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10 Apr 2016 - 3 May 2018



U.S. Citizenship and
Immigration Services

Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT)

On March 11, 2016, the Department of Homeland Security published [a final rule](#) allowing certain F-1 students who receive science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees, and who meet other specified requirements, to apply for a 24-month extension of their post-completion OPT. The 24-month extension will replace the 17-month STEM OPT extension previously available to STEM students ([see](#) 73 FR 18944). Eligible students may now apply for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.

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Eligibility for the STEM OPT Extension

To qualify for the 24-month extension, you must:

- Have been granted OPT and currently be in a valid period of OPT;
- Have earned a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree 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 \(SEVP\)](#) when you submit your STEM OPT extension application.
 - **Previously obtained STEM degrees:** If you are an F-1 student participating in a 12-month period of post-completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree, you may be eligible to use a prior STEM degree earned from a U.S. institution of higher education to apply for a STEM OPT extension. You must have received both degrees from currently accredited and SEVP-certified institutions, and cannot have already received a STEM OPT extension based on this prior degree. The practical training opportunity also must be directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree.
 - For example: If you are currently participating in OPT based on a master's degree in business administration but you previously received a bachelor's degree in mathematics, you may be able to apply for a STEM OPT extension based on your bachelor's degree as long as it is from an accredited U.S. college or university and the OPT employment opportunity is directly related to your bachelor's degree in mathematics.
 - **STEM degrees you obtain in the future:** If you enroll in a new academic program in the future and earn another qualifying STEM degree at a higher educational level, you may be eligible for

For an additional 24-month STEM OPT extension based on your master's degree.

- Work for an employer who meets all the requirements listed below in the STEM OPT Employer Responsibilities section.
- Submit the [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#) up to 90 days before your current OPT employment authorization expires, and within 60 days of the date your designated school official (DSO) enters the recommendation for OPT into your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record.

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Applying for a STEM OPT Extension

To apply for an extension, you must properly file:

- Form I-765 with the application fee on or after May 10, 2016,
- Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status, endorsed by your DSO on or after May 10, 2016, and
- A copy of your STEM degree.

If you file your extension application on time and your OPT period expires while your extension application is pending, USCIS will extend your employment authorization for 180 days.

Note: If you are currently participating in STEM OPT based on a 17-month extension or you have a pending application for a 17-month STEM OPT extension, please see the [OPT Students Who Currently Have \(or Have an Pending Application for\) a 17-Month Extension](#) section below for more information.

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After Receiving a STEM OPT Extension

Reporting responsibilities

If you receive a STEM OPT extension, you must:

- Report changes to your DSO within 10 days of the change. You must report changes to:
 - Your legal name
 - Your residential or mailing address
 - Your email address
 - Your employer's name
 - Your employer's address
- Report to your DSO every 6 months to confirm the information listed above, even if none of your information has changed.

For more information, please refer to the [DHS STEM OPT Hub](#).

Unemployment during the OPT period

The law allows you to be unemployed during your OPT period for a limited number of days.

Initial post-completion OPT only	Up to 90 days	90 days
17-month extension	An additional 30 days	120 days*
24-month extension	An additional 60 days	150 days*

*If you are granted an additional 7-month extension in addition to your 17-month STEM-OPT (for a total of 24-month STEM OPT extension) then you may be unemployed for a total of 150-days during the OPT period.

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STEM OPT Employer Responsibilities

If you are an employer who wants to provide a practical training opportunity to a STEM OPT student during his or her extension, you must:

- Be enrolled in [E-Verify](#) and remain in good standing.
- Report material changes to the STEM OPT student's employment to the DSO within 5 business days.
- Implement a formal training program to augment the student's academic learning through practical experience.
- Provide an OPT opportunity that is commensurate with those of similarly situated U.S. workers in duties, hours, and compensation.
- Complete the Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. In this form, you must attest that:
 - You 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 you will help the student attain his or her training objectives.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement may visit your worksite(s) to verify whether you are meeting the STEM OPT program requirements, including whether you are maintaining the ability and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences for the STEM OPT student.

For more information, please refer to the [DHS STEM OPT Hub](#).

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OPT Students Who Currently Have (or Have a Pending Application for) a 17-Month Extension

If you currently have a 17-month STEM OPT extension, you may apply to add 7 months to your STEM OPT period on or after May 10, 2016, as long as you have at least 150 days of valid employment authorization remaining on the date you properly file your new Form I-765. Please note that you must properly file your

This included applications in which the student mistakenly requested a 24-month extension before being eligible to do so.

If your application for a 17-month STEM OPT extension was pending on May 10, 2016, USCIS will send you a request for evidence (RFE) to allow you to demonstrate that you are eligible for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.

The chart below outlines your options.

If You...	And...	Then...
Currently have a 17-month STEM OPT extension	You do NOT want to add any additional time to your STEM OPT extension	You do not need to file any new forms or pay any new fees. You are authorized to keep working until your 17-month STEM OPT period expires, or is terminated or revoked.

	<p>You want to request to add 7 months to your STEM OPT extension</p>	<p>You may submit a Form I-765, with fee, on or after May 10, 2016. If you do so, you must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Properly file on or before August 8, 2016;• File your Form I-765 within 60 days of your DSO's recommendation;• Have at least 150 days of valid work authorization remaining on the date you properly file your new Form I-765;• Include a Form I-20, endorsed by your DSO on or after May 10, 2016; and• Show that you, your DSO, and your employer meet all the 24-month STEM OPT extension requirements, including submitting the Training Plan for STEM OPT Students.
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<p>Have a pending application for a 17-month STEM OPT extension</p>	<p>You do not withdraw your Form I-765 application</p>	<p>If your application was still pending on May 10, 2016, we will send you a request for evidence to allow you to demonstrate that you are eligible for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.</p> <p>You must then submit a Form I-20 endorsed on or after May 10, 2016, indicating that your DSO recommends you for a 24-month OPT extension and that you, your DSO, and your employer meet the requirements for a 24-month extension.</p> <p>You will not need to pay an additional fee or refile the Form I-765.</p>
<p>Are a STEM student without a current STEM OPT extension or a pending extension application</p>	<p>You want to apply for a STEM OPT extension</p>	<p>You must file:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form I-765 • Form I-20, endorsed by your DSO within the past 60 days, and endorsed on or after May 10, 2016 • A copy of your degree • Your employer's name as listed in E-Verify • Your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number

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Last Reviewed/Updated: 05/10/2016

