F-1 STEM Optional Practical Training (STEM OPT) Application Process

F-1 students with U.S. degrees in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) may be eligible for a 24 month extension of their post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) work permission described at 8 CFR 214.2 (f). Under 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(2), a STEM field of study is a field of study “included in the Department of Education’s Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomy within the two-digit series containing engineering, biological sciences, mathematics, and physical sciences, or a related field. In general, related fields will include fields involving research, innovation, or development of new technologies using engineering, mathematics, computer science, or natural sciences (including physical, biological, and agricultural sciences).”

All F-1 STEM OPT extension applications may not be received by U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) any earlier than 90 days before the current post completion F-1 OPT expires but must be received by USCIS before the current post completion OPT expires. For this reason, before making any plans to apply for F-1 STEM OPT, OIA recommends F-1 students speak with their International Visitor Advisor regarding the best time to file.

Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for the 24-month extension, the F-1 student must:

1) Be in valid F-1 OPT status;
2) Have earned a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a STEM field approved by the DHS Designated Program List
3) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer for a paid job directly related to the F-1 STEM OPT major field of study
4) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer who participates in the E-Verify program;
5) Provide completed Form I-983 Training Plan;
6) Have been recommended for F-1 STEM OPT by the Designated School Official; and,
7) Submit the Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization and required documents to USCIS before the expiration of current F-1 OPT status.

NOTE: Some F-1 students may be eligible for F-1 STEM OPT based on a previous degree. Please consult with your International Visitor Advisor to determine if you may be eligible for this benefit.

How to Apply:

Step 1: Prepare & complete application for 24-month F-1 STEM OPT recommendation:

☐ Complete and sign STEM OPT Extension Request Form;
☐ Signed F-1 STEM OPT Reporting Obligations form
☐ Complete and sign Form I-983 Training Plan
☐ Complete and sign Form O-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance;
☐ Complete and sign Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization;
  • Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper code of (c)(3)(C) on Question 20;
  • Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper degree on Question 21;
    ○ Example “Biomedical Sciences” where indicated.
    ○ Student must also indicate employer name as listed in E-Verify as well as the E-Verify Client Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number for the employer with whom the student is seeking the 24-month STEM OPT extension;
☐ Make 2 legible copies of all previously issued Forms I-20’s;
☐ Make 2 legible copy of valid passport biographic data page to include expiration date and renewal page (if applicable);
☐ Make 2 legible copy of electronic Form I-94 (www.cbp.gov/ir4) or if you received a paper I-94 card, make copies of the front and back of the paper I-94;
☐ Make 2 legible copies of all U.S. visa stamps (except for Canadian citizens);
□ Make 2 legible front & back copies of all previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (EAD);
□ Make 2 legible copies of your diploma or transcripts that confirm degree awarded and the field of study;
□ 2 passport style photos meeting specifications listed below:
  • Both photos must be identical color photographs of yourself;
  • Both photos must be taken within 30 days of filing your application;
  • Both photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched;
  • Both passport-style photos must be 2 inches by 2 inches;
  • Both photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background;
  • Head height should measure 1 in. to 1 3/8 of an inch from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8 of an in. to 1 3/8 of an in. from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member;
  • Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name, I-94 number and if applicable, Alien Receipt Number on the back of the photos;
□ $200 Administrative filing fee in the form of a personal check, money order, or cashier’s check payable in U.S. dollars to UTHealth.
□ Filing fee: in the form of a personal check, money order, or cashier’s check made payable in U.S. dollars to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Step 2: Submit Completed F-1 STEM OPT Application

1) Mail or hand deliver the completed F-1 STEM OPT application, fees, and, all required documents to the following address:

Office of International Affairs
7000 Fannin, Suite 130
Houston, Tx 77030
713/500-3176

Step 3: International Visitor Advisor’s (IVA) Processing of F-1 STEM OPT Application

1) Upon receipt of the F-1 STEM OPT application, fees, and all required documents, IVA will review complete application to determine eligibility to recommend F-1 STEM OPT:
   a. Should there be any outstanding fees or documents, IVA will contact student by email or telephone advising of required documentation outstanding;
   b. Should no documents be outstanding, IVA will move forward with reviewing packet and if it meets criterion for recommendation, IVA will recommend F-1 STEM OPT
2) If the student is in the Houston Metropolitan area and is able to meet with IVA, the IVA will send the student an electronic appointment invitation and instructions for providing fed ex shipping label.
   a. At the time of appointment, IVA will request student to review the new Form I-20 for accuracy and if accurate will have student sign new Form I-20;
   b. IVA will mail F-1 STEM OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS by fed ex and will email student once application is mailed.
3) If student is not in the Houston Metropolitan area or is not available to meet in person, IVA will
   a. Send student a scan copy of new Form I-20 and will send the student instructions for providing fed ex shipping label.
   b. Upon receipt of scanned Form I-20, student should print, sign, date, and return signed copy of Form I-20 by email attachment to IVA along with a fed ex shipping label;
   c. Once IVA receives scanned copy of signed Form I-20 and fed ex shipping label, IVA will mail F-1 STEM OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS by fed ex and will email student once application is mailed.

NOTE:

1) F-1 STEM OPT extension application may not be filed with USCIS any earlier than 90 days before the current post completion F-1 OPT expires
2) F-1 STEM OPT extension application must be received at USCIS within 30 days of the date IVA submitted the recommendation in SEVIS
3) F-1 STEM OPT extension application must be received by USCIS before the current post completion OPT expires
4) F1 STEM OPT student is eligible to work up to 180 days after the expiration of the current OPT while the extension application is pending with USCIS.

• Students whose OPT has expired but have a request for the 24-month F-1 STEM OPT extension pending with USCIS are strongly discouraged from traveling outside the U.S. until the extension application is approved and the student receives a new EAD Card. Please discuss the ramifications of traveling abroad while your extension is pending with your IVA.