

## Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) 24-Month Extension for STEM Majors

### **Eligibility and the Application Process:**

If you are currently on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) and meet one of the following:

- have completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) field; OR
- have completed all course requirements for the degree, excluding any thesis requirement or equivalent; OR
- have completed a STEM degree in the U.S. within the last 10 years;

you can request a 24-month extension of your Optional Practical Training with an employer who is enrolled in U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) E-Verify employment verification program. You may participate in the STEM OPT extension twice during your academic career in the U.S. if you earn a second qualifying degree at a higher level.

To obtain this benefit, you must apply to USCIS for a new Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Since the process usually takes about three months, we recommend that you apply 90days in advance of the current OPT end date listed on your EAD card. Please submit the following information to the International House:

- STEM Request Form (see page 2)
- Copy of your OPT I-20, pages 1 and 2
- Copy of passport page(s) showing picture, biographical information, and expiration date
- Copy of most recent U.S. entry visa and I-94 ([www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94))
- Copy of your current Employment Authorization Document (front and back)
- Copy of your diploma or transcript showing your STEM-related degree and major
- Completed [Form I-765](#) which includes:
  - Eligibility Category (c)(3)(C) [Item 16]
  - ISSS Mailing Address [Items 2,3] c/o ISSS, 2200 S Josephine St. Denver, CO 80208
  - Degree level (BS, MS, PhD) & CIP code for STEM Major from Program of Study section on Page 1 of I-20 [Item 17]
  - Your employer's E-Verify Company or Client Company Identification Number [Item 17]
  - The most recent version of the Form I-765 can be downloaded from the USCIS website: <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>
- Two identical passport-style photos taken within 30 days of filing application. Do not reuse old photos.
- Check or money order for \$410 made out to *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*
- Employer letter
- Earnings statement (recommended)
- Copy of W-2(s) (recommended)
- [Form I-983](#), Training Plan for STEM OPT Students, completed with your employer ([Instructions](#)).
  - In Section 1: Student Information use the following for the Designated School Official Name and Contact Information: Name of ISSS advisor who signed your OPT I-20, 2200 S. Josephine Street, Denver, CO 80210, Phone: 303-871-4912.
- Submit an explanation of how your employment is related to your coursework to [here](https://udenver.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_dmNKi2pLWc9tRel&Q_JFE=0) ([https://udenver.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_dmNKi2pLWc9tRel&Q\\_JFE=0](https://udenver.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_dmNKi2pLWc9tRel&Q_JFE=0)) . Use the subject line "STEM OPT Employment Explanation." The explanation must be 1000 characters or less (approximately 150 words).
- Optional: [Form G-1145](#) (to be notified by email that your OPT application was received by USCIS)

**You must also agree to report the following information to ISSS:**

- Within 10 days:
  - Change of legal name
  - Start or loss of employment
  - Change of employer name or location
  - Change of immigration status
  - Permanent departure from the United States
  - Material changes to Form I-983 such as employer's EIN, reduction in compensation/pay, significant decrease in hours per week, changes to learning objectives on Form I-983.
- Validate SEVIS information every six months:
  - legal name
  - residential or mailing address
  - employer name and address
  - status of current employment
- Each year to ISSS
  - Self Evaluation on Form I-983.

**What Happens After you Mail Your Application to USCIS****Status of Your STEM OPT Application**

If you completed the optional Form G-1145, you will receive a text message and/or email from USCIS when they have received your application.

Typically, within two to four weeks after your STEM OPT application has been received by USCIS, a receipt notice will be sent to the address you used on the I-765 application.

-If you used the I-House address: The receipt notice will be scanned into your file and you will be contacted through DU email to pick up the notice. If you are not in Denver, you can complete the [Mailing or Pick-Up Authorization Form](#) giving ISSS permission to mail the receipt to you or to have a friend pick it up for you.

-If you used a personal address: Please scan and email a copy of your receipt notice to [iss@du.edu](mailto:iss@du.edu).

From that point on, you may visit the USCIS website at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do> to check the status of your application using the receipt number (e.g., LIN #) listed in the upper left corner of your receipt notice. You can sign up for email updates at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/selectusertype.jsp>.

**What YOU Can Do If You Do Not Receive Your Receipt Notice (30 days) or EAD (75 days)**

If 30 days after submitting your application to ISSS, you have not received a receipt notice from ISSS or USCIS: check with your bank to see if your check has been cashed by USCIS. If the check has not been cashed and no receipt notice has been sent, then it is very possible that the application has been lost. You will need to resubmit the application. Please discuss options with an International Student Advisor during quick question hours or make an appointment: <http://www.du.edu/iss/advising.html>.

- 1) If your Form I-765 has been pending more than 75 days, you can submit an inquiry by calling the USCIS Customer Service Number on your form I-765 receipt notice or you can submit an on-line inquiry at <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>.
- 2) You can also check the processing time at the Nebraska Service Center for Form I-765 based on a request by a qualified F-1 student at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/processTimesDisplay.do>. If the receipt date of your Form I-765 is earlier than the date in the last column, Processing Cases as of Date, call the USCIS Customer Service number on your I-765 receipt notice to report that your case is outside of normal processing times or submit a case inquire on-line at <https://egov.uscis.gov/e-Request/Intro.do>.
- 3) Request an appointment through the InfoPass system: <http://infopass.uscis.gov/>. When you make the request, state that that you are requesting expedited handling of an I-765 application because it is currently outside the normal processing time. Rather than scheduling an appointment, USCIS will likely respond by sending a request to the appropriate USCIS Service Center for the file to be pulled and adjudicated.

If, after following either of these processes, no response is given within five business days after you contacted USCIS, please email ISSS at [iss@du.edu](mailto:iss@du.edu) to indicate the actions that you have taken. Please provide your full name as you listed it on your OPT application, date of birth, country of citizenship, USCIS receipt number (starting with LIN if you used a Colorado address on the I-765), USCIS receipt notice date, date and time you contacted USCIS to request expedited handling, and the name and referral ID number of the officer with whom you spoke (if you called).

**Approval and Receipt of Employment Authorization Document**

It can take 90 days or more for USCIS to process your application and mail the OPT employment authorization document (EAD) to the address indicated on the I-765.

**Important Reminders Concerning STEM Optional Practical Training**

- You may work for 180 days after the expiration of your EAD while you wait for USCIS to process your application.
- Your employment must be directly related to your major area of study and it must be with an employer who participates in the E-Verify program.
- It is your responsibility to confirm that you do not have incompletes or classes you must retake, and that you have met all degree requirements as expected.
- If you receive a new I-20 for any academic program, either at DU or another institution of higher education, your STEM OPT EAD will be cancelled even if you have not reached the EAD end date.
- It is very important that you maintain current contact information including email address on PioneerWeb (<http://pioneerweb.du.edu>) so ISSS can contact you when the EAD arrives or if there is a problem with your application.

### Canceling the Authorization Process for STEM Optional Practical Training

Once you have been authorized for STEM OPT, the authorization cannot be canceled, rescinded, revoked, or changed. Even if you do not actually work, USCIS counts all authorized OPT time against your total allowable time. This is particularly important for post-completion OPT. If you are authorized and then do not complete your studies on time, you must continue to be enrolled full-time, and are only eligible for part-time employment until you finish degree requirements. Once authorized for post-completion OPT, even if you do not actually complete the degree as expected, you may not exceed more than 90 days of unemployment and are no longer eligible for program extensions.

### Unemployment on OPT

Under USCIS regulations, you are allowed a total of 150 days of unemployment during F-1 Post-Completion OPT and STEM OPT. **All periods of unemployment and employment, along with employer's name and your physical work address, must be reported to [iss@du.edu](mailto:iss@du.edu).**

### OPT Cap Gap Extensions

An F-1 student who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting **change of status** and an **employment start date of October 1** of the current year that has not been withdrawn or denied is eligible for a cap gap extension of OPT in which duration of status (D/S) and any post-completion OPT work authorization, is extended to the September 30<sup>th</sup>, the day before the start of the H-1B or until the petition is withdrawn or denied. An automatic cap-gap extension of an F-1 student's duration of status also applies to the duration of status of the student's dependents in F-2 status. Email your receipt and approval notice to [iss@du.edu](mailto:iss@du.edu) to request an I-20 with a comment indicating that your H-1B is either pending or has been approved.

### Travel Before Approval of STEM OPT and Receipt of EAD

If you leave the U.S. after you complete your studies and before you receive the EAD, you must have the following documents in your possession to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status:

- EAD Card for first 12 months of OPT
- Letter from your employer confirming employment
- An STEM OPT I-20 with a travel signature less than six months old
- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 entry visa (unless you traveled to Canada, Mexico, or the Adjacent Islands and qualify for - Automatic Visa Revalidation).

**NOTE: If you leave the U.S. after your STEM OPT is approved and you do not have a job, you may not be able to re-enter the U.S. as employment is required for maintenance of F-1 status during your OPT employment authorization period. If you are applying to renew your F-1 entry visa while on STEM OPT, be prepared to show your EAD card and proof of employment at the U.S. embassy.**

### Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, as an F-1 student, you will be exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A.) taxes for your first five years in the United States, as long as you are considered a non-resident for tax purposes—see:

<http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Foreign-Student-Liability-for-Social-Security-and-Medicare-Taxes>. Income earned in the United States, including assistantships, is usually subject to any federal, state, or local income regulations that apply. Unless you qualify under a tax treaty between the United States and your home government, employers are required by law to withhold those taxes from your paychecks. Annual filing of tax returns is mandated each year by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Please see <http://www.du.edu/intl/iss/taxes.html> for more information. ISSS staff is not authorized to provide tax assistance or advice.



## 24-Month STEM OPT Extension Request Form

This request form must be submitted along with all of the documents listed below. Once your request has been processed, you will receive an email from ISSS to come to the International House to sign the new I-20. Please visit our website for more information about the OPT extension for STEM majors: <http://www.du.edu/iss/employment/opt-stem-extension.html>

### Eligibility Requirements for 24-month OPT extension for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics majors

1. Degree is included on the U.S. Government’s [STEM-Designated Degree Program List](#)
2. Currently on post-completion OPT based on STEM degree (awarded or all coursework completed excluding thesis) or completed a STEM degree in the U.S. before the most recent degree
3. Have not exceeded 90 calendar days of unemployment during initial period of post-completion OPT
4. Have job or job offer for at least 20 hours per week of paid employment from an employer enrolled in [E-Verify](#)
5. Form I-765 must be received by USCIS before expiration of current Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Section A: Student Information		
LAST (FAMILY) NAME in Passport:	FIRST NAME in Passport:	
DATE OF BIRTH (mm/dd/yyyy)	DU ID Number:	
DU Email Address:	Current EAD Expiration Date: (mm/dd/yyyy)	
Employer Name:	Job Title:	<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time (more than 20 hours a week) <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time (20 or less hours a week)
Employer Address (Street, City, State, Zip Code):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Submit an explanation of how your employment is related to your coursework to <a href="#">here</a> . Use the subject line “STEM OPT Employment Explanation.” The explanation must be 1000 characters or less (approximately 150 words).		
<b>Please verify that you understand and accept the following items:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The 24-month extension is only allowed if I have not been unemployed more than 90 days during my current post-completion OPT.</li> <li>- I can only accept paid employment that is directly related to my STEM degree and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.</li> <li>- I understand that while I am on the 24-month extension of OPT I must report the following to ISSS within ten days:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Change of legal name</li> <li>o Start or loss of employment</li> <li>o Change of employer name or location</li> <li>o Change of immigration status</li> <li>o Permanent departure from the United States</li> <li>o Material changes to Form I-983 such as employer’s EIN, reduction in compensation/pay, significant decrease in hours per week, changes to learning objectives on Form I-983.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- During the 24-month OPT extension I must make a Validation Report to ISSS every six months.</li> <li>- During the 24-month OPT extension I must make an annual self-evaluation on Form I-983 to ISSS.</li> <li>- I understand that the I-20 travel signature is only valid for six months but can be renewed by ISSS.</li> <li>- I understand that my work authorization will be terminated if my F-1 SEVIS record is transferred to another school.</li> </ul>		
<b>I hereby confirm that the information I have provided in this application is accurate. I have read and understand the requirements that are part of the 24-month OPT extension for STEM majors</b>		
<b>I hereby authorize the release of any information necessary for this request and authorize any changes needed to complete my request.</b>		
STUDENT SIGNATURE:		DATE:
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		
Assigned To:	Processing Checklist:	Processing Notes
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Enrollment checked by _____ <input type="checkbox"/> GA processed ____ / ____ / ____ <input type="checkbox"/> ISA processed ____ / ____ / ____	

**Checklist of documents to be submitted with OPT Extension Request Form for STEM majors:**

- STEM OPT Request Form
- Copy of current OPT I-20, pages 1 and 2
- Copy of passport page(s) showing picture, biographical information, and expiration date
- Copy of most recent I-94 card ([www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94)) and U.S. entry visa
- Copy of current Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front and back)
- Copy of diploma with degree and field of study or, if field of study is not on the diploma, a copy of the transcript.
- Completed Form I-765—Application for Employment Authorization
- Two color passport photos less than 30 days old (print name and I-94 number on back). Do not reuse old photos.
- Check or money order for \$410 payable to *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*
- Proof Of Employment
  - Copy of Earning statement (recommended)
  - Copy of W-2s
  - Employer letter
- Completed Form I-983 signed by you and your employer
- Completed Form G-1145 if you would like to be notified electronically that your application has been accepted by USCIS