

OPT STEM EXTENSION

General Information, Rights, and Responsibilities

STEM Extension APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- ✓ Form I-983
- ✓ Form I-765
- ✓ New I-20 (Recommended for OPT-STEM Extension)
- ✓ Passport (2 Copies)
- ✓ Visa (2 Copies)
- ✓ I-94 (2 Copies)
- ✓ Initial OPT EAD card (2 Copies)
- ✓ Copy of Diploma/Unofficial Transcript that displays you have graduated in a STEM field (2 Copies)
- ✓ Check or Money Order for \$410.00 (Made payable to – US Department of Homeland Security)
- ✓ 2 passport sized photographs – 2x2 in size, white background, no glasses, or hats

Definition of STEM OPT

Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 36 months (12 months of “regular/initial” OPT with a 24-month extension possible).

Eligibility Criteria for the 24-month OPT extension (All four of the above criteria must be met for a student to be eligible for the 24-month OPT extension).

- ✓ Students who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT.
- ✓ Who have earned a bachelor’s or higher degree in a field included on the U.S. Government's list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields within the last 10 years.
- ✓ Who are employed in a paid job directly related to his/her field of study.
- ✓ Who are working for an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program.

Remember:

Once you have been approved please email a scanned copy of your EAD card to iss@louisville.edu

- Your F-1 status continues through the OPT-STEM Extension period
- You will have a 60 day grace period at the end of your OPT-STEM Extension period
- You may change jobs during the STEM application, but it is not recommended if possible; contact ISSS at iss@louisville.edu for more information.
- You **can change jobs** after you have been approved but the ISSS office will need a **new Form I-983** and the company must be e-verified.
- **Any change to your job functions, a promotion, or any other forms of change in the company requires you and the company to submit a new Form I-983**
- **Form I-983 is submitted yearly as well.**
- 6-month validation of current employment is required on STEM Extension.
- You add an extra 60 days of unemployment on the STEM extension to the 90 days of unemployment from the 12 months OPT period.

List of degrees in STEM fields

If a student earned a degree in a field that appears on the U.S. government's official list of STEM fields, he/she may be eligible for the 24-month OPT extension. To verify that your degree is on this list, look at the code listed under "Primary Major" on your I-20, and then look for that code in the CIP code column of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security list <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf>

E-Verify

E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify.

Application time frame for the 24-month OPT extension

Students must apply for the 24-month OPT extension before the expiration of the first 12 months of "regular/initial" OPT. The application must be received by USCIS before the expiration date of the first OPT period EAD to be properly (timely) filed. USCIS will not accept I-765 applications for STEM extensions any earlier than 90 days before the current EAD expiration date.

Please note: you cannot apply during the 60-day grace period.

Work authorization status while STEM extension is pending

If you successfully file the application for your 24-month OPT extension before the expiration of your current 12-month OPT period, you may continue employment *even if your previous EAD card is expired* until your OPT extension is processed or until 180 days have passed, whichever is sooner.

Reporting requirements during the 24-month extension

Students approved for the 24-month OPT extension have additional reporting requirements to maintain their status and work authorization. Students must report to the IC within 10 days if there is any change of:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name
- Employer address, and/or
- Loss of employment

Students must make a validation report to the IC every six months to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date.

- For 6 months validation please notify ISSS via email at iss@louisville.edu Please include the following items in the email:
 - Employer('s) name
 - Employer('s) address
 - Supervisor's name, email, and phone number
 - Job Title(s)
 - Date of exiting the U.S. (You must provide date of exit if you decide to exit the U.S and complete your OPT status before the end date of your OPT)
 - If your visa status changes while on OPT

Types of Employment Allowed during an OPT STEM extension

A student authorized for a 24-month extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a paid position directly related to his or her DHS-approved STEM CIP code.

For students who are on a STEM extension, this employment may include:

- **Multiple employers.** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to each individual student's degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.
- **Work for hire.** This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. The company for whom the student is providing services must be registered with E-Verify. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- **Self-employed business owner.** Students on a STEM extension can start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must register his or her business with E-Verify and work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program. HOWEVER, under the new STEM regulations, students may not fill out their Form I-983, Sections 3 to 6, nor act as their employer for the purpose of the form. *The student might NOT be eligible for STEM extension if self-employed.*
- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm.** If a student uses a temporary or staffing agency to place them in a training opportunity, the agency cannot complete and sign the [Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students."](#) Only the E-verified employer that provides the actual training relevant to the student's qualifying STEM degree is authorized to sign and complete the Form I-983. The "Official with Signatory Authority" for a student's Form I-983 must meet the following criteria:
 - Be employed by the organization providing the training.
 - Be familiar with the STEM OPT student's goals and performance.
 - Have the authority to affirm that the information on the Form I-983 is true and correct.

24-Month Extension Available Twice

The 24-month extension of OPT is available to each student at TWO non-consecutive periods. Please note that this rule is different from the application rules for the "standard" 12-month OPT, under which students could be approved for multiple OPT periods for each higher degree earned in the U.S. (i.e., bachelor's, master's, doctoral). Each STEM extension must meet the above-listed STEM eligibility requirements.

Starting and Ending Dates

The start date of the 24-month OPT extension will be automatically set to the day after the expiration of the current 12-month OPT authorization. The end date will be 24 months later. (It is not possible to request smaller increments of time for the OPT extension.)

Once Approved

If an application for a 24-month extension is approved, USCIS will issue an EAD with a validity period that starts on the day after the expiration date stated on the 12-month OPT EAD.

During the 24-month OPT Extension - How to maintain your F-1 status

Information reporting requirements are more strict during the 24-month OPT extension. Take special care to comply with these obligations. Failure to do so can jeopardize the validity of your OPT and your legal visa status in the U.S.

1. You must report any change of address, phone number, and email address within 10 days. You can update this information in the ULINK system. You will always have access to ULINK as a UofL alumni.
2. If the name or address of your employer changes, you must report this information to the IC within 10 days of the change.
3. If you experience an interruption in employment, you must report it to the ISSS. Students are allowed a maximum of **150** days of unemployment time, which is cumulative including the 90 days on the 12 months OPT and the 60 days on the 24-month STEM extension. If you used unemployment during the “regular/initial” OPT period, then you may have fewer unemployment days.
4. **You are required to make a validation report to the IC every six months** starting from the date your 24-month OPT extension is approved. The report is due within 10 days of the required reporting date.

Ending Your OPT

Your F-1 status remains valid until 60 days after the expiration of your EAD card. During this 60-day grace period, you are no longer authorized to work, however, you may legally stay in the U.S. If you depart the U.S. during the 60-day grace period, you are no longer eligible to re-enter under your previous F-1 visa status.

- If you plan to return home after the end of your OPT, please make sure that you depart the U.S. before the end of your 60-day grace period.
- If you decide to abandon your OPT and depart the U.S., please submit send an email to iss@louisville.edu
- If you plan to change your visa status, we recommend you begin this process before your OPT is expired. Notify the ISSS office once you are approved.
- If you plan to start a new degree program at UofL or another college or university, please make sure to contact the ISSS office regarding change of level or transfer procedures. Change of Levels or transfers must be done before the end of the 60-day grace period.

By signing this document, you agree that you have read and understood the above regulations for OPT. Also, OPT is the responsibility of the student applying. The International Student & Scholar Services office at UofL holds no responsibility for my OPT status.

Signature: _____ Date: _____