

# STEM OPT

*F-1 students in lawful status who are currently engaged in post-completion OPT may be eligible for an additional 24 months (for a total of 36 months) of OPT. If students have completed a degree in a [STEM designated field](#). The field of study can be found on the form I-20. If the field of study is not on the STEM list, then a STEM extension is not possible.*

## **Basic Steps of a STEM OPT Extension Application:**

1. Prepare the **STEM OPT materials with the employer** (more information below)
2. **Send STEM OPT** materials to the **International Office at UCHC**
3. **Obtain new I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation** from the International Office
4. **Apply online to USCIS**
5. Wait for USCIS approval

## **NOTES ON TIMING:**

- The application must be submitted to the International office **no later than one month prior to the end of your current Post-Completion OPT**.
- The STEM OPT application must be **submitted and received by USCIS before the expiration of the current OPT period**. The application can be submitted to USCIS **as early as 90 days prior to the end of the current OPT period**.
- If you **timely file** your STEM OPT extension application, you will be able to continue employment **while your application is pending**, until a final decision is made by USCIS or for 180 days beyond the expiration of your Post-Completion OPT, **whichever comes first**.
- It normally takes up to 90 days for USCIS to process STEM OPT extension applications.

# Eligibility Details

## **F-1 Student:**

- Is currently on a period of **standard Post-Completion OPT**
- Holds a degree in a field of study (indicated on the I-20) [which qualifies as STEM eligible](#) according to the official STEM Designated Degree Program List
- Has a **job offer** from an employer enrolled in [E-Verify](#)

- Letter should include your title, name of supervisor, email and telephone # of the supervisor, complete address of the employer
- **Can demonstrate the job is directly related to a STEM field**
- **Prepares and signs** the Training Plan with his/her employer ([Form I-983](#))
- Applies before his/her current Post-Completion period of OPT expires

#### **Employer Eligibility:**

- Is enrolled in [E-Verify](#)
- Has a [Federal Employer Identification Number](#) (EIN Number)
- Agrees to the [terms of STEM OPT](#) by completing their sections of the Training Plan ([Form I-983](#))

## Documents Needed for STEM OPT Application to USCIS:

*Once you receive your **new STEM OPT I-20**, you will include a copy of this new I-20 with the rest of your OPT application that you submit it to USCIS. You are now ready to submit your application to USCIS.*

#### **Included in the online application:**

- **Application form**
- **Photographs**
- **Payment method (credit card, debit card, online check)**
- **Copies** of the following: new I-20 (with STEM request), previous I-20s, current I-94 (printed online I-94 record), visa page, passport, and current post-completion OPT EAD card
- **Proof of STEM Degree completion** – copy of **awarded degree** and **official transcript**

#### **Required for UCHC International Office to Issue I-20** *(not included in packet to USCIS)*

- [Form I-983 Training Plan](#) completed and signed by you and your employer
  - It should include a brief explanation of the relevance of your work to your degree/coursework.
- **Employment verification letter:** should explain your **duties, pay, location** of the company, whether your **employment is part-time or full-time**, and should have **employer's name as listed in E-verify and E-verify identification #**

**NOTE:**

- **DO NOT** submit application without STEM OPT I-20
- Keep copies of all application materials for your records
- Upload all documents separately in relevant fields
- Your OPT application must be **received by USCIS within 60 days of the issuance of your new STEM OPT I-20**

# Tips for Completing the Documents:

## **Form I-983**

The purpose of the [Form I-983](#) is to ensure that students continue a rigorous training program that builds on the skills obtained as a full time student.

The student and their supervisor must agree on the components of the plan as follows:

1. The role of the student in the work place
  2. The goals and objectives of the proposed training
  3. How the employer will provide oversight of the plan
  4. What set of measures and assessments will be used. Both student and supervisor must sign this form.
- Use the SEVP instructions to [complete the I-983](#) as a helpful guide.
  - Use the **name and contact information of your UCHC** International Advisor as your **Designated School Official (DSO)**.
  - **UCH SEVIS School Code** is found on Page 1 of your I-20 under School Information, and begins with the letters **BOS214F**\_\_\_\_\_
  - **Your CIP code** is assigned to your major and can be found on your I-20 or on a degree verification. The number format will be **00.0000 (i.e. – “26.0102 - Biomedical Science”)**
  - Contact your employer to obtain the **company's EIN (tax ID number)**, [NAISC](#) code, and **E-Verify information**

## **Photographs**

- Two recent photographs on thin, glossy paper [per instructions from DHS](#).
- These will need to be uploaded to USCIS portal

## **Proof of STEM Degree**

- Proof of your STEM degree can include a copy of your UCHC diploma accompanied by official Transcript

A full overview of the application requirements including instructions for your employer can be found on [The Study in the States hub](#).

# STEM OPT Employment

## Limitations

- Employment must be paid.
- Employment must be a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- Employment must be directly related to your course of study.
- Limitation on **Unemployment** for the STEM OPT Extension
  - Students approved for the 24-month STEM OPT extension may not accrue more than a total of 150 days of unemployment throughout their entire 36 months on OPT.
  - Time spent outside the United States, if not employed by a U.S. employer, is counted towards the 150-day period of unemployment.
  - To count as “employed” a student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student’s employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of reported employment.
- **Unemployment Warning**
  - SEVIS records may **automatically terminate** for students who have no employment reported for 150 days.
  - Be sure that you have made alternate plans and communicated them to the International Office before your record is terminated. If you have any concerns, you can always contact the International Office.

## Reporting Requirements

- Students must submit a self-evaluation (last page on the form I-983) to the International Office **after the first 12 months** on the STEM OPT extension.
- A final self-evaluation is submitted **at the completion of the 24-month extension** period, or at the **conclusion of employment**, whichever comes first.
- Evaluations should be submitted within 10 days of the required date.
- **Students and employers** must report to the International Office a change in any of the following on the I-983:
  - Employer name and address
  - Decrease in student's compensation
  - Termination of employment
  - Reduction in hours worked to less than 20 hours a week
  - Employer's EIN

- **Students** are required to report to International Office **within 10 days**, any change in the following:
  - Legal Name
  - Residential address
  - Employer name and address
  - Change in status of current employment, including loss of employment, change of status to H-1B, transfer to another F-1 program, or change of employers.
  - If you change employers, you and your employer will need to complete a new I-983 and submit it to the International Office.
  
- **Students** are required to report the following to the International Office **every 6 months** - regardless if there is a change or not:
  - Legal name
  - Residential address
  - Employer name and address
  - Status of current employment

## Travel on STEM OPT

### Documents required to re-enter the U.S. while on STEM OPT Extension

- **Valid I-20:** Page two should list your employer's information and be signed by a UCHC DSO within the last six months.
- **Valid F-1 Visa:** If your F-1 visa is expired, you must apply for a new one at a U.S. embassy or consulate prior to your return. (*Note: Canadian citizens do not need a visa*).
- **Valid Passport:** The expiration date should be at least six months into the future at any given time.
- **Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**
- **Evidence of a job offer** or proof of employment. If you are returning to the U.S. without evidence of a job offer, you may be questioned at the port of entry.