UCCS International Affairs

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
COLORADO SPRINGS

<u>OPT STEM EXTENSION ONLINE FILING INSTRUCTIONS</u>

F-1 students who are currently authorized for OPT employment based on completion of a Bachelor's, Master's or Ph.D. degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) field from an SEVP certified school, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), may be eligible for a 24-month extension of OPT.

In order to be eligible for this extension, students applying for this benefit must:
- Already be on valid post-completion OPT, and be 'Active' and in-status in SEVIS
- Have a valid passport (must be valid for at least 6 months into the future)
- Have completed a STEM-eligible degree (check eligible degrees HERE, either the current OPT degree, or a prior one for which no STEM extension has been given)
- Had fewer than 90 days of unemployment while on the current post-completion OPT
- Apply before the end of the year of post-completion OPT
- Be employed or have a qualifying job offer: from an employer who is registered in the E-Verify employment verification system, that offers paid employment directly related to the STEM degree, of at least 20 hours per week, that will provide formal training and learning objectives directly related to the qualifying STEM degree and that constitutes a bona-fide employer-employee relationship
- The training plan is the responsibility of the employer where the work experience is to take place, and the training experience must take place on-site at the employer's place of business or worksite
- Employment through a staffing agency is possible, but the 'employer' should be the onsite employment client of the agency in most cases, and must be signed off on by the actual supervising employer
  - Any new staffing agency assignments require a new completed I-983, completed and signed with the supervising employer for the new assignment
- Any 'material change' to the employment such as location, supervisor, job duties, etc., require reporting to the International Affairs (IA) Office and an updated I-983

There is a lifetime limit of **two** periods of 24-month STEM OPT; each occurring after a higher degree level has been obtained. A STEM degree obtained at a U.S. university prior to your current degree may be the basis for a STEM extension under certain circumstances. OPT STEM employment may be with more than one employer, but <u>each position</u> must be STEM OPT eligible (i.e. more than 20 hours/week, proper employment, reported by I-983 to the school official and in SEVIS, E-Verify employer, etc.). Volunteering and self-employment are not permissible. See more eligibility information, and employer responsibilities: HERE.

<u>Process:</u>
1. Gather all items listed in the checklist (below) and email all documents to international@uccs.edu.
   - Completed and signed "OPT STEM EXTENSION REQUEST" form
   - Completed Training Plan I-983 form (see tips below)
   - Scan of 1 color U.S. passport-style photograph. Photo must be taken within the last 30 days, measure 2 inches by 2 inches and have a plain white or off-white background
   - Most recent I-94 printout (https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/)
   - Passport identity page (and any renewal pages)

- Scan of the front and back of any previous EAD card and approval notice
- Scan of any prior I-20s if they show CPT or OPT OR a different SEVIS ID
- Evidence that your degree meets the STEM degree/major requirements (copy of the diploma that shows your degree level and program of study **or** an official transcript)
- Completed online form I-765 DRAFT (see directions below, start here: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/)

2. Make an appointment with IA to review the application. Only after the meeting with IA, you will be given the I-20 needed to complete your OPT application.
3. After you receive your OPT I-20, print and physically sign the I-20 showing your OPT recommendation. Upload a scanned copy of your new I-20 to your draft application. Review your application, ensure all required materials are uploaded, and submit within 30 days of receiving your new I-20.
4. After submission, return to your pending applications to download your application receipt. Email a copy of your application receipt to international@uccs.edu when received (send the formal receipt; no copy of the confirmation email is needed).

Step-by-Step Instructions for Online Filing:
1. Create an account (if you don't already have one) at: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/
2. Click on "Create an Account" to set up your account OR log in to an existing account. If you are setting up an account use a personal non-UCCS email that you will have access to forever.
3. Once you have logged in, click on "My USCIS" then "File a form online" to begin your application process.
4. Select "Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)" from the drop-down list.
5. Review the information on the page carefully. It will tell you everything you need to file online. Make sure you have all the items on the list of required evidence prepared before starting your application. Answer the form questions in order, do not skip ahead. The form will autosave your answers in each section.
6. Make sure you select the category: (c)(3)(C) 24-month extension for STEM students.
7. You must select "Initial permission to accept employment." If you have ever filed form I-765 before (even if it was denied), you must say "Yes".
8. The next sections in the application will ask information about you. You will need your I-94, passport, and I-20 to complete the immigration information section. You will generally not have an A Number or USCIS account number. Leave these blank.
9. For the Form I-20 upload, you will see it listed that your "DSO must enter OPT recommendation in SEVIS within 30 days before you submit I-765" – this will be done at your OPT appointment. Do not submit your application until then You are only preparing a draft of your I-765 for review at this time. You will be given an I-20 showing your STEM OPT recommendation after your appointment. Your I-20 must be printed and physically signed (in ink) before uploading. Do not electronically sign or insert a digital signature on an I-20. This must be uploaded or your application will be denied. Review the formatting requirements required for your uploads. It is your responsibility to format your documents properly for USCIS, according to their instructions. It is highly recommended that you do not take pictures. Scan your documents from a scanner/copier machine and upload clean, clear and legible PDFs, free of shadows, and with nothing in the background.
10. Before moving to payment, the application will check for errors and notify you if you may need to edit your response. Errors will NOT be checking your answers for accuracy or blanks, you must make sure that the data you provided in your application is complete and correct. If an error is highlighted in red, it must be corrected before you can submit your application. A 'yellow' error calls your attention to something that may need correction. Review it to make sure your information is correct. If it is, you can submit without changing your response.
11. Download the draft and send a copy to international@uccs.edu with all other required materials.

12. STOP: DO NOT move to the next step of payment and submission of your application until after you have had your OPT appointment with IA, received your STEM OPT I-20, and uploaded this evidence to your application.
13. After reviewing your draft I-765 and other materials, you will receive an email with any corrections. You will then be offered the opportunity to schedule your OPT appointment. After you have had your appointment, received your OPT I-20, and uploaded it to your application, proceed to the submission and payment page.
14. You will electronically sign your I-765. This is the only electronic signature allowed (again, your I-20 copy must show a signature signed physically, in ink). You will then be directed to pay.gov to pay your application fee.
15. You may pay by bank transfer (ACH) or via a debit/credit card issued by a U.S. bank. The U.S. billing address provided must match the details on your bank/credit card account.
16. Make sure that you have completed submission. A confirmation will be displayed on the screen, and you will immediately get a receipt notice with your case number. Click on "Go to my cases," then click on "Documents," to download and send your receipt to international@uccs.edu (please include your full name and ID number when emailing). If you receive an RFE, speak with IA before responding.

TIPS for filling out the I-983:
- UCCS's SEVIS School Code: DEN214F00219000
- SEVIS ID Number: This number is found on page 1 (top left) of your I-20, starting with 'N'.
- STEM OPT Requested Period: The day after your post-completion OPT EAD expiration date, until the end of the two-year period.
- Major: Enter your major as it is printed on page 1 of your most recent I-20.
- CIP Code: This is found on your I-20 on Page 1 next to your major.
- Employment Authorization Number: This is the "USCIS #" on your EAD
- The rest of the form must be completed by you and your employer (on-site employer) and signed in ink.
- Note that you do not complete the sections 'Evaluation on Student Progress' and 'Final Evaluation on Student Progress' at the time you submit your STEM application. These are currently on page 5 of the I-983.
- It is your responsibility to complete the 1-year and 2-year evaluations on page 5 at the appropriate time. Submit each evaluation to IA at international@uccs.edu.
- IMPORTANT: You will need to submit a new I-983 for each new employment (any new location included) you have while on STEM OPT

Guidelines for the Passport Style photo:
- Photo must measure 2 inches by 2 inches.
- Head should be positioned directly facing the camera.
- Photo should capture from slightly above top of hair to middle of chest.
- Background should be plain white or off-white.
- **Photos should be taken within the last 30 days prior to the extension application**. Photos used for obtaining a non-U.S. passport or a U.S. visa stamp are generally not acceptable, as they are often not the correct size, and rarely taken within 30 days of the OPT application.

- ✓ *Submit the STEM OPT application and all items in the checklist above to USCIS in the 90 day period BEFORE your current OPT expiration date.*

- ✓ ***While the STEM OPT I-765 is pending with USCIS, you may continue to work for up to 180 days (but only if your employment is proper STEM employment in all aspects).***

- ✓ ***Be aware of the STEM OPT reporting responsibilities (below): reporting any changes at any time, reporting each 6 months for the duration of your STEM Extension, and completing and submitting the 12-month and 24-month final evaluations. Report to an IA advisor by email and provide an updated I-983 for any employment changes that appear on the I-983.***

STEM OPT Reporting Requirements:

In order to maintain their legal F-1 status, a STEM OPT student must regularly check in with their Designated School Official (DSO) throughout the duration of the extension to validate SEVIS information and report changes made to the student's training plan.

Validating SEVIS Information: Every six months a student must work with their DSO to confirm that the student's record in SEVIS accurately reflects their current circumstance. As part of this six-month reporting, STEM OPT students must confirm that their SEVIS information correctly identifies their:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name and address
- Status of current employment

Please note that STEM OPT students must report a change in this information, including any loss of employment, within 10 days of the change.

Self-Evaluations: Each STEM OPT student must complete and submit to their DSO an annual self-evaluation describing the progress of the training experience. The student must ensure that the DSO receives the assessment no later than 10 days following the conclusion of the training period. The student must submit the assessments for the stated periods:

- Initial: 12 months after the STEM OPT start date
- Final assessment that recaps the training and knowledge acquired during the complete, 24 month training period

A student must complete an assessment at the conclusion of the training opportunity; usually this is a final assessment due at 24 months, but possibly any time during the period of authorized employment when employment ends.

Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983: Each STEM OPT student must report to their DSO any material changes to, or material deviations from, the student's formal training plan. Material changes or deviations from the original Form I-983 may include, but are not limited to:

- New employer
- Any change of the employer's EIN
- Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked
- Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity
- Change in supervisor and/or supervisor contact information
- Company acquisition/merger
- Employer street address and/or site address
- Changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on Form I-983

So long as the STEM OPT student and employer meet the regulatory requirements and the modified Form I-983 meets the specified requirements, the student's employment authorization will not cease based on a change to the plan. Report directly by email to IA and provide any updates of forms included with your reporting email.

Use the following link for a summary of information from the official DHS page:

https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-stem-opt-reporting-requirements