OPT STEM Overview

Also referred to as:
• OPT STEM
• STEM Extension
• 24-Month OPT STEM Extension

Commonly used terms:
• OPT- Optional Practical Training work authorization usually granted after completion of academic program
• DSO- Designated School Official. At the International Center we are called International Student Advisors
• SEVIS/Immigration record- Your F-1 immigration record as listed in SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) database
• Training- On-the-job learning that supports knowledge gained during academic studies
OPT STEM Overview

• Students currently on OPT who hold a STEM degree (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) are eligible to apply for an additional 24-month extension of their 12 month OPT provided they are meeting eligibility requirements.

• Students may be eligible to apply for OPT STEM twice during their academic career.

• Students may apply for OPT STEM based on a previous STEM degree from an SEVP, accredited U.S. institution within the last 10 years.
Eligibility Requirements

F-1 Student Eligibility:
• Have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher from a school that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency and is certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)
• Currently in valid period of OPT
• STEM degree has been obtained

Employer Eligibility:
• Be enrolled in E-Verify and remain in good standing.
• Assist student with completing I-983 Form, Training Plan. In this form, employer must prove that:
  • They have enough resources and trained personnel available to appropriately train the student;
  • The student will not replace a full- or part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. worker; and
  • Working for them will help the student attain his or her training objectives.
OPT STEM Employment Requirements

• Employment must be paid
• Employment must be a minimum of 20 hours per week
• Employment must be directly related to student’s course of study
• Students approved for the 24-month STEM OPT extension may not accrue more than a total of 150 days of unemployment throughout their entire Post-Completion and STEM OPT period.
  – Unemployment Caution: SEVIS records will automatically terminate for students who have no employment reported for 150 days. Be sure to report employment to the International Center
• Students cannot receive STEM approval for volunteer opportunities
OPT application MUST be mailed to USCIS within **60 days** of the date the OPT STEM I-20 was issued by the International Center.

USCIS requires **60-90 days** to review application after they receive it.

The IC requires **7 business days** to review application.
24-Month OPT STEM Application Timeline

- Student may apply for the 24-Month OPT STEM extension up to 90 days before current EAD card end date. Student cannot apply after EAD card end date.
- It will take the International Center seven business days to process the application and USCIS 60-90 days to approve the application. It will take an additional 2-4 weeks after approval for USCIS to send the EAD card.
- OPT STEM employment will begin the day after student’s current EAD card end date and will end 24 months later.
- Student can work up to 180 days past their current EAD card end date IF they have applied for OPT STEM and the application is pending.
  - Employment during this time is based on employer discretion and valid receipt notice from USCIS.
1. Complete OPT STEM Extension Checklist
2. Form G-1145 (optional)
3. Obtain two 2”x2” U.S. passport-sized photos with white background and first and last name printed on the back of each
4. Copy of Passport Biographical Page
5. Copy of F-1 Visa Stamp
7. Copy of Post Completion OPT I-20
8. Copy of STEM degree diploma
9. Copy of front and back of post-completion EAD card
10. Copy or original I-983; completed by you and your employer
11. OPT Employment Update form
Completing the I-765 Form

- The I-765 Form is available through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website only. Utilize the fillable PDF form only from this website.
  - [https://www.uscis.gov/forms](https://www.uscis.gov/forms)
- Make sure you are using the latest edition
- For detailed instructions on how fill out this form you can also download the I-765 instruction sheet found on the USCIS website.
- Be sure to check ‘Renewal of my permission to accept employment’
Completing the I-765 Form

1. **Full Name**
   - Family Name
   - First Name
   - Middle Name

2. **Other Names Used** (include Maiden Name)
   - Family Name
   - First Name
   - Middle Name

3. **U.S. Mailing Address**
   - Street Number and Name
   - Apt. Number
   - Town or City
   - State
   - ZIP Code

4. **Country of Citizenship or Nationality**

5. **Place of Birth**
   - Town or City
   - State/Province
   - Country

6. **Date of Birth** (mm/dd/yyyy)

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1. Name should match what is listed in your passport.
2. Leave blank if you have not used other legal names
   - Use your personal address if this will be your address for the next 60-90 days. Otherwise, use a friend or relative’s address where your mail can be kept safe. This section must be HAND WRITTEN as it will not allow you to type any characters other than numbers and letters
   - **Example**: C/O Mickey Mouse
     345 Disneyland Way
     Anaheim, CA 92620
3. List your country of citizenship/nationality
4. List the information of your place of birth
5. List your date of birth
Completing the I-765 Form

7. Gender □ Male □ Female

8. Marital Status
   □ Single □ Married □ Divorced □ Widowed

9.a. Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?
   □ Yes □ No

   NOTE: If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 9.a., provide the information requested in Item Number 9.b.

9.b. Provide your Social Security number (SSN) (if known)

10. Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?
    (You must also answer “Yes” to Item Number 11., Consent for Disclosure, to receive a card.)
    □ Yes □ No

    NOTE: If you answered “No” to Item Number 10., skip to Item Number 14. If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 10., you must also answer “Yes” to Item Number 11.

11. Consent for Disclosure: I authorize disclosure of information from this application to the SSA as required for the purpose of assigning me an SSN and issuing me a Social Security card.
    □ Yes □ No

    NOTE: If you answered “Yes” to Item Numbers 10. - 11., provide the information requested in Item Numbers 12.a. - 13.b.
12a. If you answered yes to questions 10 and 11 please fill in 12a-13b

14. Fill in your 11-digit I-94 number. This can be found at [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/)

15. Answer yes as you have applied for the initial one year of OPT

- List the USCIS office your OPT application was processed at. You can find this by looking at your EAD card and the card #. The first three letters are an abbreviation of the USCIS office that processed your application. For example, YSC-Potomac Service Center
- List the start date on your current EAD card
- List ‘granted’

16. List your most recent date of entry into the U.S. as listed on your I-94

17. List your last place of entry INTO THE U.S. as listed on your I-94 history. (For example: LAX)

18. List the status of last entry into the U.S as listed on your I-94. Note this should be F-1 Student.
Completing the I-765 Form

19. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)

20. Eligibility Category. Go to the Who May File Form I-765? section of the Instructions. In the space below, place the letter and number of the eligibility category you selected from the instructions. For example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii), etc.

21. (c)(3)(C) Eligibility Category. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(3)(C) in Item Number 20. above, list your degree, your employer's name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in the space below.

   Degree: __________________________  Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify: __________________________

   Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a Valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number: __________________________

19. List student

20. When applying for OPT STEM, use (C)(3)(C)

21. List the degree level and your employer’s name as list in E-verify
   - List your employer’s E-verify number, which should be 5-7 digits. Be sure NOT to list the Employer Identification Number, which is different than the E-verify number
Completing the I-765 Form

22. (c)(26) Eligibility Category. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(26) in Item Number 20, above, please provide the receipt number of your H-1B principal spouse’s most recent Form I-797 Notice of Approval for Form I-129.

23. (c)(35) and (c)(36) Eligibility Category
   a. If you entered the eligibility category (c)(35) or (c)(36) in Item Number 20, above, please provide the receipt number of the Form I-140 beneficiary’s Form I-797 Notice of Approval for Form I-140.

   b. Have you EVER been arrested for and/or convicted of any crime?  
      □ Yes  □ No

   NOTE: If you answered “Yes” to Item Number 23.b., refer to Item Number 5., Item H., or Item I. in the Who May File Form I-765 section of these Instructions for information about providing court dispositions.

Certification
I certify, under penalty of perjury, that the foregoing is true and correct. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking. I have read the Who May File Form I-765 section of the Instructions and have identified the appropriate eligibility category in Item Number 20.

Applicant’s Signature

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yyyy)

Telephone Number

22. Do not fill out
23a. Do not fill out
23b. Do not fill out

Applicant’s Signature-Sign using BLACK INK do not use electronic signature. Fill in the date and your telephone number below. Signature must be inside box.
Completing the I-983 Form

- The 24-Month OPT STEM Extension requires that the students and their employer complete the I-983 learning plan that clearly states the student’s STEM OPT learning objectives and confirms the employer’s commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives.

- Download the form I-983 [here](#).

- Review [I-983 Instructions](#).

- Work with your employer to complete and sign each section. You may have different people sign each section if appropriate.

- Do not fill out ‘Evaluation on Student Progress’ pages. These evaluations are to be submitted within the first 12 months of OPT STEM and then again once you’ve complete 24 months.

- Submit the form with the rest of your 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application to the International Center.

- The I-983 will be retained by the International Center.
How to Submit Your OPT STEM Application

• Meet with an advisor to review your STEM OPT application.
  • Submit your completed STEM OPT application during an Employment Hand-In Session Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 9:00am to 11:00am
• Other ways to submit your STEM OPT application:
  • Schedule an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor by calling 949.824.7249
  • Mail your application to UCI International Center, G302 UCI Student Center, Irvine, CA 92697-5255
  • Authorize a friend to submit your STEM OPT application on your behalf during the hours listed above.
    • Download IC Authorization Form
Picking Up Your OPT STEM Application

- How to pick up your application from the International Center:
  - Pick up in-person
  - Authorize a friend to pick up the your STEM OPT application on your behalf with an authorization letter
  - Request to have your application mailed back to you using E-Ship Global. Please notify our office of payment of mailing.

- What to expect back in the OPT STEM application:
  - A half sheet of instructions on where to send your application and other reminders. Read this thoroughly.
  - An original, updated I-20 with your new OPT STEM dates recommended on the second page
    - Please keep the original I-20 and send the copy to USCIS with your OPT STEM application.
  - A copy of the updated I-20 with your new OPT STEM dates
  - I-765, immigration documents, and two photos
What NOT expect back in the OPT STEM application:
- I-983 Training Plan. This will be retained by the International Center and may be requested by USCIS for further review.
- OPT STEM Extension Checklist
- OPT Employment Update Form

Before sending your application to USCIS:
- Sign the copy of the updated I-20 with your new OPT STEM dates
- Include the check/money order to Department of Homeland Security
- Make a copy of the OPT STEM application for your records
Maintaining Your Status On OPT STEM
Employment Guidelines

While on OPT STEM your employment:
- Must be paid
- Must be at least 20 hours per week
- Must be related to your field of study
- Must report new employment and changes to employment to the International Center

Unemployment
- 150 days of unemployment are allowed while on OPT STEM. This includes the 90 days of unemployment allotted while in the initial OPT period.
- Time spent outside the United States, if not employed by a U.S. employer, is counted towards the 150-day period of unemployment. To count as “employed” a student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student’s employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of reported employment.
As an F-1 student on OPT you are required to report certain information to the International Center so we can update your SEVIS/immigration record. These reporting tools come in the form of the I-983 form and/or the International Center’s OPT employment update form both of which are to be submitted to the International Center. Reporting is required at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months while on OPT STEM.
Types of OPT STEM Reporting

6-Month Reporting
• [OPT STEM Employment Update Form](#)

12-Month Reporting
• OPT STEM Employment Update Form
• Page 5 of form [I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan](#) progress report

18-Month Reporting
• OPT STEM Employment Update Form

24-Month Reporting
• OPT STEM Employment Update Form
• Page 5 of form I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan- Final Evaluation
Types of OPT STEM Reporting

**Changing Employers**
- OPT STEM Employment Update Form
- Page 5 of I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan - Final Evaluation for ending employment with previous employer
- New I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan - For new/current employer

**Additional Employer**
- OPT STEM Employment Update Form
- New I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan

**Employment Has Ended**
- OPT STEM Employment Update Form
- Page 5 of I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan - Final Evaluation for ending employment

**Departing the U.S.**
- OPT STEM Employment Update Form
- Page 5 of I-983 STEM OPT Training Plan - Final Evaluation for ending employment
- [Student Check-Out Form](#)
Types of OPT STEM Reporting

Material Changes to I-983
- Employer name and address
- Decrease in compensation
- Change in hour worked
- Employer's EIN
- Termination of employment

Email all forms to internationalcenter@uci.edu within 10 days of any change.
• Employer must work with students to report any of the following changes:
  – Employer name and address
  – Decrease in student's compensation
  – Change in hours worked
  – Employer's EIN

• Termination of employment
  – The student and employer must notify the DSO when the student’s employment is terminated for any reason before the end of the authorized extension period. The employer must report such a change in employment to the appropriate DSO no later than five business days after the student’s employment terminates or the student has departed.
For questions, please e-mail the International Center staff at internationalcenter@uci.edu or call our main line at (949) 824-7249.
Thank You!

International Center