usc.edu:
  • In email subject line write: STEM OPT Change of Employer: Last Name, First Name – SEVIS ID #

Attach the following documents in PDF format:
• Completed Request for 24-Month STEM OPT Extension Change of Employer I-20
• Completed Form I-983 for new employer
  • See USC’s Sample STEM OPT Extension I-983 for guidance
• Completed Form I-983 for previous employer (pages 1-5)
  • Include signed final self-evaluation on page 5
• eShipGlobal Payment Confirmation, if applicable

Once all information has been received and reviewed by DSO, a new I-20 will be issued to student. Please allow 7 business days for OIS to process change of employer I-20 requests.
Recordkeeping Tips

• Keep copies of all I-20s and EADs
  • Students who apply for future immigration benefits in the US will likely be asked to provide evidence of all previous EADs and I-20s

• Keep original EAD in a safe place, not in a wallet
  • Lost or stolen EAD will need to be replaced at the student’s expense
150-Day Unemployment Rule

- Students on STEM OPT Extension may accrue up to 60 additional days of unemployment, for an aggregate total of 150 days (up to 90 days on OPT and 60 days STEM OPT Extension)

- USCIS may terminate SEVIS records of students who accrue 150 days or more of unemployment and/or do not comply with employment reporting requirements
150-Day Unemployment Rule

Continued:

Students who are unemployed should select one of the following solutions before accruing 60 STEM OPT unemployment or an overall total of 150 days of unemployment:

- Begin a new degree program at USC
- Transfer SEVIS record to another SEVP certified school
- Change visa status
- Depart the United States
International Travel
# Required Documents for Re-Entry into the U.S.

### Pending STEM OPT Application
- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa
- STEM OPT I-20 (signed for travel by OIS)
- I-797 Notice of Receipt (Payment receipt that can be used as proof of properly filing OPT application with USCIS)

### Approved STEM OPT Application
- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa
- STEM OPT I-20 (signed for travel by OIS)
- Employment verification letter, offer letter, or interview schedule
- Valid STEM OPT EAD (EAD says “Not Valid for Re-entry” since the card must be presented with above documents. The EAD alone does not suffice for re-entry to the US.)

Students are strongly advised to wait until they receive their STEM OPT Extension EAD before traveling internationally.
Travel Signatures

• Students who have an STEM OPT I-20 and need to travel internationally will need to request a travel signature from OIS prior to leaving the US

⚠️ Travel signatures while on STEM OPT are only valid for **6 months**.

• **Need a travel signature?** Submit the following documents to OIS:
  1) Completed [Travel Signature Request Form](#)
  2) STEM OPT I-20 (Original)

• Students can **pick up their signed I-20 in person or request express mail delivery via eShipGlobal** (at the student’s expense)

⚠️ Plan ahead – don’t wait until the last minute to request a travel signature! Visit the OIS website for current [document processing times](#)
Options After Completing STEM OPT Extension
Options After STEM OPT Extension Ends

Students are allowed to remain in the US for **up to** 60 days after the STEM OPT EAD end date. This period of time is called a “grace period”. During this time, students may **not** work and cannot leave and reenter the US as F-1 students.

Please see next slide for options during the 60 day grace period.
## Options During 60-Day Grace Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Begin a new program of study at USC</strong></td>
<td>Students must apply to the new program, be admitted, and be issued a new I-20 from the <a href="https://www.usc.edu/gradadmissions">Graduate Admissions (GA)</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apply for a change of status</strong></td>
<td>USCIS must receive the application to change the immigration status before the end of the grace period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer to another institution</strong></td>
<td>Students must request the transfer of their SEVIS record to that institution before the end of the 60 days. To request a transfer of SEVIS record, students will need to submit the <a href="https://www.i%C3%AAt.org">SEVIS Transfer Release Form</a> and the transfer in form (if applicable) to OIS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Return home</strong></td>
<td>Students can return to their home country or depart the US before the end of the grace period.</td>
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STEM OPT Extension Application Instructions
# STEM OPT Extension Application Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td>Student submits STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request to OIS via the <a href="#">OPT I-20 Request System</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>Student receive STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
<td>Student assembles STEM OPT Extension application packet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4</strong></td>
<td>Student mails STEM OPT Extension application packet to USCIS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 5</strong></td>
<td>USCIS adjudicates STEM OPT Extension application and mails decision to student</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 6</strong></td>
<td>If STEM OPT Extension application is approved, USCIS mails EAD to student</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 7</strong></td>
<td>Student works on STEM OPT EAD, and complies with all STEM OPT Reporting Requirements (6 month validity reports, self-evaluations, I-983 changes, etc.)</td>
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STEP 1: Student requests STEM OPT Extension I-20 online

• Log in to **OPT I-20 Request System**
  
  • Click “Create A New Request”
  • Select “I-20 Type: STEM OPT Extension”
  • Complete the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Information

• Upload copies of the following documents (PDFs only):
  1) Current I-20 (all pages) **
  2) Current Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front side only)
  3) Completed form I-983 (typed and signed)
     • Refer to USC’s [Sample Form I-983 for USC Students](#)
     • For additional guidance, see [Study in the States website](#).
  4) [eShipGlobal payment confirmation email](#)
  5) Most recent [SEVP Portal](#) employment screenshot

** If you are requesting a STEM OPT Extension I-20 based on a previously obtained degree, please refer [here](#) for additional documents needed
STEP 1: Student requests STEM OPT Extension I-20 Online

Continued:

• Submit payment for the $200 STEM OPT Extension Administration Fee*
• Finalize and submit the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request
• You will receive an email confirming your request was submitted to OIS

* This fee is non-refundable and must be paid upon submission in order for OIS to begin processing the STEM OPT Extension I-20
STEP 2: Student Receives STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS

- OIS will mail the STEM OPT Extension I-20 and an application checklist to student via eShipGlobal
  - Reminder: OIS processing time for STEM OPT I-20 request is 7 business days
- Student must sign and date STEM OPT Extension I-20

Remember to check expiration date of your OPT EAD and “Date Issued” on Page 1 of your STEM OPT Extension I-20. If your application is received by USCIS after the expiration of your OPT EAD and/or more than 60 days after “Date Issued” on Page 1, your STEM OPT Extension will be denied.
STEP 3: Student Assembles STEM OPT Extension Application Packet

Assemble all documents as indicated on the STEM OPT Application Checklist:

- Original Form G-1145
- Original Form I-765 – see here for instructions
- Passport Photocopy
- I-94 Printout
- Photocopy of complete STEM OPT I-20, sign and date “Student Attestation” section
- Two US Passport Style Photos*
- Application Fee Payment (check -or- Form G-1450)*
- Verification of Graduation from USC (copy of official/unofficial transcript -or- copy of USC diploma showing degree earned and program of study)
- Photocopies of all previously issued EADs, CPT I-20s, and OPT I-20s (if applicable)

*Paperclip the 2 photos and payment method on top of the application packet
**STEP 1 for Students Applying Based on a Previously Obtained STEM Degree**

- In [OPT I-20 Request System](#), upload copies of the following documents (PDFs only):

  1. **Current I-20 (all pages), along with:**
     - Signed letter of explanation that states you are applying based on previously obtained degree (state degree, name of degree, and CIP). Be sure to include your name, SEVIS ID, and I-94 admission number on the top of your letter.
     - Copies of previous I-20s that show STEM OPT-eligible CIP/Major
     - Copy of transcripts and/or diploma, showing completion/award of STEM OPT-eligible degree
     - Letter from employer explaining how work opportunity is directly related to STEM OPT-eligible degree


  3. **Completed form I-983 (typed and signed)**
     - Refer to [Sample I-983 for USC Graduates](#)
     - For additional guidance, see [Study in the States website](#)

  4. **eShipGlobal payment confirmation email**

  5. **Most recent [SEVP Portal](#) employment screenshot**
Instructions for USCIS Form I-765

- Download form and instructions from USCIS
- Type all information
- Refer to USC’s Sample STEM OPT I-765
- Print and sign completed form in black ink
U.S. Address

• Students are strongly advised not to move or change their mailing address while the OPT application is pending with USCIS – it can cause delays with processing and receiving EADs in a timely manner.
  
  • Refer to USC’s [Sample STEM OPT I-765](#) for address instructions
  • A Post Office Address (P.O. Box) is acceptable for mailing address, but not physical address
  • The U.S. Postal Service does not forward mail from USCIS
  • If students are no longer residing at the address listed on the I-765, the EAD will be returned to USCIS
    • Students are *not* notified when EADs are returned to USCIS

If it is absolutely necessary for you to change addresses after mailing your OPT application to USCIS, you **must** **notify OIS** and the USCIS National Service Center of this change. Please call USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 or complete the online [USCIS Change of Address](#) form.
Two U.S.-Style Passport Photos

Passport Photo Requirements – click on link for specifications

• Only U.S.-style passport photos taken in the U.S. will be accepted by USCIS

Handwrite on the back edge of each photo:

• Name in the format of “LAST NAME, FIRST NAME”
• I-94 Arrival/Departure Admission Number

Note: Damaged photos are not accepted by USCIS. Do not press too hard when writing on them. Do not let ink smear on the face of the photo.
I-765 Application Fee Payment

- Non-refundable
- Fee Amount: $410
- Two payment options available, choose one:
  - Form G-1450 for credit card payment
  - OR -
  - Check (personal, cashier’s, or money order) payable to the US Department of Homeland Security (do not abbreviate) – see sample check below & next slide

```
Tommy Trojan
1234 Sample Street #123
Los Angeles, CA 90089

Pay to the order of: US Department of Homeland Security
The sum of: Four hundred ten dollars

Date of birth: 08/20/1989
Memo: I-94#12345678910

Check ## ## ##
mm/dd/year

$410.00

Tommy Trojan
```

Always format dates as MM/DD/YYYY
Check Payment for Application Fee

**If you are paying with a credit card, please skip to the next slide**

- **Pay to the Order of:** “US Department of Homeland Security”
- **Amount:** “Four hundred ten dollars”
- **Memo section** (bottom left corner): Write date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY) and I-94 admission number
  - If check is a cashier’s check, money order, or from another account holder, be sure to write student’s name as well

- Do not write on or sign the back of the check
- Check must have imprinted name and either imprinted or hand-written address in upper left corner
- Check must be a U.S. check from a U.S. bank, but does not need to be from students’ own accounts
- Ensure sufficient funds are available
- If the check “bounces” (is not valid due to insufficient funds), USCIS will suspend the application until receiving valid payment, which delays the application processing time
Credit Card Payment for Application Fee

- Use a card from a U.S. bank & ensure sufficient funds are available
- Type or print legibly in black ink

Sample **Form G-1450**

Credit card holder must sign here in black ink

Authorized Payment Amount: $410.00
Standard STEM OPT Processing Time

- **USCIS STEM OPT Application Processing Time**: 3.5 to 5.5 months*


- Students can [check the status of their I-765 application](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/) online
  - Enter receipt number from I-797C Receipt Notice of Action
Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Once the STEM OPT Extension application is approved by USCIS, students will receive the Approval Notice in the mail. A few days later, the EAD will also arrive by mail.

Sample EAD

- A valid passport, I-94, STEM OPT I-20, and STEM OPT EAD will satisfy employer’s request for proof of work authorization
Rejection, Request for Evidence (RFE), or Denial

• If there are errors or omissions in the application packet, USCIS may reject (and return) the application or issue a RFE

Contact OIS and schedule an appointment as soon as you receive a rejected application, RFE, or denial notice

• Rejection: If the application is rejected, students may need to request a new OPT I-20 if it has been more than 50 days since the I-20 was issued (refer to “Date Issued” on Page 1)
• RFE: The RFE will explain which additional documents are required along with return mailing instructions
  • Use the return envelope that is provided by USCIS to send the requested documents to USCIS
  • Respond to the RFE by the stated deadline; otherwise, students risk having their request for OPT significantly delayed or denied
• Denial: USCIS will indicate the reason for the denial on the denial notice
STEM OPT Extension Cancellation

• Students who wish to forfeit their OPT and return to their home country must notify OIS so that their SEVIS records can be closed out. Failure to report departure information to OIS can result in the automatic termination of their SEVIS record as a result of excessive unemployment days, which could have a negative impact on any future U.S. visa applications.

  • Report departure via OIS STEM OPT Employment Reporting System and by email to optstem@usc.edu

STEM OPT Extension and Taking Classes – “Avocational Coursework”

• Students may take classes that are avocational or recreational in nature, and are incidental to their employment. Per USCIS regulations, students cannot be enrolled in a certificate- or degree-seeking program while on OPT.
Questions Regarding STEM OPT Extension?

Call OIS at (213) 740-2666 to schedule an appointment (phone or in-person) with an advisor or email ois@usc.edu.