



USC OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

STEM OPT Extension Instructions

24-Month STEM OPT Extension Instructions
and Guidelines for USC Students in F-1 Status



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What is STEM OPT Extension?

STEM OPT Extension is an additional 24-month work authorization benefit for employed F-1 students on post-completion OPT, who obtained a DHS-approved science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degree in the U.S.

The student must meet certain eligibility requirements in order to request a STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS and apply for a renewal of their EAD with USCIS.



What is STEM OPT Extension?

CONTINUED

If approved, USCIS will issue the student a STEM OPT Extension EAD and the student must fulfill specific employment and reporting requirements over the 24-month period to maintain F-1 status.

STEM OPT Extension is a benefit of F-1 status, not a separate visa status. Therefore, OIS continues to monitor status maintenance for F-1 students on STEM OPT Extension.

For more detailed information, students and their employers should refer to the STEM OPT Extension resources on the Study in the States website.



When can students apply for STEM OPT Extension?



- USCIS accepts completed STEM OPT Extension applications as early as **90 days prior** to the post-completion OPT EAD end date and no later than the OPT EAD end date.
- In accordance with USCIS submission deadlines, OIS accepts STEM OPT I-20 requests up to **90 days prior** to the post-completion OPT EAD end date.
- After receiving the STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS, the student must submit their STEM OPT Extension application to USCIS for adjudication. USCIS must receive the application:
 - Prior to student's OPT EAD end date
- *AND* -
 - No more than 60 days after *Date Issued* on Page 1 of the STEM OPT Extension I-20



How long does the entire STEM OPT Extension application process take?

***Approximately
2 to 3 months***

Students who file a timely application with USCIS may continue working after their post-completion OPT EAD is expired - until they receive the final decision from USCIS on the application (i.e., approved or denied) *or* for 180 days, whichever comes first.

- ▶ **Student requests STEM OPT I-20 from OIS as early as 90 days before the OPT EAD End Date**
OIS processing time for complete and correct requests submitted via Trojan International is 7 business days *after* submission date – students will be notified by email to print their signed STEM OPT Extension I-20 once processed.
- ▶ **Student submits online Form I-765 and supporting documents to USCIS prior to their OPT EAD end date**
After submitting the online Form I-765, supporting documents, and filing fee, students will be issued a receipt number which they can use to track the status of their application or through the USCIS online account.
- ▶ **USCIS adjudicates STEM OPT Extension application and if approved, mails STEM EAD to student**
USCIS processing time from the "received" date on the receipt notice is approximately 2 to 3 months

To be eligible for STEM OPT Extension, the student must:



- ▶ **Currently be on Post-Completion OPT and meeting all OPT employment and reporting requirements**
- ▶ **Have obtained a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in the U.S. listed on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Programs List***
 - CIP code (XX.XXXX) can be found on the I-20 under "Major"
- ▶ **Meet the following employment requirements:**
 - Student must be paid – volunteer or unpaid is not authorized
 - Student's position must be directly related to major and appropriate to degree level
 - Student must work 20 hours or more per week to meet full-time requirements
 - Employer must be enrolled in DHS's E-Verify system
 - Employer must maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student (as defined by USCIS)
 - Student and employer must attest to employment information on the Form I-983



Students and their employers must review Study in the States for additional guidance

**Updated January 2022*



STEM OPT Extension Application Overview

| STEP | PROCESS | SLIDES | REMINDER |
|------|--|--------|---|
| 1 | STUDENT REQUESTS STEM OPT EXTENSION I-20 from OIS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student submits STEM OPT I-20 Request to OIS via Trojan International as early as 90 days prior to OPT EAD end date• OIS will email the STEM OPT I-20 to student• Student prints and signs (in ink) STEM OPT Extension I-20 | 9-10 | OIS processing time for complete and correct STEM OPT Extension I-20 requests is 7 business days after submission |
| 2 | STUDENT SUBMITS ONLINE FORM I-765 (APPLICATION FOR STEM OPT EXTENSION) TO USCIS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student completes Form I-765 using the USC Guide to Filing Form I-765 for STEM OPT Extension• Upload supporting documents, including STEM OPT Extension I-20 | 11 | Important reminders to prevent STEM OPT application rejection or denial |
| 3 | USCIS ADJUDICATES STEM OPT EXTENSION APPLICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• USCIS provides receipt number to student upon submission of online Form I-765• USCIS adjudicates STEM OPT Extension application within 2 to 3 months of receipt date; and• Mails decision notice to student | 12 | USCIS processing times |
| 4 | STUDENT RECEIVES EAD VIA MAIL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If STEM OPT Extension is approved, USCIS mails student STEM OPT Extension EAD• Student completes all STEM OPT Extension reporting requirements throughout their 24-month period. | 13-21 | STEM OPT Extension reporting requirements |



How do students determine their STEM OPT Extension start and end dates?

| STEM OPT EXTENSION START DATE | STEM OPT EXTENSION END DATE |
|--|--|
| The STEM OPT Extension start date is always the day <i>after</i> the OPT EAD end date. | By default, the STEM OPT Extension expires 24-months from the STEM OPT Extension start date. |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Example</u> OPT EAD ends May 13, 2023 STEM OPT Extension start date: May 14, 2023 STEM OPT Extension end date: May 13, 2025</p> | |



When and how do students request a STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS?

Student submits STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request via Trojan International as early as 90-days prior to their OPT EAD end date.

- The request form will require you to enter your information, OPT EAD end date, and STEM OPT Extension employer information, including company EIN and supervisor contact information
- Upload PDF copies of the following documents
 - Current OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (front side only)
 - Completed Form I-983 (typed and hand-signed). Refer to USC's Sample STEM OPT Extension I-983 for guidance
- Pay non-refundable \$200 OIS Administrative Processing Fee. For additional information about the Administrative Processing Fee, refer to the STEM OPT Extension Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Student will be able to submit completed STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request via Trojan International upon successful payment of Administrative Processing Fee.
- Processing time for complete and correct requests is 7 business days *after* submission date.

OIS will email STEM OPT I-20 to student once it processed. Student will need to print it and sign (in ink)

- If corrections are needed on the STEM OPT I-20 Request, student will be informed via email.



What happens after receiving the STEM OPT Extension I-20?

Assemble application documents and submit Form I-765 online to USCIS



- ▶ **Refer to the Guide to Filing Form I-765 for STEM OPT Extension for required application documents and instructions on how to complete the online Form I-765**
Follow the USCIS instructions and OIS guidance carefully; failure to comply could result in rejection or denial of the OPT application.
- ▶ **USCIS must receive complete and correct STEM OPT Extension applications:**
 - ▶ **Prior to student's OPT EAD end date**
- *AND* -
 - ▶ **No more than 60 days after *Date Issued* on Page 1 of the STEM OPT Extension I-20**
USCIS will deny any applications that are received after either deadline—no exceptions. Students at risk of missing either deadline should contact OIS immediately.



Next, USCIS reviews and adjudicates the student's STEM OPT Extension application

● After submitting the online Form I-765, supporting documents, and filing fee, students will be issued a receipt number which they can use to track the status of their application

● USCIS processing time is approximately 2-3 months; current processing times can be found in the USCIS Processing Time website– select “Form I-765” and “Potomac Service Center” from the drop-down menus

● If STEM OPT Extension is approved, USCIS will issue an approval notice and mail the student their Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

● Student must comply with all STEM OPT Extension Reporting Requirements based on their EAD start and end date

Students can continue working after their OPT EAD end date with a pending STEM OPT Extension application.





To maintain F-1 status on STEM OPT Extension, students must:



Comply with all STEM OPT reporting requirements, including submitting data validation reports and Form I-983 self-evaluations to OIS



Report and submit all changes to their employer or employer information to OIS within 10 days of the change



Not accrue more than 150 days of unemployment



Update personal contact information via the Trojan International

Failure to comply with these requirements will result in termination of the student's SEVIS record by SEVP



What are the reporting requirements students must complete while on STEM OPT Extension?

- ▶ Submit data validation reports to OIS every six months
- ▶ Submit Form I-983 12-Month Self-Evaluation to OIS
- ▶ Submit Form I-983 Final Self-Evaluation to OIS
- ▶ Report any changes to their employment situation to OIS within 10 days of the change
- ▶ Report any changes to their U.S. address and contact information in Trojan International within 10 days of the change





What are data validation reports?

Immigration regulations require students on STEM OPT Extension to validate their address, telephone number, and employment information with their school every six months

Refer to DHS's Study in the States website for additional information



When are these reports due?

Students must submit data validation reports/self-evaluations 6, 12, 18 and 24 months after their STEM OPT start date

Use the STEM OPT Extension Reporting Tool for USC Graduates to check submission deadlines for each Validation Report. Ensure Validation Reports are submitted accurately and on time. Validation Reports can be submitted up to 30 days before the report due date.

How do students complete and submit their data validation reports?

Refer to the STEM OPT Extension Employment Reporting Requirements instructions and submit the appropriate Validation Report through Trojan International.



What are Form I-983 self-evaluations?

Immigration regulations require students on STEM OPT Extension to submit Pages 1-5 of their Form I-983, with the appropriate self-evaluation completed on Page 5, to their school at the following points in time:

- 12 months after STEM OPT EAD start date
- 24 months after STEM OPT EAD start date (i.e., by STEM OPT EAD end date)
- On the final day of employment when changing employers, visa status, or transferring to another school

Refer to DHS's Study in the States website for additional information

When are Form I-983 self-evaluations due?

Students must submit self-evaluations 12 and 24 months after their STEM OPT start date, and, if applicable, on their last date of employment when changing employers, visa status (e.g., to H1B), or transferring to another school

Students can determine their exact 12- and 24-month due dates by logging in to their SEVP Portal account and reviewing their reporting due dates in the "STEM Student Due Date Announcement" notice

How do students complete and submit their Form I-983 self-evaluations?

See Slide 17



How do students complete and submit their Form I-983 self-evaluations?

CONTINUED

Follow the STEM OPT Extension Employment Reporting Requirements instructions and upload the required documents in Trojan International.

Form I-983, Page 5

EVALUATION ON STUDENT PROGRESS
Provide a self-evaluation of your performance, using the indicators previously identified, in acquiring and applying new knowledge, skills, and competencies identified in the Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. Discuss accomplishments, successful projects, overall contributions, etc. during the review period. Address whether there are any modifications to the objectives and goals for projects, or new areas for skill and competency development.

Range of Evaluation Dates: From (mm-dd-yyyy) _____ To (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

Signature of Student (Sign in ink): _____
Printed Name of Student: _____ Date (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

Signature of Employer Official with Signatory Authority (Sign in ink): _____
Printed Name of Employer Official with Signatory Authority: _____ Date (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

FINAL EVALUATION ON STUDENT PROGRESS
Provide a self-evaluation of your performance, using the indicators previously identified, in acquiring and applying new knowledge, skills, and competencies identified in the Training Plan for STEM OPT Students. Discuss accomplishments, successful projects, overall contributions, etc. during the review period. Address whether there are any modifications to the objectives and goals for projects, or new areas for skill and competency development.

Range of Evaluation Dates: From (mm-dd-yyyy) _____ To (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

Signature of Student (Sign in ink): _____
Printed Name of Student: _____ Date (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

Signature of Employer Official with Signatory Authority (Sign in ink): _____
Printed Name of Employer Official with Signatory Authority: _____ Date (mm-dd-yyyy) _____

ICE Form I-983 (7/16) Page 5 of 5

12-month self-evaluation

- Complete top section (only) of Page 5
- Due 12 months after STEM OPT EAD start date, regardless of start date with employer
- Range of Evaluation dates should cover first 12 months of STEM OPT Extension following STEM OPT EAD start date

Final (24-month or end of employment) self-evaluation

- Complete bottom section (only) of Page 5
- Due on STEM OPT employment end date
- Range of Evaluation Dates should cover final 12 months of STEM OPT Extension period, ending on STEM OPT EAD end date, or employment end date due to change of employer, SEVIS transfer, or change in visa status



What types of changes to their STEM OPT Extension employment do students need to report?

Students must report all changes to employment to OIS within 10 days of the change



Change to employment situation due to starting a new job, quitting a job, being laid off, etc.

If ending employment, or changing or adding employers, students **must** submit required documentation to OIS to request a new I-20.

Students can change employers while:

- STEM OPT Extension application is pending with USCIS
- On approved STEM OPT Extension



Any material changes (as defined by DHS) to their Form I-983 Training Plan

Student must report these changes via Trojan International.

**If there are any changes to the employer's name or EIN, student is required to report this to OIS as a "change of employer"*



How do students change employers while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending with USCIS?

OIS strongly advises against changing employers while STEM OPT is pending to avoid any complications, delays, or potential denials with USCIS.

In the event a student needs to change employers while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending, they must:

- 1) Have a receipt number from USCIS for their pending STEM OPT Extension application
- 2) Request an updated I-20 from OIS
- 3) Submit updated I-20 and supporting documents via their myUSCIS account for USCIS for review

STEP 1: Within 10 days of changing employers, student must request an updated STEM I-20 from OIS by completing and following the instructions for a Change of Employer request via Trojan International

STEP 2: Upon receipt of the new STEM I-20, student must immediately submit the following documents online to USCIS in their myUSCIS account by uploading their documents under “Your Cases” > “Documents” > “Unsolicited Evidence”:

- 1) Copy of signed I-20 with new employer information
- 2) Letter of explanation – be sure to include I-797 receipt number, I-94 admission number, full name, and new employer’s name and E-Verify number



How do students change employers while on approved STEM OPT Extension?

Students may change employers while on STEM OPT Extension, so long as their new employment opportunity meets all eligibility requirements, and the student continues to comply with all reporting requirements.

Students are required to request a new STEM OPT Extension I-20 from OIS within 10 days of the change.

To report their change of employer to OIS and obtain a new I-20, students must complete and follow the instructions on the Change of Employer request via Trojan International





What is the 150-day unemployment rule on STEM OPT Extension?

● Students on STEM OPT Extension may accrue up to 60 additional days of unemployment from the 90 days allowed on OPT, for an aggregate **total of 150 days**

● Accrual of more than 150 days of unemployment is considered a violation of the F-1 status and the ***student's SEVIS record will be automatically terminated***

What happens if a student accrues more than 150 days of unemployment?

SEVP and/or USCIS will terminate SEVIS records of students who accrue more than 150 days of unemployment, which would end the student's F-1 status and may negatively affect future U.S. immigration benefits

If a student is unemployed, they must forfeit their STEM OPT Extension prior to accruing more than 60 days of unemployment on STEM OPT, or an overall total of 150 days of unemployment, by selecting one of the following options:

- Begin a new degree program at USC
- Transfer SEVIS record to another school
- Change visa status
- Depart the United States



STEM OPT Rejection, Request for Evidence (RFE), or Denial



Students that receive a returned or rejected STEM OPT application, RFE, or denial notice from USCIS must contact OIS for guidance *before* responding or resubmitting their application to USCIS

Rejected: If a student's application is rejected, the student may need to request a new STEM OPT I-20 from OIS. USCIS will deny the OPT application if the student re-applies with an expired STEM OPT Extension I-20. USCIS must receive the new application prior to the OPT EAD end date.

RFE: If USCIS needs more information to process a student's application, they may issue an RFE. The RFE will explain which additional documents are required to process the STEM OPT Extension application and a specific deadline to respond by.

Denial: If a student's STEM OPT is denied, USCIS will indicate the reason for the denial on the denial notice. Due to the long STEM OPT application processing time with USCIS, students whose applications are denied will likely not be eligible to re-apply for STEM OPT.

Quick Links & Resources



- [DHS STEM Designated Degree Programs List](#)
- [E-Verify \(General Info\)](#)
- [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#)
- [Form I-765 Guide](#)
- [Form I-983 Overview](#)
- [Form I-983 \(Sample for USC Graduates\)](#)
- [How to Calculate Processing Days](#)
- OIS Forms (Available in Trojan International)
 - [STEM OPT I-20 Request Form](#)
 - [6-Month Validation Report Form](#)
 - [12-Month Evaluation Report Form](#)
 - [18-Month Validation Report Form](#)
 - [24-Month/Final Evaluation Report Form](#)
 - [Change in STEM OPT Employment Form](#)
- [OIS STEM OPT Website](#)
 - [STEM OPT Extension Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [SEVIS Transfer \(General Info\)](#)
- [STEM OPT Extension Based on a Prior Degree](#)
- [STEM OPT Reporting Tool](#)
- [Study in the States- STEM OPT Website](#)
- [Study in the States- STEM OPT Reporting Requirements](#)
- [USCIS Case Status Tracker](#)
- [USCIS Change of Address](#)
- [USCIS Online Account](#)
- [USCIS Processing Time](#)
- [USCIS STEM OPT Website](#) includes:
 - STEM OPT Overview
 - Definition of bona fide employer-employee relationship



Questions?

OIS International Student Advisors are available to answer questions via email, one-on-one advising, or through group advising sessions.

Email

Email OPTSTEM@usc.edu with a brief description of issue or question. Be sure to include student name, SEVIS ID, and if applicable, photocopies of any documents received from USCIS.

OIS Live – Virtual Front Desk and Advising

OIS Advisors are available for one-on-one consultation Mondays through Fridays via Zoom. No appointment is necessary. Advising hours and Zoom meeting link are posted on the [OIS website](#).

OIS Zoom Group Advising and Webinars

OIS offers group advising sessions covering topics such as STEM OPT Extension via Zoom. Refer to the [OIS eCalendar](#) for upcoming dates and times.