

OPT 17-Month Extension for STEM Degree

International Office, 601 University Dr., San Marcos, TX 78666

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Basic Explanation:

F-1 students in lawful status who are currently engaged post-completion OPT in a STEM field may apply to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for an additional 17 months of OPT.

Eligibility Requirements:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must have completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a STEM field<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ (Verify that the CIP code (3rd page of your I-20) is a STEM degree: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must be employed, or have a job offer from an employer enrolled in E-Verify
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must submit your application to the DHS <u>before</u> your current 12-month OPT authorization expires.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ (You may apply up to 120 days before your 12-month OPT end date)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must not have accrued more than 90 days of unemployment during current 12-month OPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must not have previously received a 17-month STEM Extension after earning a STEM degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment must be directly related to your major area of study
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• USCIS must receive the application for the STEM Extension at least 1 day prior to your current OPT expiration date
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Double majors may apply for a STEM Extension <u>only</u> if the major which the regular post completion OPT was authorized for is a STEM degree. If OPT was linked to non-STEM major, the student is ineligible for the 17-month extension. (Note: A STEM Extension will never be authorized for a <i>minor</i>).

Uninterrupted Employment Authorization : If the I-765 is properly and timely filed (prior to the 12-month OPT end date), the student's employment authorization is considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT extension EAD application is pending. The receipt from USCIS indicating that it was timely filed is evidence of your authorization to continue working.

Application Process (cannot be initiated sooner than 120 days before your OPT End Date)

Step 1: Check that your employer is enrolled in E-Verify & request an employment letter

Inform your current (or future) employer of the below responsibilities, and request a letter from your employer on company letterhead that certifies that you are currently/will be employed and includes the statement below.

***Employer Responsibilities & Instructions**

- A. The employer must be enrolled in E-Verify (<http://www.dhs.gov/e-verify>)
- B. The government regulations pertaining to F-1 students state that to be eligible for a STEM Extension, the employer has the following responsibility: *“The employer agrees to report the termination or departure of an OPT employee to the DSO at the student's school or through any other means or process identified by DHS if the termination or departure is prior to end of the authorized period of OPT. Such reporting must be made within 48 hours of the event. An employer shall consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left the employment or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the consent of the employer, whichever occurs earlier.” -8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(4)*

To meet the requirements, the employer should provide an employment letter, which includes the **Employer's name and address, employee's name, employment start-date**, and a statement of agreement for the International Office as outlined below:

I/We agree to report within 48 hours the termination or departure of this employee to the International Office at Texas State University or to the Department of Homeland Security, if the termination or departure is prior to end of the authorized period of Optional Practical Training.

Step 2: Request a recommendation for an OPT Extension from the International Office

You apply for an OPT STEM Extension by first making a request for the authorization to an advisor in the Texas State International Office. In order for the DSO to create a new I-20 with a request for your STEM Extension to be approved, you must submit the following forms:

- A. The employment letter from an E-Verified employer which must include the “Statement of Agreement” detailed on Page 1.
- B. A signed Statement of Understanding (page 4 of this form)

Once the DSO has received these forms and approved your eligibility for a STEM Extension, a new I-20 will be made that certifies OPT Extension eligibility, which you will need to sign and make a copy of to include in your OPT Extension Application. Please allow for up to 3 business days for your I-20 to be created after you have requested it.

Step 3: Fill out the I-765 Form

You may [download](#) an electronic version of the I-765 (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>)

Instructions for completing the I-765:

- DO NOT leave any questions blank, write “None” or “N/A” (Not Applicable) as needed,
- Item 3: Use your own address **OR** (if you are moving) you may use the International Office address for the return address:
 - Written as: 601 University Dr., Thornton Hs. | San Marcos | TX | 78666
- Item 16 should be: “(c)(3)(C)” which is the code for requesting Stem-Extension OPT Authorizations
- Item 17a: “list the major”: We recommend typing the CIP code listed on the 3rd page of your I-20 or hand-writing your degree name as it appears on the I-20.
- Make sure your signature fits between the two lines because it will be transcribed on the OPT card

You must complete the I-765 yourself, however if you would like the International Office advisors to review the I-765 for accuracy prior to you sending it to USCIS, please e-mail a copy of it to the International Office: international@txstate.edu and wait at least 3 business days for a reply.

Step 4: Gather the necessary documents to be included in your application

Copy the following documents and submit to international@txstate.edu for advisor review. You may use copies of most of the documents for the application, but you must mail your original I-765, check, photos.

Document Checklist

- Form I-765 (original)
- 2 passport photos (taken within 30 days) (for help see: [Passport photo requirements](#))
- Personal check or money order, payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” for \$380.00
- Copy of your current EAD (OPT Card) and any other EAD cards you have (front and back)
- Copy of passport (it should be valid for at least 6 months into the future)
- Copy of original entry I-94 (front and back) **OR** a printout of the electronic I-94 card found on the [CBP website](#)
- Copy of US Visa
- Copy of any Form I-797A Notice of Action (if applicable)
- Copy** of your new OPT Extension I-20, with your printed name, signature and date
- Copy of your **unofficial** transcript or to prove graduation (print this out from [Catsweb](#))
 - *We recommend sending the unofficial transcript and not an official because USCIS seems to prefer the details listed on the unofficial version.*

When you receive the OPT Stem Extension EAD card, you must submit a copy of the EAD Card to the Int’l Office

Step 5: Mail the I-765 and additional documents to the appropriate USCIS facility

(Find this information on the USCIS website: <http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>)

USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox facilities	
If you live in:	Mail your application to:
<p>Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Northern Mariana Islands.</p>	<p><u>USCIS Phoenix Lockbox</u></p> <p>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:</p> <p>USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036</p> <hr/> <p><i>For Express mail and courier deliveries:</i></p> <p>USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034</p>
<p>Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia</p>	<p><u>USCIS Dallas Lockbox</u></p> <p>For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:</p> <p>USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266</p> <hr/> <p><i>For Express mail and courier deliveries:</i></p> <p>USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067</p>

Statement of Understanding and Reporting Responsibilities for OPT STEM Extension

1. An F-1 student who has properly filed Form I-765 prior to the end date of his or her 12 month post completion OPT is allowed to maintain continuous employment for up to 180 days while USCIS adjudicates the request for the extension.
2. USCIS will notify the applicant of the decision and, if the application is denied, of the reason or reasons for the denial. The applicant may not appeal the decision.
3. The employment authorization period for the 17-month OPT extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization and ends 17 months thereafter, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.
4. For the 17-month STEM extension, employment must be traditional paid employment for at least 20 hours per week
5. During your 17-month STEM extension, you may work in a paid position for only an employer that is an E-Verified.
6. F-1 students may not accrue more than 120 days of unemployment during the total period of employment authorization or 29 months.
7. If the student mails the OPT STEM application themselves, the student is responsible for filing form AR-11, Alien's Change of Address Card in order to notify Department of Homeland Security of any address change, especially if one occurs while the OPT-17 application is pending. Failure to do so may result in a delay in receiving the OPT-17 Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

8. Reporting Requirements While on the 17-Month OPT. Compliance is mandatory in order to maintain lawful F-1 status.

10-Day Reporting Requirements

Within 10 days of the change, the student must report (using an OPT Personal Information Update Form in Email or person) to the student's DSO a change in:

- Full legal name, Current mailing and Residential address, Phone number and Email
- Employer name, Employer address, Loss of employment, Date you began working for the current employer

6-Month Reporting Requirements

Every 6 months you will receive an automatic e-mail from the International Office requiring a validation report regarding your employment. The validation report requires the same information that is required on a OPT Personal Update form. Regardless of when you last updated your employment information, you are required to reply to the e-mail from the International Office. The report is due within 10 business days of when it is requested.

- Name and address of the current employer, Date you began working for the current employer (company)
- Your full legal name, current mailing and residential address, phone number and email

What should students report to ensure that their status does not expire due to excessive unemployment time? Students are encouraged to report changes in employment to their DSO as soon as possible through the *OPT Change of Personal Data* form on the International Office website. SEVP recommends that students report changes within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a DHS official may determine the student is out of status.

- I have read and understand the statements above and certify that I will take full responsibility for execution of the above mentioned reporting requirements and that I will not rely on the International Office at Texas State to remind me of my responsibility.
- I have been informed by this Statement of Understanding provided by the Designated School Official at the International Office at Texas State University-San Marcos of my responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- I also understand that I am responsible to monitor the International Office website at Texas State University-San Marcos and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) website (www.ice.gov/sevis) for subsequent updates to any reporting requirements and that I will be responsible for complying with those requirements.
- I have read all statements contained in this Statement of Understanding and by signing below indicate that I understand the statements and will comply with the reporting requirements outlined therein.

Applicant Signature

Date