STEM OPT Extension Information & How to Apply

F-1 students with degrees in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) may be eligible for an extension of their Post-Completion OPT work permission. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published new expanded regulations which took effect on May 10, 2016. Before making any plans to be employed on STEM OPT please speak to Sarah Keefe, Director, Office of International Programs.

Contents

STEM OPT ELIGIBILITY

For a 24-month STEM OPT work authorization extension to your Post-Completion OPT:

The F-1 student must:

- Be on a period of standard Post-Completion OPT
- Hold 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 [PDF]
- Have a job offer from an employer enrolled in E-Verify
- Demonstrate the job is directly related to a STEM field
- Prepare and sign the Training Plan (Form I-983)
- Apply before your current Post-Completion period of OPT expires.

The employer must:

- Be enrolled in E-Verify
- Have a Federal Employer Identification Number
- Agree to the terms of STEM OPT by completing their sections of the Training Plan (Form I-983)

WHEN TO APPLY

Here are the basic steps of a STEM OPT application:

- Prepare the STEM OPT materials with the employer
- Send STEM OPT materials to Office of International Programs (obtain new I-20 recommending STEM OPT)
- Mail STEM OPT application to USCIS
- USCIS receives application

The application must be submitted to OIP no later than one month **prior to the end of your current Post-Completion OPT**. The STEM OPT application must be received by USCIS before the expiration of the current OPT period. However, you can submit an application 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.

PREPARE YOUR STEM OPT APPLICATION

1. Prepare the documents below for your STEM OPT application.

If you are not in Manchester, you can communicate with the Office of International Programs via email.. Students in Manchester can schedule an appointment if they prefer.

Below is a list and explanation of the documents you will need for your STEM OPT application. The first document to obtain, however, is your new I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation. Please start the process by sending an email to Sarah Keefe attaching the Saint Anselm STEM OPT Request Form, Form I-765, Form I-983 Training Plan (completed and signed by you and your employer) and including a brief explanation of the relevance of your work to your degree/coursework.

Form I-983 Training Plan

The purpose of the Form I-983, a new requirement for 24-month extension, 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: the role of the student in the work place, the goals and objectives of the proposed training, how the employer will provide oversight of the plan, and what set of measures and assessments will be used. Both student and supervisor must sign this form and send it to OIP for review.

Tips for completing the I-983:

- Start with the SEVP instructions for students and employers to complete the I-983 as a helpful guide as you complete the form.
- Use the name and contact information of Sarah Keefe as your Designated School Official (DSO).
- Saint Anselm's SEVIS School Code is found on Page 1 of your I-20 under School Information, and begins with the letters BOS.
- Your CIP code is assigned to your major and can be found on your I-20 or on a degree verification. If this number is not easily found on either, please contact your academic institution to obtain your CIP code. The number format will be 00.0000
- Contact your employer to obtain the company's EIN (tax ID number), NAISC code, and E-Verify information.

A full overview of the new application requirements including instructions for your employer can be found on The Study in the States hub.

Form I-765

The purpose of the Form I-765 is to request renewal of your permission to accept employment. Do not apply for your STEM extension of OPT using the online USCIS process. Here are some tips for completing the PDF form:

- Type this form, except for the signature box
- Check the second box: Renewal of my permission to accept employment

- Question 3: Make certain that the address you put in item #3 will be valid for the next 90 to 120 days as this is where your receipt and EAD will be sent. Mail from USCIS will **not** be forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service.
- Question 10: Number from your online I-94 record
- Question 16: Eligibility code: (c)(3)(c)
- Question 17: Degree awarded and field of study. Employers EIN or E-Verify number, as supplied by your employer
- Signature: Sign in blue ink and make sure your signature does not touch any text or lines

Form G-1145

The purpose of the Form G-1145 is to request an electronic notification when USCIS accepts your application.

Photographs

Two recent photographs on thin, glossy paper per instructions from USCIS. Write your name and SEVIS number in pencil on the back of the photos. Do not cut to size or staple.

Check or Money Order

Current fee: $410 payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Photocopies of

- All previous I-20s (you will receive one additional I-20 to add to your application after Office of International Programs review)
- F-1 visa and passport ID pages (including your photo, passport number and expiration date)
- All previous EADs, including your current EAD
- Printed online I-94 record

Proof of STEM Degree

Proof of your STEM degree can include a copy of your Saint Anselm College diploma accompanied by either a degree verification letter or an official transcript.

2. Submit the forms to the Office of International Programs

Each student applying for STEM OPT must consult with a the Office of International Programs to receive a STEM OPT recommendation. Complete the application forms I-765 and I-983 and forward to Sarah Keefe, Director, Office of International Programs. Sarah Keefe will review your submission and contact you if she has questions.

3. Receive your new STEM OPT I-20 recommendation

When all materials are complete the Office of International Programs will create the required I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension. We will send first an electronic version which can be submitted by the student with their application. Then we will mail you the original for your use in travel.

SUBMIT TO USCIS & USCIS PROCESSING

Once you receive your **new STEM OPT I-20** from the Office of International Programs, you are ready to mail your application to USCIS.

- You will include a copy of this new I-20 with the rest of your OPT application that you submit it to USCIS.
- Make a copy of all application materials for your records and attach them using a paper clip.
- Make sure to send your application **via certified mail with a return receipt or tracking number**.
- Your OPT application must be **received by USCIS within 60 days of the issuance of your new STEM OPT I-20.**

The application and all of the required documentation must be sent to the USCIS Service Center Lockbox facility. Those with addresses in NH, MA or NY will send their application to the address below. Those with addresses in other states should visit the USCIS website to learn where to mail their applications.

By Courier Service (FedEx, DHL, UPS):	**By U.S. Postal Service:**
USCIS, Attn: AOS	**USCIS**
2501 S. State Hwy. 121	**PO Box 660867**
Business Suite 400	**Dallas, TX 75266**
Lewisville, TX 75067	

USCIS Processing

Checking the Progress of Your OPT Application. Within 2 - 3 weeks, USCIS will send you a receipt notice (Form I-797). This is proof that USCIS has received your application. Make sure to check the spelling of your name. If you notice an error, contact the Office of International Programs. The receipt will also have your case number printed on it (EAC#########), with which you can track the progress of your application on the USCIS website.

Request for Additional Documentation. Occasionally, a student will receive a Request for Further Evidence (RFE) from USCIS. These requests are typically because the application is missing a document or new photographs are required. If you receive such a request (normally a yellow sheet of paper) reply immediately to USCIS with the requested documents, including the original yellow sheet placed on top. If you do not understand the USCIS request, contact the Office of International Programs. Be sure to make copies of your materials before you mail them, and send the reply by courier mail.

EAD Delays. If you do not receive your EAD card within 75 days from the date immigration received your application, contact the Office of International Programs and we can check the status of your application. If you have applied to USCIS for your 24-month STEM extension and you have not received your new EAD by the end of your Post-Completion OPT, **you may continue to work for up to 180 days after the end of your Post-Completion OPT.** You should receive your new EAD before you reach 180 days.

STEM EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

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 Caution:** SEVIS records will **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 Office of International Programs before your record is terminated. If you have any concerns, you can always contact the Office of International Programs.

Keep Records of your Employment

Keep records of your employment history for your personal file, to present as evidence of maintaining lawful status should you apply for future immigration benefits.

Examples of records to keep:

- I-983 forms
- offer letters
- contracts
- payroll stubs
- letters describing volunteer activity and hours

STEM OPT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

During your STEM OPT extension period, you continue to hold F-1 status sponsored by Saint Anselm College and your F-1 record remains active in the government database, SEVIS. When participating in STEM OPT extension you must report and verify specific information to OIP. Please remember that the responsibility to report most information related to your STEM OPT extension rests primarily with you or your employer, but we will continue to support you during this period, and remain responsible for maintaining your record and updating your information in SEVIS. Reporting requirements usually entail submitting information to us by filling out the OPT Update Form, but certain changes in your employment information or periods of reporting will also involve submitting an updated I-983 form. Please read below to find out which reporting requirements will involve an update to Form I-983.

 When do you need to submit a STEM OPT update?

1) **Within 10 days** of any change in the following areas:

- 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. (**Important Note:** If you change employers, you and your <u>old employer</u> will need to update your existing I-983 form by filling out the final evaluation, and you and your <u>new employer</u> must complete a new I-983 form and submit to the <u>Office of International Programs</u>.)

2) **Every 6 months** regardless if there is a change or not in areas listed above.

When do you need to submit a STEM OPT update with an updated I-983 form?

1) **Within 10 days** of any change in the following areas:

- Employer name and address
- Decrease in your compensation
- Reduction in hours worked to less than 20 hours a week
- Employer's EIN
- Termination of employment

2) **Within the first 12 months** on the STEM OPT extension, you must submit to OIP the self-evaluations via the I-983. The section titled "Evaluation on Student Progress" on page 6 of the I-983 form needs to be filled out.

3) **At the completion of the 24-month extension period** or **at the conclusion of employment**, whichever comes first, you must submit to OIP self-evaluations via the I-983. The section titled "Final Evaluation on Student Progress" on page 7 of the I-983 form needs to be filled out. Evaluations should be submitted within 10 days of the required date.

TRAVELING ON STEM OPT

While on STEM OPT, you are required to show your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) along with your other immigration documents (see list below) in order to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. In many cases, students will also need to apply at a U.S. embassy or consulate for a new F-1 visa before returning to the U.S.

If you need to leave the U.S. **before you receive your EAD,** speak with the Director, Office of International Programs.

If your employer has **filed for H-1B on your behalf**, check with your employer about any travel plans as leaving the U.S. while an H-1B application is pending may jeopardize your application.

<u>Required documents to re-enter the U.S. while on STEM OPT Extension</u>

- **Valid I-20** - Page two should list your employer's information and be signed by an OISS adviser 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 you 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 resumption 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.