24-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) STEM Extension Application Guide & Tutorial for F-1 International Students

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Who is Eligible to Apply for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

- F-1 student with a STEM-qualifying bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree from an accredited, SEVIS-certified U.S. educational institution, who is in a valid period of standard post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT), and has an offer of paid employment for at least 20 hours per week from an employer that is enrolled in the E-Verify program and has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN).

- F-1 student may not be self-employed (there must be a bone-fide employer-employee relationship). The student and the employer must also agree to comply with all reporting, training, supervision, evaluation, wage, documentation, and other obligations specified in the regulations and on Form I-983 during the OPT STEM extension period.

- To determine if you qualify for the 24-month OPT STEM extension, please do the following:
  - Check with your supervisor or HR representative if your employer is enrolled in the E-Verify program: [https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify](https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify) and is in good standing. You will need the E-verify number (typically 5 or 6 digits long, showing at the top of the employer's E-Verify Memorandum of Understanding) and the EIN for your OPT STEM application.
  - Review your employment records to verify that you have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment during your current period of post-completion OPT, and check if your job (offer) directly relates to the level and (STEM) field of study showing on your I-20 form.
Who Qualifies for a Second Period of the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

The government allows qualified F-1 students a maximum of two 24-month OPT STEM extensions in their lifetime based on two separate STEM eligible degrees. For example, if you receive an OPT STEM extension for a bachelor’s degree, and then complete a higher degree in a STEM field, you will qualify for a new STEM extension.

If you never applied for the STEM extension based on the lower STEM degree, you can still qualify for a STEM extension as long as you are eligible for post-completion OPT based on the new non-STEM degree. For example, if you are currently participating in post-completion OPT based on a master’s degree in Business and Management, but you previously received a bachelor’s degree in Mathematics, you may be able to apply for a STEM OPT extension based on your bachelor’s degree in Mathematics as long as you meet the following criteria:

- You have received both degrees from currently accredited and SEVP-certified institutions.
- Your previous degree cannot have been conferred more than 10 years ago at the time of application.
- Your previous degree is assigned a STEM eligible code found on the STEM Designated Degree Program List: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf at the time of application.
- You have not already received an OPT STEM extension from the USICS based on this previous degree.
- Your practical training opportunity (job offer) is directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree.
- Your employer is registered in the E-verify program, has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN), and agrees to comply with all reporting, training, supervision, evaluation, wage, documentation, and other obligations specified in the regulations and on Form I-983 during the STEM OPT extension period.
When Can I Apply for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

- You can apply for a 24-month OPT STEM extension as early as **90 days before** your current post-completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card expires.

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must receive your 24-month OPT STEM extension application **before** your current post-completion OPT EAD card expires.

- USCIS must also receive your 24-month OPT STEM extension application **within 60 days** of when the ISS advisor makes the (electronic) OPT STEM recommendation in SEVIS (the government database).
How do I apply?

1. Request OPT STEM I-20 form by sending an email to your ISS advisor with the following information/documentation:
   - Your employer’s E-verify number (showing at the top of the employer’s E-Verify Memorandum of Understanding);
   - Confirmation if you previously obtained OPT STEM authorization from USCIS (the government allows a maximum of two 24-month OPT STEM extensions);
   - Confirmation if you have any international travel plans in the next 3-4 months; and,
   - Confirmation if you have any plans to move (change your U.S. residential address) in the next 3-4 months.

2. Assemble your OPT STEM application materials once you receive the I-20 form showing OPT STEM recommendation from ISS:
   - Original signed Form I-765 (see pages 7-12 of this tutorial for details);
   - Form G-1145 (see page 6 of this tutorial for details);
   - Passport photographs (paper-clipped to the top of Form I-765; see page 13 of this tutorial for instructions);
   - Money order in the amount of $410.00 made payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (paper-clipped or stapled to the bottom of Form I-765, with your name, address, and I-94 card number written in the memo section);
   - Copy of your signed I-20 form showing the OPT STEM recommendation;
   - Copy of your signed I-20 form showing your current OPT authorization and employer details;
   - Copy of your current and any previously issued EAD cards (front and back);
   - Copy of your biographical passport page(s) showing the validity date;
   - Copy of your current/latest F-1 visa page in your passport;
   - Copy of your current I-94 record: [https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions](https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions) showing your latest entry; and,
   - Official paper transcripts showing your STEM degree conferral: [http://offices.depaul.edu/depaul-central/academics/records/transcripts/Pages/default.aspx](http://offices.depaul.edu/depaul-central/academics/records/transcripts/Pages/default.aspx).

3. Retain a copy of the application for your records and mail the OPT STEM application to the appropriate USCIS service center before the deadline (see page 4 and page 14 of this tutorial for details).
Submit form G-1145 with your 24-month OPT STEM extension application and USCIS will alert you via SMS text message and/or email that your application has been accepted for review. You will also receive your receipt number in this text/email.

A sample G-1145 form is shown here. Complete the form with your name, e-mail address and mobile telephone number as directed. Please type the information on this form to avoid USCIS misreading your hand-writing.

Form I-765

Application for Employment Authorization

Form I-765 is the other USCIS form you will need to submit with your 24-month OPT STEM extension application. A sample I-765 form is shown here (Page 1 of 2).

**Important**

You are required to use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 right before you mail your application since USCIS updates forms frequently.

**How to Complete the I-765**

Completing the I-765 for your 24-month OPT extension application is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The following pages will cover how to complete those “tricky” questions so you can avoid any delays in receiving your work authorization extension.

Please type most of information on this form to avoid USCIS misreading your hand-writing. Note, some information will not always fit (name and address information primarily). For these areas, if applicable, please hand write the information clearly.

Download Form I-765 and instructions: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765).
Completing the I-765

Do not write in the space at the top of the I-765 form.

Begin by selecting the box labeled “Renewal of my permission to accept employment.” on Page 1

I am applying for:

- [ ] Permission to accept employment.
- [ ] Replacement (of lost employment authorization document).
- [x] Renewal of my permission to accept employment (attach a copy of your previous employment authorization document).
Completing the I-765

Items 1-8 (Page 1)

Item #1: Name
Your Family (last) Name must be in ALL CAPS. Your First Name (and Middle Name, if applicable) can be entered as you would normally write it (see example).

Item #2: Other Names Used
You only need to complete Item #2 if you had a name change while studying in the U.S.

Item #3: Address in the United States
The address you put here is where your new EAD card will be mailed if approved. This address needs to be valid for at least the next 3 months, the typical length of time it will take to process your OPT STEM application. If you think you may move in the months after you mail the application, use a reliable friend or family member’s address to receive your EAD card.

If you are using an address other than your own, use “c/o” to indicate that your mail is being delivered “in care of” the resident of that address. If you have questions about using a “c/o” address please contact your ISS advisor.
Completing the I-765

Items 9-16 (Page 1)

Item #9: Social Security Number (SSN)
Enter your Social Security Number (SSN). Your SSN can be found on your Social Security card.

Item #10: I-94 Number
Use your current I-94 number. This is the 11-digit number found on the top left corner of your paper I-94 card or on your electronic I-94 record (access here).

Item #11: Previous Employment Authorization
Check “Yes,” include the appropriate USCIS Office and start date for your current post-completion OPT authorization as well as any previously issued EAD cards, and write “Granted.” A photocopy of all previously issued EAD cards must be included with your 24-month OPT extension application packet. If you have lost any of your previously issued EAD cards, write “lost EAD” in this space.

Please note: the example here is for a student who has only been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT in the past (with an EAD card start date of July 1, 2016).

Item #12: Date of Last Entry into the U.S.
This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your paper I-94 card, on your electronic I-94 record, or in your passport admission stamp.

Item #13: Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is found on your passport admission stamp (usually as a code like “CHI” for Chicago). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, enter the name and the city where you entered the U.S.

Item #14: Status of Last Entry
This is the status you had upon entering the U.S. Most students entered in F-1 status, however, you may have initially entered with an H-1B work visa or in another status.

Item #15: Current Immigration Status
Your current status should be F-1 Student. If not, talk to your ISS Advisor immediately.

Item #16: Eligibility Category
Use the following code to apply for 24-month OPT extension authorization:

(c) (3) (C) 24-month STEM extension
Completing the I-765

Items 17-19 (Page 2)

Item #17: (c)(3)(C) Eligibility Category
Enter the 5 or 6-digit CIP code for the degree program you completed at DePaul University (available under the “Program of Study” section on page 1 of your I-20 form), your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer’s 5 or 6-digit E-Verify number.

Item #18: (c)(26) Eligibility Category
Leave this line blank.

Item #19: (c)(35) and (c)(36) Eligibility Category
Leave this line blank.
Finishing the I-765

Sign your name, include the date of your signature, and enter your telephone number at the bottom of the form.

Please note that your signature must fit in the space provided on the form. If your signature is too big your EAD card may not contain your signature or your application may be returned to you and delay the processing time of your application. Be conservative and use a signature smaller than your normal handwriting.

SIGNATURES MUST BE IN BLUE INK!

If you prepare your own I-765 you do not need to complete the bottom portion of the form.
Application Photographs

The photos you are required to use for your 24-month OPT extension application must meet the specifications of U.S.-style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the U.S. Department of State web site.

Most places that take passport photos are already familiar with the specifications. However, you may want to print this page, or the pages from the web site above to take with you when you get your photo taken.

Frequently Asked Questions

What type of paper are the photographs to be printed on?
The photos should be printed on thin photo-quality paper.

Do the photos have to be in color?
Yes, the photos must be in color.

How big must the photos be?
The photos must measure exactly 2 inches by 2 inches.

Can hats or religious headgear be worn for the photo?
Unless worn daily for religious reasons, all hats or headgear should be removed for the photo. In all cases, no item or attire should cover or otherwise obscure any part of the face.

Can eyeglasses be worn for the photo?
Eyeglasses worn on a daily basis can be worn for the photo. However, there should be no reflections from the eyeglasses that obscures the eyes. Dark glasses or nonprescription glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable unless you need them for medical reasons.

7 Steps to Successful Photos:

1. Your photo should show your full face, front view, eyes open.
2. Make sure the photo shows your full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm).
3. Your head should be centered within the frame.
4. Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo.
5. The background should be plain white or off-white.
6. There should be no distracting shadows on the face or in the background.
7. Make sure you have a natural expression.

Write your name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo in case they get separated from your application.
Mailing Instructions

USCIS Mailing Addresses For Students Residing in Illinois:

Mail your OPT STEM application to the appropriate USCIS Service Center based on your residential address (https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses) using a fast and trackable mailing service like Priority Express, certified USPS mail, FedEx, UPS, or DHL. It is not recommended that you use regular USPS mail, as it may take too long and/or get lost in the mail.

Do not E-file your 24-month OPT STEM extension application!
Additional Information and Reminders

- You must work **at least 20 hours per week for an E-verify employer in a paid position that directly relates** to the STEM field/degree showing on your I-20 form during the OPT STEM extension period.
- If USCIS timely receives your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you can continue working **for up to 180 days beyond** the expiration of your original post-completion OPT authorization while your application is pending with USCIS.
- If USCIS has any questions about your OPT STEM application or requires additional documentation, you will receive a **Request for Evidence (RFE) notice** from USCIS. If that happens, please contact your ISS advisor immediately for assistance.
- If you **change employers** while your 24-month OPT extension application is still pending or after it has been approved, please notify your ISS advisor **within 10 days of the change**. ISS will need to update your employment information in the SEVIS system, and you will be required to update your application with USCIS, if it is still pending. You will also need to submit a new Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan.
- If your **address, legal name, or contact information changes**, please update your Campus Connection account with this information **within 10 days of the change**. Please note that ISS will contact you at **6, 12 and 18 month intervals** for an update on your employment, address, and contact information.
- If USCIS approves your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you will receive a new EAD card from USCIS. Please send a copy of your new EAD card (front and back) to your ISS advisor.
- In addition to the 90 days of **unemployment** that you are eligible for during your initial period of post-completion OPT authorization, if USCIS approves your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you will be granted 60 more days of unemployment for the duration of your 24-month OPT STEM extension authorization (for a total of 150 days of unemployment over up to 36 months of OPT authorization should you need to use it).
- If you transfer to another school/college or start a new degree program, your OPT STEM extension will **no longer be valid**.
- For **more information** on the 24-month OPT STEM benefit, please visit this link: [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub)
- For more information on how to complete **Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan**, please visit this link: [https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983Instructions.pdf](https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983Instructions.pdf)
Frequently Asked Questions: Form I-983

This information refers to frequently asked questions on Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan. For complete instructions on Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan, please visit this link: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983Instructions.pdf

- **What is the SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix)?** This is DePaul University’s SEVIS school code and can be found on page 1 of your current I-20 form under the “School Information” section. It will begin with the letter “CHI”.

- **Who is my Designated School Official (DSO)?** This is your ISS advisor. Enter the full name and contact information, including official address, phone, and email, of the DSO (ISS advisor) who will process your Form I-983 and who is recommending the STEM OPT extension for you.

- **Where can I find my SEVIS ID number?** Your SEVIS ID number can be found in the top left corner on page 1 of your current I-20 form. It will begin with the letter “N”.

- **Where can I find my Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code?** Your qualifying major and CIP code are available on page 1 of your current I-20 form under the “Major 1” heading of the “Program of Study” section. Your CIP code will be 6 digits and your qualifying major will be written immediately before your CIP code. Please note that some students’ qualifying majors on their I-20 forms will read differently than what is listed on their diplomas. Be sure to copy the qualifying major and CIP code exactly as they read on your current I-20 form into the correct Form I-983 field. If you are applying for the 24-month STEM OPT extension based on a prior degree (i.e. not your most recently completed degree), please speak with your ISS advisor to confirm your qualifying major and CIP code.

- **Should I complete page 5 of Form I-983?** Page 5 of Form I-983 is for you to provide an initial and final self-evaluation of your employment performance during your OPT STEM extension. Include the “from” and “to” dates of the first 12 months of your anticipated OPT STEM extension time for the “Evaluation on Student Progress” section, but leave the rest of the content in this section blank when first submitting the completed form to your ISS advisor. You will eventually complete this content at the end of your first 12 months of OPT STEM extension time. Do the same thing for the “Final Evaluation on Student Progress” section, but for the second 12 months of your anticipated OPT STEM extension time.

Please remember to type or clearly hand-write the content of Form I-983, print the completed form for you and your employer’s handwritten signatures, and then scan and email it to your ISS advisor for review.
Thank you!

Congratulations on successfully completing your 24-month OPT STEM extension authorization application. Please contact your ISS advisor if you have any questions or concerns.

Best of luck from the ISS as you pursue continued OPT employment!

Special thanks to our friends at the International Office at the University of California Berkeley and Stanford University from whom we adapted this OPT tutorial.