# STEM OPT Extension Instructions

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Revised 9/23/2020
General STEM OPT Extension Information
## Useful Terminology and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIP Code</td>
<td>6 digit code (XX.XXXX) found on the I-20, under “Major.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Homeland Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>Designated School Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAD</td>
<td>Employment Authorization Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIN</td>
<td>Employer Identification Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Verify</td>
<td>A web-based <strong>system</strong> that allows enrolled employers to confirm the eligibility of their employees to work in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT</td>
<td>Optional Practical Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFE</td>
<td>Request for Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVIS</td>
<td>Student and Exchange Visitor Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVP</td>
<td>Student and Exchange Visitor Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSN</td>
<td>Social Security Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USCIS</td>
<td>Citizenship and Immigration Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 work for a minimum of 21 hours per week to meet full-time requirements
  - 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

If you plan to apply for STEM OPT based on a prior degree, please email OPTSTEM@usc.edu with a copy of your STEM-eligible I-20 and proof of graduation for your STEM-eligible degree. An advisor at OIS must review and approve your request before you will be eligible to proceed. Include your SEVIS ID in the email subject line.
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
  • See ‘Applying for STEM OPT Extension’ on the USCIS website
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 *four to five months*

- **OIS OPT I-20 Processing Time**: 7 business days
- **USCIS OPT Application Processing Time**: 3.5 to 5.5 months*

*As of 7/2019. 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
Students’ Reporting Requirements While on STEM OPT Extension
Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT Extension

While on STEM OPT Extension, students must:

- Submit six-month data validation reports to OIS
- Submit Form I-983 12-Month Self-Evaluation to OIS
- Submit Form I-983 Final Self-Evaluation to OIS
- Report any changes to their employment situation to OIS
- Report any changes to their U.S. address and contact information online SEVP Portal within 10 days of the change

Per the Department of Homeland Security, students on approved STEM OPT Extension must comply with these reporting requirements. Failing to report in a timely manner may result in termination of your SEVIS record by USCIS.
24-Month STEM OPT Extension Reporting Timeline

If **changing employers** on STEM OPT, an additional final evaluation is due upon ending employment with the previous employer. The 12-month/first-year and 24-month/final self-evaluations are always due at the 12- and 24-month mark, **regardless of when employment with the most recent employer began.**
Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT Extension

Six-month data validation reports

• While on STEM OPT, DHS requires students to validate their address, telephone number, and employment information with their school every 6 months
  • For additional information, see DHS’s Study in the States website

• When are these reports due?
  • Every 6 months after your STEM OPT EAD Start Date
  • To find your exact due dates, log into your SEVP Portal account and review your reporting due dates in the “STEM Student Due Date Announcement” notice

• How do I submit my report?
  • Complete and follow instructions on the STEM OPT Extension Data Validation Report Form
Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT Extension

Form I-983 Self-Evaluations

- While on STEM OPT, DHS requires students to submit Form I-983 to their school at the following points in time:
  - 12-months after STEM OPT EAD start date
  - 24-month after STEM OPT EAD start date (i.e. by STEM OPT EAD end date)
  - On the final day of employment when changing employers, visa status, or transferring to another school

When are these self-evaluations due?
- To find your exact due dates, log into your SEVP Portal account and review your reporting due dates in the “STEM Student Due Date Announcement” notice
- If changing employers, visa status, or transferring to another school, a final evaluation is due on last date of employment

Form I-983 Self-Evaluation submission instructions continued on next slide
Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT Extension

Form I-983 Self-Evaluation Submission Instructions

STEP 1: Complete Page 5 of Form I-983, signed by yourself and employer

12-month self-evaluation

- Complete top section (only) of Page 5
- Due 12 months after STEM OPT EAD start date, regardless of start date with employer
- Range of Evaluation dates should cover first 12 months of STEM OPT Extension following STEM OPT EAD start date

Final (24-month or end of employment) self-evaluation

- Complete bottom section (only) of Page 5
- Due on STEM OPT employment end date
- Range of Evaluation Dates should cover final 12 months of STEM OPT Extension period, ending on STEM OPT EAD end date, or employment end date due to change in employer, SEVIS transfer, or change in visa status

STEP 2: Complete and follow instructions on the STEM OPT Extension Data Validation Report Form
Reporting Requirements for STEM OPT Extension

Report the following changes to employment to OIS within 10 days of the change:

- Change to employment situation due to starting new job, quitting current job, laid off, unemployed, etc.
  - If ending employment, or changing or adding employers, students must submit an I-20 request and required documentation to OIS – see next slide for further instructions

- Any “material changes” (as defined by DHS) to their Form I-983 Training Plan
  - Log into SEVP Portal and update employment information, if applicable
  - Must submit a revised Form I-983 to OPTSTEM@usc.edu
    - In email subject line write: I-983 Material Change: Last Name, First Name – SEVIS ID #
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, students must:

1) Have received their I-797 Receipt notice from USCIS for their original STEM OPT Extension application

2) Notify OIS and request an updated I-20

3) Mail updated I-20 and supporting documents to USCIS

*Change of Employer Instructions continued on next slide*
Changing Employers While STEM OPT Extension Application is Pending with USCIS

**STEP 1:** Request an updated I-20 from OIS by completing and following the instructions on the [STEM OPT Extension Change of Employer I-20 Request Form](#)

**STEP 2:** Update STEM OPT Extension application with USCIS
- 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 I-797C Receipt Notice
  3) Copy of new I-20 with new employer information
  4) Letter of explanation – be sure to include receipt number, I-94 admission number, and full name

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

Students are required to apply for a new STEM OPT Extension I-20 reflecting their change of employer within 10 days of the change.

To obtain a new I-20, complete and follow the instructions on the STEM OPT Extension Change of Employer I-20 Request Form.
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 from the 90 days allowed on OPT, for an aggregate total of 150 days

⚠️ • 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 days of unemployment on STEM OPT, 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pending STEM OPT Application</th>
<th>Approved STEM OPT Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Valid passport</td>
<td>• Valid passport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Valid F-1 visa</td>
<td>• Valid F-1 visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• STEM OPT I-20 <em>(signed for travel by OIS)</em></td>
<td>• STEM OPT I-20 <em>(signed for travel by OIS)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I-797 Notice of Receipt (Payment receipt that can be used as proof of properly filing OPT application with USCIS)</td>
<td>• Employment verification letter, offer letter, or interview schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Valid STEM OPT EAD <em>(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.)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

• Students who have a STEM OPT Extension 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 Extension are only valid for 6 months.
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 approved STEM OPT Extension end date printed on their EAD. This period of time is called a “grace period”. During this time, students may not work and cannot leave and re-enter the US as F-1 students. During their 60-day grace period, students can:
  
  • **Begin a new degree program at USC** - Students must apply to the new program, be admitted, and be issued a new I-20 from USC Graduate Admissions
  
  • **Transfer SEVIS record to another school** – Student must submit a completed Transfer Out from USC to Another Institution form to OIS@usc.edu
  
  • **Change visa status** - USCIS must receive and approve the application to change the immigration status before the end of the grace period
  
  • **Depart the United States**
STEM OPT Extension Application Instructions
# STEM OPT Extension Application Overview

**Step 1**
- Student submits STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request to OIS via the OPT I-20 Request System

**Step 2**
- Student receives STEM OPT Extension I-20 via eShipGlobal

**Step 3**
- Student assembles STEM OPT Extension application packet

**Step 4**
- Student mails STEM OPT Extension application packet to USCIS – USCIS must receive application *before* post-completion OPT EAD end date

**Step 5**
- USCIS adjudicates STEM OPT Extension application and mails decision to student

**Step 6**
- If STEM OPT Extension application is approved, USCIS mails EAD to student

**Step 7**
- Student works on STEM OPT EAD, and complies with all [STEM OPT Reporting Requirements](#) (6 month validity reports, self-evaluations, I-983 changes, etc.)
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)**
      • See [USC’s Sample STEM OPT Extension I-983](#) for guidance
    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
  2) **Current Employment Authorization Document (EAD)** (front side only)
  3) **Completed form I-983 (typed and signed)**
     - See [USC’s Sample STEM OPT Extension I-983](#) for guidance
  4) **eShipGlobal payment confirmation email**
  5) **Most recent SEVP Portal employment screenshot**

*Please call OIS to schedule an appointment with an advisor before uploading. The advisor will explain the additional documents OIS will need in order to process your STEM OPT I-20 Request.*
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 you need to change your mailing address after sending your STEM OPT application to USCIS, you must complete the online [USCIS Change of Address](#) form.
## I-765 Application Fee Payment

Choose **one** payment option – do not send multiple forms of payment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTION 1: Check or money order*</th>
<th>OPTION 2: Credit card via Form G-1450**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can be personal check, cashier’s check, or money order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If personal check or cashier’s check, must be from a U.S. bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If personal check, must include account holder’s name and address on top left corner of check; does not need to be from student’s own account</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make payable to <strong>U.S. Department of Homeland Security</strong> – do not abbreviate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY) and I-94 number in memo section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not write on or sign the back of the check</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Card must be from a U.S. bank – no exceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All information must be completed fully and accurately; any mistakes will cause the payment to be declined and application to be rejected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Billing address</strong> must match address on file for credit card</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Form must be signed by the <strong>cardholder</strong> in black ink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Cardholder should notify credit card company of an upcoming out-of-state charge</strong> – otherwise, the payment could be declined</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Non-refundable application filing fee, if OPT application packet to USCIS is **postmarked**:**

- On or before October 1, 2020 – **$410**
- On or after October 2, 2020 – **$550**

*Strongly recommended by OIS

**Not recommended by OIS; this form of payment is more likely to be rejected by USCIS due to typos or errors
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
OPT Rejection, Request for Evidence (RFE), or Denial

Students that receive a returned or rejected STEM OPT Extension application, RFE, or denial notice from USCIS **must contact OIS** for guidance **before** responding or resubmitting their application to USCIS.

- **Returned or Rejected**: If a student’s application returned or rejected, the student may need to request a new STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS. USCIS will deny the application if the student re-applies with an expired STEM OPT Extension I-20. **USCIS must receive the new application prior to the OPT EAD end date.**

- **RFE**: If USCIS needs more information to process a student’s application, they may issue an RFE. The RFE will explain which additional documents are required along with return mailing instructions and a specific deadline to respond by.

- **Denial**: If a student’s STEM OPT Extension is denied, 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.

  - Submit Form I-983 final self-evaluation, and copy of departure flight confirmation 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?

To contact an advisor at OIS, email OPTSTEM@usc.edu. Include your SEVIS ID # in the subject line, and description of your inquiry or concern.