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STEM OPT For Designated STEM Degree-Holders

This handout explains the various extension periods of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for which some students, with degrees in a designated-STEM program, are eligible.

Eligibility for 24-month STEM OPT Extension:

☐ Applicant must be an F-1 student who is currently engaged in post-completion OPT with a job or job offer from a participating E-Verify employer in a position directly related to the major field of study.

☐ Applicant must have completed a degree in a designated STEM field from a U.S. accredited institution with SEVP certification within the last 10 years and may not have already utilized this degree to apply for a STEM OPT extension,

☐ Or applicant is in a period of post-completion OPT, is currently engaged in a designated STEM Master's or PhD program, has been certified by the department before the end date listed on the 12-month EAD Card.

☐ Applicant must be in an active period of post-completion OPT at the time of requesting the STEM OPT extension.

☐ Applicant must submit a completed I-983 Form with all attestations and supporting documentation to OIE to request the 24-month STEM extension.

☐ Applicant files the I-765 Form, with all required documentation & filing fee to USCIS to request the STEM OPT extension within the required filing timeline.

☐ Applicant must be working in a full-time (20+ hours per week) paid position for a participating E-Verified employer; **cannot be self-employed**. (See note on Attestation page)

☐ Applicant must have his/her application received by USCIS within **60 days** of the STEM OPT Recommendation in SEVIS, or the application will be denied. If you are unable to adhere to this deadline, then you must contact OIE for a new I-20. This will cause a delay in your filing as reissued STEM I-20s take longer to process.

Conditions and Limitations:

• The STEM OPT start date will begin the day after the initial OPT ends. You do not choose the dates.

• TWO STEM OPT extensions are allowed per lifetime.

• A STEM OPT Extension can only be applied for while the applicant is in a valid period of post-completion OPT

• If the application has been timely filed, you can continue to work while the application is being processed for 180 days, even if you do not receive your new EAD before the end of your initial 12-month period of OPT.

• YOU MUST PAY ATTENTION TO AND COMPLY WITH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES. Failure to comply with reporting requirements will result in the loss of your immigration status and employment authorization.

• Individuals engaged in a period of 24-month STEM OPT extension cannot be unemployed for an aggregate of more than 150 days (90 days on Post-OPT, plus an additional 60 days on STEM OPT).

Application Process:

You must submit a timely application to USCIS in order to continue working and obtain the STEM OPT extension. Review the OIE STEM Extension PowerPoint as a reference.

STEP 1: Be Informed: Read this handout thoroughly and carefully. For more detailed information, consult the DHS "STEM HUB" Website.

STEP 2: Obtain the OIE Recommendation and new I-20

You will submit your STEM I-20 request through MyOIE Portal *(Remember to login with "Limited Access Services")*. You will find the "STEM I-20 Request" e-Form under the 'F-1 Practical Training' tab. You can submit your STEM I-20 Request e-Form (at the earliest) 100 days before your current EAD card expires. Submit the e-Form *with all necessary attachments including: 1.Copy of your I-983 Form – Signed by the employer (make sure the employer is E-Verified) 2. copy of your EAD card(s), copy of your most recent I-94 Record*. You, not your employer or company attorney, must submit this form. Carefully follow the instructions on the e-Form to avoid processing delays. Upon OIE receiving your complete request, your STEM I-20 will typically be issued within 10 business days. When your I-20 is ready, you will receive an email from OIE with the next steps to create a shipping label for your document.

STEP 3: APPLICATION MATERIALS (submitted in this order):

☐ G-1145 Form. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application.

☐ Fee information can be found on the USCIS website. You can pay by:

☐ A US Check or Money Order - payable to the "US Department of Homeland Security." **NO CASH!**

☐ A credit card – to pay by credit card you must fill out G-1450 Form and attach it to your application.

☐ I-765 Form (follow instructions on how to complete form on page 2).

☐ Two "passport" photos. Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo.

☐ **NO GLASSES** can be worn in the passport photos. Use powder to prevent glaring and be sure there are no shadows in your photos! You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).

☐ A copy (**NOT** original) of page 1 and 2 of the new STEM Extension I-20 from OIE with recommendation for STEM OPT on page 2.

☐ Sign the new STEM I-20. This I-20 cannot be more than 60 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!

☐ A copy of **ALL** previously issued I-20 documents from your current degree level (**signed**).

☐ A copy of your I-94 Record.

☐ Printout of the electronic I-94 Record – **Do Not send a copy of your "Travel History Page"**

☐ A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.

☐ A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).

☐ A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card(s).

☐ Proof of degree completion: **Official transcripts confirming your degree and/or a copy of your diploma.**

Instructions For Completing Form I-765

Download the [Form I-765](#) from www.uscis.gov and complete it as a form-fillable pdf *OR* if the form does not allow for certain characters – you can hand write the information in black ink. ***Remember to write clearly!***

>Part 1

Check the 1.a box: "Permission to Accept Employment."

>Part 2

#1 Name: Type or write your name as it is listed on your passport.

#2, #3, #4 Other Names Used: Leave this blank unless you have had a legal name change with an updated passport.

#5, 6, 7 U.S. Mailing Address: This must be an address where you can receive mail for at least the next 100 days into the future. Governmental Mail is NOT FORWARDED. If the EAD is sent to an address with a "forwarding order", or if you cannot receive mail at the address you used on the I-765, then your EAD will be returned to USCIS. Put both your name on inside and outside of your mailbox. You should also put a notice on the inside of your mailbox saying, "do not return the priority mail." If you want to use a friend's address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox, and that you put their information for questions 5. Return Address: Note: If the mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in Pennsylvania, refer to the I-765 instructions (www.uscis.gov) or OIE for the proper mailing address for your application.

#8 "Alien #: If you have an A-Number, enter that information. If not, or if you lost this information, then you can leave this blank

#9 USCIS Account: Leave BLANK

#10: Gender: List Gender as shown in your passport

#11 Marital Status: Enter current marital status

#12 Have you ever before filed an I-765 before:
- Check YES -> if you have filed an I-765 Form with USCIS in the past.
- If that does not apply to you -> then check NO.

#13.a Has the SSA ever issued you an SSN: Check yes or no

#13.b If you answered YES to 9a: Then enter your social security number

#14, 15 (If you do not have an SSN) Do you want the SSA to issue you an SSN:
- If you check NO -> Skip to #18
- If you check YES -> Answer questions 15, 16.a to 17.b

#18.a Country of Citizenship or Nationality: Enter your passport's country – if you have more than one – use the one listed on your I-20

#19.a, 19.b, 19c, Place of Birth: Enter your place of city/state/country of birth (if you do not have a state/province, then leave it blank

#20 Date of Birth: REMEMBER to write this in the US date style format (mm/dd/yyyy)!

#21.a I-94 Number: You can find this I-94 Website

#21.b Passport Number: Enter most recent passport number

#21.c Travel Document: Leave Blank

#21.e Passport Expiration Date: Enter most recent passport expiration date (mm/dd/yyyy)

#22 Date of the last arrival into the US: Check the POE (Point of Entry) Stamp in your passport. Do Not check the I-94 "Travel History Page".

#23 Place of your last arrival into the US: Check the POE (Point of Entry) Stamp in your passport. Do Not check the I-94 "Travel History Page".

#24 Status of last entry: For most, it will be *"F-1 Student" *(This could be different if you changed your status inside the US*).

#25 Current Immigration Status: Input "F-1 Student"

#26 Current SEVIS Number: Find this on your immigration document

#27 Eligibility Categories: Fill out as follows: **(c) (3) (C)**

#28.a Degree: Enter degree stated on your diploma or what is listed on your I-20. Either option is allowed.

#28.b: Employer's Name as Listed in E-Verify: Ask your employer this question!

#28.c: Employer's E-Verify Number: Ask your employer this question!

>Part 3

#1.a to 2 Applicant's Statement: Check as it applies to you

#3, #4, #5 Contact Information: Enter in US phone numbers and a PERSONAL email address

#7.a, 7.b Certification: Sign and date the I-765 in dark blue ink. Sign WITHIN the box – do not go outside the box.

>Part 4-5

If this applies to your situation, fill in as applicable – OR – if this doesn't apply to you, draw a diagonal line across each page you are not completing, and write "NA" next to your line. **(NOTE: Page 5 requires your signature – so *DO NOT* draw a diagonal line across that page)**

>Part 6

- Complete this section only if you have been approved for CPT, and/or OPT, and/or you have used a different SEVIS ID in F-1 status in the US in the past.
  - If you need to complete this section because one or more of these apply to you, please complete item 1
  - For each of the items listed above, complete one box in Part 6. We suggest using the following to complete the Page number, Part Number, and Item number, as this information is required specific to Category (c)(3)(C) (per the I-765 [instructions](#), page 4):
- **Page 3, Part 2, Item 27**
  - We suggest this format – see an example in the OIE STEM OPT [PowerPoint](#):
  - **CPT Authorizations:**
    - Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), **Full-Time or Part-Time, CPT**, with Employer Name: Start date to End date (You can find your CPT details on the I-20 that was approved for each period of CPT)
  - **OPT Authorizations:**
    - Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), Post-Completion OPT, Start date to End date (You can find your OPT details on the I-20)
- **Page 3, Part 2, Item 26**
  - **Previous SEVIS ID Number(s):**
    - Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), Program Start Date – Program End Date, SEVIS ID: N00…. (You can find your SEVIS Number in the top right-hand corner of your I-20)

Mail the STEM OPT application to USCIS. Check the [filing locations for Form I-765](#) (Click on Foreign students and use address for F-1 OPT)

- You will receive a Receipt Notice (form I-797) from USCIS – *SAVE THIS FOR YOUR RECORDS.* The Receipt Notice will have a tracking number (located in the 'Receipt Number' box on the I-797). This can be used to follow the progress of your case at www.uscis.gov.
- Your case may stay in "Initial Review" status until it is approved.

STEP 4: Wait for the EAD

Within one month of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard receipt notice. If you do not get this notice within 6 weeks contact an OIE advisor for more information. The "Receipt Number" in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to check the status of your case on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov or by calling the phone number indicated on the receipt. Keep in mind that this information is updated infrequently.

Other Important Information

Reporting Requirements and Limitations on Unemployment

- F-1 regulations ==**REQUIRE**== you to report any change in your residential address, your personal contact information, your employer's address and supervisor contact information within 10 days to immigration: https://www.sevp.ice.gov/opt.
- *For any other changes, email oie@andrew.cmu.edu for next steps. [Material Changes](#) may require updated documentation being submitted to OIE!**
- **Additionally, you must report to OIE every 6 months, within 10 business days, to confirm that the employer information you submitted with this request is still correct**. The first report is due 6 months after the end of your 12-month OPT period. After that, the report is due every 6 months (refer to your 24-month planning tool) until your STEM OPT ends, or you change status or depart the US. Send STEM reports & evaluations (found on page 5 of the [I-983 Form](#)) when due to oie@andrew.cmu.edu.
- **Periods of "unemployment" are limited to 150 days while on STEM OPT**. This dates back to the start of your initial 12-month OPT period days (90 days on Post-OPT, plus an additional 60 days on STEM OPT).
  - You must report status changes directly to OIE (oie@andrew.cmu.edu) while you are on STEM if:
    - If you apply for and are granted a change of status from F-1 (OPT) to H-1B or any other status, if you leave the US and make a new entry in another status, if you leave the US permanently before the end date of your EAD card, If you plan to return to CMU as a student or continue studies elsewhere after STEM.
- **Authorization May Not be Rescinded.** Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted, it may not be rescinded or canceled. This means that after OPT is authorized by the USCIS, it is impossible to have it canceled and restored at a later date. If you do not use the work authorization, it is forfeited.
- **Change of Employer after STEM OPT has been Authorized:** You must report any change of employer within 10 days directly to OIE through [MyOIE Portal](#), *NOT* through the SEVP Portal. Remember to login to MyOIE portal with ==*"Limited Access Client Services"*==. You will find the "STEM I-20 Request" e-Form under the F-1 Practical Training tab. You will also need to submit the final evaluation (found on page 5 of the [I-983 Form](#)) along with the entire original I-983 from your old employer. OIE will then update SEVIS and will email you instructions for receiving a new STEM OPT I-20.
- Social Security and Other Taxes: In general, F-1 students who have been in the US fewer than five tax years are "nonresidents for tax purposes" and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "US Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Beginning in the sixth tax year, most students in F-1 status become "residents for tax purposes" and employers should withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year, for both "nonresidents" and "residents."
- **Traveling Outside of the US While on STEM OPT:** Reentry provisions of the regulations require students who have graduated and are on authorized STEM OPT to present the following documents to reenter the US:
  - STEM OPT I-20 signed (page 2), within the last 6 months. Should you require an updated travel signature and are no longer in Pittsburgh, email OIE for next steps (oie@andrew.cmu.edu).
  - Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Valid passport, Valid F-1 visa sticker (e.g. unless re-entering using Automatic Visa Revalidation [(AVR)](#)
  - A job offer letter/proof of employment. F-1 regulations allow for travel and reentry in order to "resume employment."
  - **Dependent Travel:** Since dependents do not receive an EAD, an F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student's I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation, EAD card and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 when traveling.
- **Employment Authorization with a Pending H-1B petition ("Cap Gap" employment authorization)**
  - All students on OPT who have a pending or approved H-1B petition with a request for change of status will have their F-1 status and OPT authorization automatically extended if the employer has filed a timely H-1B petition with a change of status request with a requested October 1 start date.
  - Should your employer require a new [Cap-Gap I-20](#), contact oie@andrew.cmu.edu
  - The OPT employment authorization automatically ends if the H-1B petition is denied, rejected or withdrawn (although the student can continue working until the end date indicated on the OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The F-1 would have a 60-day grace period with no work authorization after the end of OPT.
- **Other Key Changes to the New Regulation:**
  - Students granted a 24-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment dating back to the start of the initial 12- month OPT period. (90 + 60 = 150 TOTAL)
  - A student meeting the eligibility requirements for a 24-month STEM extension may request an extension of employment by filing Form I-765 up to 90 days prior to the expiration date of the student's current OPT employment authorization.
  - The student seeking the 24-month extension must properly file the I-765 with USCIS within 60 days of the date the DSO recommends OPT in the SEVIS system.
  - Students may not be their own (sole) employer or provide employer attestations on their own behalf. Additionally, there must be an employer/employee relationship with the employer providing training on site, which means that people will typically need to be employed directly by the company, not employed by a third party or temp employment agency. The government guidance is that the "employer that signs the Training Plan must be the same entity that employs the student and provides the practical training experience."
  - To qualify for the STEM OPT extension, the position must be at least 20 hours per week or more. Employment with multiple employers is only possible if both positions will be at least 20 hours per week and if both employers comply with all of the STEM OPT regulations, including completing and signing the I- 983 Training Plan.