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I. Eligibility for the 24-Month STEM OPT Extension

What degrees qualify for the STEM OPT extension?
If you received a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree from Stevens, and the field of study is on the Department of
Homeland Security’s list of STEM major fields, you can qualify for the STEM OPT extension.

Does employment on the STEM OPT extension have to be paid, and if so, how much?
Yes, employment on the STEM OPT extension must be paid. Unfortunately, volunteer opportunities are not considered
employment on the STEM extension. There is no specific wage requirement for employment during STEM OPT, but the I-983
includes an attestation by the employer that compensation is commensurate with that provided to U.S. employees who
provide similar duties and responsibilities.

May I be self-employed on the 24-month STEM OPT extension?  
No, students must have a Training Plan, the I-983 signed by an employer. Therefore, self-employment is not permitte
during the STEM OPT period.

How many hours per week must I work?
You must work a minimum of twenty (20) hours per week to be considered employed.

Does my employer have to use E-Verify?
Yes, your employer must be part of the E-Verify Program.

My employer wants to enroll in E-Verify. May I apply for the STEM OPT extension while their application is pending?
No. You must provide the employer’s E-Verify number on your I-765, which is the application for the STEM OPT extension.

What is Form I-983, and is it a requirement for the 24-month STEM OPT extension?
Before applying for the STEM OPT extension, you must complete the Form I-983: Training Plan for STEM OPT Students with
your employer. The Form I-983 is not sent to USCIS, but provided to ISSS as part of your STEM OPT application and saved to
your student record. You should also retain the original of your I-983 for your records. ISSS has created a visual Form I-983
Guide based on the I-983 Instructions. These tools will help you and your employer complete the form with accuracy. STEM
OPT students and their employers are subject to the terms of the 24-month STEM OPT extension regulations, effective as of
the start date requested for STEM OPT, as indicated on the form I-983. More information about the Form I-983 can also be found on the Study in the States website.

Are there two 24-month STEM OPT extensions available to me?
You must meet two requirements in order to qualify for a second 24-month STEM extension:

1. Earn a second qualifying STEM degree at a ‘higher degree level’ and
2. Be first approved for a new period of post-completion OPT based on that higher degree

This means you may not apply for a new STEM OPT extension if you are not currently participating in post-completion OPT, and you may not apply for back-to-back STEM OPT extensions.

How do I determine if the STEM degree I previously earned from a different school qualifies for a 24-month STEM OPT extension?
If you are engaged in your 12-month period of post-completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree, you may be eligible to use a prior STEM degree earned [within the last ten years] 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. The STEM OPT employment opportunity must be directly related to your bachelor’s degree in mathematics.

II. STEM OPT Application Process

In general, how early can I apply for the 24-Month STEM OPT extension?
You may apply no earlier than ninety (90) days before your post-completion OPT expires.

Can I apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension during my 60-day grace period (following my post-completion OPT end date)?
No, USCIS must receive your application before your current post-completion OPT EAD expires.

What is the application process?
Complete and submit the following items to ISSS.Application@stevens.edu or in person:

1) OPT Request Form
2) The completed I-983 (Please see Form I-983 Guide)
3) Copies of the front and back of your current EAD card

ISSS will issue you a new Form I-20 if you qualify for the STEM OPT extension. You should sign the I-20 and make a copy for your application. Mail your application to USCIS according to the instructions on the STEM OPT Extension Application Checklist.

As long as you submit all of the documentation listed on the STEM OPT Extension Application Checklist, USCIS will adjudicate your application, which takes approximately 90 days. If USCIS has any questions, they will send you a request for information/evidence.
If your application is approved, USCIS will mail you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) for the STEM OPT extension, which will list the start and end dates you are authorized to work on the STEM OPT extension.

What documentation must I submit to ISSS, and which documents must I submit to USCIS?
Please refer to the [STEM OPT Extension Application Checklist](#) for a complete list of documents to submit to ISSS and USCIS.

How long will it take to receive my I-20 with the 24-month STEM OPT extension recommendation from ISSS?
Please refer to our [website](#) for current processing times.

**How long after receiving my Form I-20 must I mail my application to USCIS?**
USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the date your OPT was recommended in SEVIS. Since this date is not listed on your I-20, please make sure USCIS receives your application within 55 days of the date the I-20 was issued (the date next to the ISSS staff member’s name on the first page of your new I-20). If you are too close to the deadline to be sure the application will arrive in time, please contact your ISSS advisor (listed on the [ISSS Contact US page](#)) for assistance. Also, keep in mind that the application needs to be received by USCIS before your current EAD expires.

**How long will it take USCIS to process my application? Can I expedite the process?**
The average length of time for USCIS to adjudicate an application is 90 days. USCIS does not typically expedite applications. However, you can review the process for expediting at this website: [https://www.uscis.gov/forms/expedite-criteria](https://www.uscis.gov/forms/expedite-criteria)

### III. Pending STEM OPT Extension Applications

**Can I continue working if my post-completion OPT expires while my STEM OPT extension application is pending?**
Yes, your work authorization is “automatically extended” for up to 180 days after the expiration date on your most recent OPT EAD once you have a STEM OPT extension application pending with USCIS. Please see this referenced on the [USCIS website](#). Your proof of filing is the receipt number, which you may obtain by filing [Form G-1145](#) with your original application; this will allow you to receive an e-mail/text when USCIS accepts your application.

You can direct your employer to page 25 of the M-274, the Employer Guide to the I-9: "If the student's Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766) expires while his or her STEM extension application is pending, he or she is authorized to work until USCIS makes a decision on his or her application, but not more than 180 days from the date the student's initial OPT Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766) expires. The student's expired Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766), together with the Form I-20 endorsed by the designated school official recommending the STEM extension are acceptable proof of identity and employment authorization for Form I-9 purposes. Enter these documents in Section 2 under List A of Form I-9. You should re-verify employment authorization no later than 180 days from the expiration date of the previous Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766)."

**May I change jobs while my STEM OPT application is pending?**
Yes, you may change jobs while your STEM OPT application is pending.

To ISSS, you must submit the following items:

1) An [Employer Update Form](#) and
2) A new I-983

Your Immigration Advisor will update your employer information in SEVIS and print a new I-20. After you receive your new I-20, you need to sign it, and submit the following items to appropriate USCIS Service Center:
1) An amended Form I-765 with the new employer’s E-Verify number listed
2) A copy of the USCIS receipt notice for the first Form I-765
3) A brief letter explaining the submission
4) A copy of the new I-20 form with the updated employer.

Please note: There is no fee associated with submitting the amended Form I-765.

IV. Reporting Requirements during the 24-Month STEM Extension

If I change employers after I am approved for the STEM extension, what am I required to report?

You must submit the Employer Update Form and a new Form I-983, and a copy of your STEM extension EAD and employment offer letter within 10 days of your job change. If your STEM extension application is still pending with USCIS and you want to change employers, please contact your ISSS advisor and follow the instructions provided in the question above.

You will also need to submit the final evaluation on the Form I-983 (page 5) from your previous employer to ISSS.

If the nature of my job changes (but not my employer), what am I required to do?

You must submit the Employer Update Form and a new Form I-983 to the ISSS office within 10 days of your job change.

If I am working for the same employer but my employer’s client changes, what am I required to do?

You must submit the Employer Update Form and a new Form I-983 to the ISSS office within 10 days of your job change. There is space on the Employer Update Form to reflect change in client site.

How much unemployment time am I allowed, and if I become unemployed, what am I required to do?

Of the 90 days of unemployment you were allowed on post-completion OPT, you are permitted to use any unused time (the balance of 90 days), plus an additional 60 unemployment days on the 24-month STEM OPT extension for a total of 150 days.

If you become unemployed, you must submit the Employment Update From to the ISSS office within 10 days of ending employment. You will also need to submit the final evaluation on the Form I-983 (page 5) from your previous employer to ISSS.

What is a six-month report? When and how should I provide it?

On the OPT STEM extension, you are required to report your legal name, address, employer, employer address, employment start date every 6 months; if you do not do so, your F-1 status could be terminated in the SEVIS system. You should complete the STEM OPT Report Form and email the form to ISSS.Application@stevens.edu. The staff of ISSS will report your information in SEVIS.

What is the 12 month self-evaluation? What is the final evaluation? When and how should I provide it?

For the 12 month self-evaluation, you must submit to ISSS two items:

1) STEM OPT Report Form
2) Page 5 of the Form I-983, the self-evaluation section.

The form reviews the progress of the training experience. Students and their employers must sign the student’s self-evaluation before the student submits it to ISSS to be included in your student record.
If you change jobs, in addition to submitting a new I-983 for your new job, you will need to submit the final evaluation from your previous employer. If you reach the end of your 2-year STEM OPT extension, you will need to submit the final evaluation.

For more information about the annual self-evaluation, please visit the [Students and the Form I-983 page](#).

**What are the reporting requirements on the STEM Extension?**

- Do not participate in self-employment or unpaid employment.
- Report changes to your legal name or home address within 10 days of the change.
- Submit a new Form I-983 within 10 days of any changes in employment.
- Submit a new Form I-983 if there are material changes to the original I-983.
- Submit Self-Evaluation 12 and 24 months from STEM OPT Start Date. (Page 5 of the Form I-983.)
- Submit STEM OPT Report Form, every 6 months.

**V. Travel on STEM OPT**

**Can I travel outside the U.S. while my STEM OPT application is pending?**
If you have an unexpired EAD card for post-completion OPT, and you are otherwise admissible to the United States, you may consider international travel.

If your EAD card for post-completion OPT is expired, and you have a pending STEM OPT application, we suggest you avoid travel. More information about travel can be found on the [Travel Information](#) section on the website.

**My application has been approved, and I have received my EAD. What documents do I need for re-entering the U.S?**
You should have the following documents: I-20 with travel signature that is less than 6 months old, valid passport, valid visa, letter of employment/offer letter, EAD card.