OPT STEM Extension Information and Application

Certain F-1 status students engaged in post-completion OPT are eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of their OPT authorization.

ELIGIBILITY

Who is Eligible for an OPT Extension?

The extension is available only to F-1 students currently working in a period of post-completion OPT

1. Student must have a Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral degree in an eligible STEM field. A list of currently eligible STEM fields can be found at: [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm)

Please note that your degree must match the specific CIP Code in the list (the CIP Code will print on the front page of your I-20). If your CIP Code does not match, then you are not eligible for an OPT extension.

The STEM Designated Degree Program List is issued and updated by the federal Department of Homeland Security; there is no flexibility to grant an OPT extension for a major that does not meet the CIP Code guidelines.

Students may be eligible to use a previously earned STEM degree for a STEM extension if they meet the following requirements:

- Most recent degree (which does not need to be STEM-related) must be from a currently accredited SEVP-certified school in the U.S.
- Prior STEM degree must have been earned in the U.S. within 10 years of applying for the STEM OPT extension.
- Prior STEM degree CIP Code must be on the STEM Designated Degree Program List.

2. Student must be employed with an employer who is enrolled in the E-Verify program.

3. Student must have worked with their employer to create and submit a formal training plan Form I-983 to their International Student Advisor.

4. Student must work over 20 hours per week at their STEM eligible job.
Do I need to apply for a STEM extension if I applied for an H-1B on April 1 but my OPT will end before October 1?

Not necessarily.

Duration of status and work authorization will be automatically extended for a student on OPT who meets the following criteria:

- Your employer filed your H-1B application on April 1 requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the same year
- Your employer requests a “change of status” to H-1B and NOT “consular processing”
- You have otherwise followed the F-1 regulations

This automatic “H-1B gap coverage” applies to all students on OPT. This means that even if your OPT ends before October 1, you will be able to remain in the U.S. and continue working for the same employer who filed the H-1B for you until your H-1B becomes effective on October 1. If you have dependents in F-2 status, their ability to remain in the U.S. is automatically extended as well.

However, be aware that the extension of duration of status (ability to stay in the U.S.) and work authorization will automatically terminate if your H-1B application is rejected, denied, or revoked. In this case you will have 60 days to leave the U.S., change to another status, or begin a new degree program. This same applies if – between the time your OPT ends and the start of the H-1B - your employment ends with the company that sponsored you for the H-1B. The ability to remain in the U.S. and continue working with the same employer does not apply to students with H-1B petitions to work in higher education or nonprofits, as they are not currently restricted by an H-1B “cap” nor are they limited in when they must apply for the H-1B. They also have the option of applying for expedited H-1B processing.

APPLICATION PROCESS

When Should I Apply for the OPT Extension?

Your application must be received by the appropriate USCIS Service Center before the end date of your current OPT authorization. We recommend applying for your OPT extension 90 days before your current OPT ends.

How long does the application process take?

The average processing time for OPT is currently 90 days; it could happen faster or could take longer in individual cases. In the very unlikely event that your application cannot be granted, you will receive an explanation for the denial. Likewise, if USCIS wants you to send additional or supporting documentation before they will proceed with your application, they will send a letter to you with a Request for Evidence. Your STEM application will be put on hold while USCIS processes this Request For Evidence. Due to this fact, we highly recommend responding to a USCIS Request for Evidence as soon as possible.

What is the process for applying for an extension?

Please refer to the attached application instructions for detailed processes and a list of documents.

Students who currently live in or near Grand Forks

Please gather all forms and documents listed in the application instructions and schedule an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor by calling 701-777-4231.
Students who are unable to apply in person

You will need to complete the paperwork listed in the application instructions, including the online OPT Reporting Form. Please scan and email the Form I-765 and Form I-983 to an International Student Advisor. Your International Student Advisor will verify both forms are complete and issue a new I-20 for you, recommending the STEM extension and return it to you. You will then be responsible for mailing the full application packet to the appropriate USCIS Service Center in accordance with the instructions.

POST-APPLICATION

What Happens After I Mail My OPT Application?

Processing Information:

About 2-3 weeks after you mail your application, you should get a special receipt letter from the USCIS called a Notice of Action. Remember to keep this letter, since it will contain a special number beginning with the letters “LIN, WAC, EAC or SRC...” that refers to your specific application. If you do not receive the Notice of Action after 5 weeks, please notify the International Center.

Decision on Your Application:

The average processing time for OPT is currently 90 days; it could happen faster or could take longer in individual cases. In the very unlikely event that your application cannot be granted, you will receive an explanation for the denial. Likewise, if USCIS wants you to send additional or supporting documentation before they will proceed with your application, they will send a letter to you with a Request For Evidence. Your STEM application will be put on hold while USCIS processes this Request For Evidence. Due to this fact, we highly recommend responding to a USCIS Request for Evidence as soon as possible.

Can I Keep Working While Waiting for My OPT Extension Decision?

Students who file an application for the STEM OPT extension in a timely before their existing OPT expires will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending until a final decision is made by USCIS OR for 180 days, whichever comes first. Ensure you continue to report using the OPT Reporting Form on the Employment Page of the International Center’s website.

What Happens if I Become Unemployed While on OPT?

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 cumulative days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial 12-month post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 24-month STEM OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 36-month OPT period. If you are unemployed for more than the permitted lengths of time you must consider your OPT to be automatically cancelled and your F-1 status ended. Note that volunteer positions do NOT qualify for a STEM extension.

Can I Change Employers Once I Apply for an Extension?

Once the extension is approved, you may change to work for another employer who is also enrolled in E-Verify. You must notify the International Center when this occurs. However, the International Center does not recommend you change employers while the extension is pending. During the extension period, you may not work for any employer who is not enrolled in E-Verify.
OTHER INFORMATION

Reporting Information to the International Center
While on OPT you are still legally required to report certain information to an International Student Advisor. Changes to any of the following must be reported within 10 days of the event using the OPT Reporting Form found on the Employment page of International Center Website.

- Changes in name or residential/mailing address
- Report your employer name, address, and supervisor’s email within 10 days of any changes or new employment
- Report changes to another immigration status
- If you will leave your OPT employment before your OPT end date
- Notify the International Center if your email address changes

After I have been approved for a STEM extension, do I have to send the International Center an updated form I-983?
Yes. Even before your OPT STEM extension I-20 can be issued, you must submit (to an International Student Advisor) a copy of the I-983 form, with pages 1-4 fully completed. If your OPT STEM extension application is approved by USCIS, you must:

- Complete the 1st self-evaluation on page 5 of the Form I-983 within the first 12 months of your STEM Extension and promptly resubmit the form to an International Student Advisor.
- Complete the 2nd self-evaluation on page 5 of the form I-983 at the end of the 24-month STEM Extension period and promptly resubmit the form to an International Student Advisor.

Failure to submit both self-evaluations promptly can result in F-1 status termination and loss of OPT.

Will I be eligible for another 24-month extension if I go back to school and get another degree?
Yes. If a student completes all course requirements for another qualifying STEM degree at a higher degree level (Example: Masters to PhD) than the first STEM qualifying degree, the student may apply for a second 24-month STEM OPT extension while in a valid period of standard post-completion OPT. A student may not be authorized for more than two lifetime STEM OPT extensions.
APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Document Checklist

☐ **OPT Reporting Form** – found at [https://und.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_byJFZFQSKAmAjr](https://und.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_byJFZFQSKAmAjr) This form must be submitted online prior to the issuance of your STEM Extension I-20. You do not need a hard copy of this form.

☐ **Form I-765**: Complete all fields
  - Item 11: The first three letters of your receipt number indicate the service center –
    - YSC – Potomac Service Center.
    - EAC – Vermont Service Center;
    - WAC – California Service Center;
    - CSC – California Service Center;
    - LIN – Nebraska Service Center;
    - SRC – Texas Service Center;
  - Item 16: indicate code (c)(3)(C)
  - Item 17 must contain the requested information on the student’s degree and the employer’s E-Verify Company or Client Identification Number.
  - The current version of Form I-765 is available at: [http://www.uscis.gov/forms](http://www.uscis.gov/forms)

☐ Copy of **signed** OPT STEM Extension I-20 (Keep the original)

☐ **Form G-1145**: Complete all fields
  - This form authorizes USCIS to send electronic updates in addition to regular mail. Please note that this form is not required, but if it is not included USCIS will only send notification by U.S. Postal Service.
  - The most current form can be found at [https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145](https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145)

☐ **Completed Form I-983**: Student and employer must fully complete pages 1-4 of form I-983.
  - The current version of Form I-983 is available at: [https://www.ice.gov/](https://www.ice.gov/)
  - The Form I-983 is NOT submitted to USCIS in the application packet. It is instead submitted to and retained by the International Center.

☐ Copy of your **transcript** – it must indicate the degree level and title of major/degree program. An unofficial transcript is acceptable.

☐ **Two new identical “natural color” passport photos** – These are **U.S.-style** passport photos that are fewer than 30 days old. For more details on the photograph specifications, please go to: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html)

☐ Copy of your **MOST RECENT** Form I-94: Your official form I-94 can be retrieved and printed from: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home)

☐ Copy of BOTH your passport photo/information page showing the passport expiration date AND your most recent U.S. visa.

☐ Copies of all current or previous EAD cards.

☐ **Application Fee** - The cost is $410. Personal checks or money orders must be in the exact amount and payable to “United States Department of Homeland Security.” Personal checks are preferable to money orders, because they can more easily be traced in case of problems.
APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Students in or near Grand Forks

Gather all documentation listed above. Schedule an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor by calling 701-777-4231.

Students unable to apply in person

1. Complete the three items in the checklist above (OPT Reporting Form, Form I-765, and form I-983)

2. Scan and email the Form I-765, and form I-983 to brittany.rhodes@UND.edu. Include your full name UND Student ID (EMPLID), and mailing address in the e-mail.

3. The International Center will review the submitted documentation and issue you a new I-20 recommending the OPT Extension. You will receive two new I-20s. The first I-20 is for the STEM Extension application packet for USCIS, while the second I-20 is for your own records and use. Both I-20s will be sent to you via USPS mail service.

4. Upon receipt of the new I-20s, sign the student signature line on page 1.

5. Compile the Extension application in the following order:

   □ Application Fee
   □ Passport Photos (write your name, Date of birth and I-94 number on the back of each photo)
   □ Form I-765 (original)
   □ Form G-1145 (original)
   □ Copy of OPT extension I-20 that you received from your International Student Advisor (you should keep the original)
   □ Copies of any I-20s that have previous OPT or CPT authorization
   □ Copy of your transcript
   □ Letter from your employer
   □ A copy of your MOST RECENT Form I-94
   □ A copy of passport photo/information page showing the passport expiration date
   □ A copy of your most recent U.S. visa.
   □ Copies of all current and previous EAD cards.

6. Make a photocopy of the entire application packet for your records

7. Send the application via UPS, FedEx or Certified U.S. Mail with Return Receipt to the appropriate U.S. Service Center serving your residence (see attached Service Center Filing Chart or go to http://www.uscis.gov). If there are any problems with your application, you will need the mailing receipt and/or tracking information for your packet. Do not send your application via regular mail. *IMPORTANT* USCIS must receive and log your application within 30 days of the issue date of your I-20. Late applications will be denied.

8. When a decision is made, please send a photocopy of your results and new documents to Brittany.Rhodes@UND.edu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you live in:</th>
<th>Mail your application to:</th>
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  For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries:  
  USCIS  
  PO Box 21281  
  Phoenix, AZ 85036  
  For Express mail and courier deliveries:  
  USCIS  
  Attn: AOS  
  1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S  
  Suite 100  
  Phoenix, AZ 85034 |
| 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 | **USCIS Dallas Lockbox**  
  For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:  
  USCIS  
  PO Box 660867  
  Dallas, TX 75266  
  For Express mail and courier deliveries:  
  USCIS  
  Attn: AOS  
  2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business  
  Suite 400  
  Lewisville, TX 75067 |