UCLA Dashew Center for International Students & Scholars

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STEM OPT EXTENSION GUIDELINES

F-1 students who have completed a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) designated degree and secured a paid, full-time (at least 20 hours per week) employment offer in a position directly related to their STEM degree with an E-Verified employer may be eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM OPT Extension.

Eligibility Requirements

If applying based on their most recent UCLA STEM degree, F-1 students:

- Must have completed a STEM Designated Program list (based on the Classification of Instructional Program [CIP] code on page 1 of their current I-20).
  - Please note, the Dashew Cetner does not determine your UCLA major's CIP code.
- Must be in their Post-Completion OPT period (EAD card must not have already expired).
- Must not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment time during their Post-Completion OPT period.
- Must have a bona fide employer-employee relationship with an employer enrolled in the U.S. E- Verify system.
- Must have a paid, full-time employment offer (20 or more hours per week) for a position directly related to their major and appropriate for their degree level.
  - Volunteer/unpaid positions are not eligible. Self-employment is not eligible.
- Must be within the U.S. with F-1 status at the time they submit their STEM OPT Extension application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

If applying based on a previous STEM degree (in addition to the requirements listed above):

- STEM degree must have been completed within 10 years of the STEM OPT Extension application submission date to USCIS.

Note: F-1 students may be authorized for the STEM OPT Extension no more than 2 times in their lifetime.

Application Timeline

- STEM OPT Extension applications may be submitted to USCIS for processing as early as, but no earlier than, 90 days before a student's Post-Completion OPT EAD card end date.
- STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request must be submitted in MyBruin International to receive a STEM OPT Extension I-20 from the Dashew Center first. The I-20 containing the STEM OPT Extension recommendation is required for the STEM OPT application with USCIS.
- USCIS must receive STEM OPT Extension applications by the Post-Completion OPT EAD card end date to be considered timely filed.
- USCIS may take 3+ months or more to approve STEM OPT Extension applications. Visit the Check Case Processing Times page for current USCIS processing times.

Application Procedures

Step 1: **Report all of your Post-Completion OPT employment information in the SEVP Portal.**

Step 2: **Review the STEM OPT Extension Workshop.**

Step 3: **Pay the Dashew Center STEM OPT Administrative Processing Fee.**

Log in to your Dashew Center account and click on the "STEM OPT Administrative Processing Fee" to pay the fee. Save a copy of your emailed payment confirmation to include in your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request.

Step 4: **Prepare and complete your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request materials.**

Step 5: **Submit your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request in MyBruin International.**

Step 6: **Receive your STEM OPT Extension I-20 in MyBruin International.**

Step 7: **Prepare your STEM OPT Extension application materials for submission to USCIS for processing.**

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- **USCIS must receive your completed STEM OPT Extension application materials within 60 days of the issuance date listed on page 1 of your STEM OPT Extension I-20. Applications received by USCIS later than 60 days from the issuance date on page 1 of the STEM OPT Extension I-20 will be denied.**
- **USCIS must receive your completed STEM OPT Extension application materials before your Post-Completion OPT period ends. Applications received by USCIS after the Post-Completion OPT periods ends will be denied.**

After Submitting STEM OPT Extension Application to USCIS

- Students with a timely filed STEM OPT Extension application with USCIS may continue working for up to 180 days beyond their Post-Completion OPT EAD card end date while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending.
- Applicants can check the status of their STEM OPT Extension application online using the receipt number in their I-797 Notice of Action Receipt Notice on the USCIS Case Status Page.
- Applicants will receive the decision from USCIS approximately 3+ months from the date their STEM OPT Extension application was received by USCIS.
- If you do not receive your STEM OPT Extension EAD card by your Post-Completion OPT EAD card end date, you will have to update your I-9 with your employer to continue employment beyond your current EAD card end date while your STEM OPT Extension application is pending. For information on how to update your I-9 with your employer, please discuss this directly with an appropriate employer official.

Unemployment during STEM OPT Extension

Students on the STEM OPT Extension have an additional 60 calendar days—including weekends and holidays—of allowed unemployment time, in addition to any remaining unemployment days from the Post-Completion OPT.

For example, if you used 45 days of unemployment during your Post-Completion OPT, you would have 105 unemployment days remaining for your 24-month STEM OPT Extension period.

Reporting Requirements during STEM OPT Extension

Students on STEM OPT Extension must report the information below to maintain valid F-1 status during their STEM OPT Extension period — this period begins from the start date as stated on your STEM OPT EAD card.

1. Submit copies of the front and back of my STEM OPT Extension EAD card in MyBruin International.
2. You must confirm the following information to the Dashew Center every *6 months* during your STEM OPT Extension period by submitting a STEM OPT Validation request in MyBruin International.
    i. Your legal name

ii. Your U.S. residential address
iii. Employer name and address
iv. Status of current employment

3. Self-Evaluations: You must submit ***two*** self-evaluations during your STEM OPT Extension period. Self-evaluations can be submitted by completing a STEM OPT Validation request in MyBruin International.
   i. 12-month self-evaluation: Submit the top half of page 5 of Form I-983
   ii. 24-month / final self-evaluation: submit the bottom half of page 5 of Form I-983

NOTES: You can submit these two evaluations 30 days prior to the deadline and no later than 10 days after. You should only submit page 5 of the Form I-983.

4. Employment Termination: Report employment termination within 10 days of the employment end date. You can report employment termination by submitting a STEM Update Employment request in MyBruin International. You will be asked to upload the final self-evaluation (bottom half of page 5 of Form I-983) for your previous employment in the online request.
5. Material Changes: Report any material changes to an existing employment by submitting a STEM Update Employment Request in MyBruin International within 10 days of the change. You will be required to upload an updated Form I-983 to the online request. Material changes are any changes or deviations from the original Form I-983 that you completed with the employer. If anything on the Form I-983 has changed, this is a material change.
6. New Employment / Changing Employer: If you secure new employment and/or change employer during your STEM OPT Extension period, you must submit a STEM Update Employment request in MyBruin International within 10 days of the change. You must upload the following in the online request:
   i. For previous employment, submit a final self-evaluation (bottom half of page 5 of Form I-983) to report your previous employment end date.
   ii. For new employment, submit a completed Form I-983 (pages 1-4) to report your new employment start date
   iii. For new employment, upload an employment verification letter from the new employer on their company letterhead. (Must include the job title, the supervisor's name, the employer's contact information, and the employer's E-Verify ID number.)
7. Employer Non-Compliance: If a student on the STEM OPT Extension believes that their employer is not complying with the terms and conditions of the 24-month STEM OPT Extension regulations, the Form I-983 instructions, and the completed Form I-983 on file with their Designated School Official (DSO), the student may:
   i. Contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by following the instructions on ICE.gov.
   ii. Report violations through the Homeland Security Investigations tip submission form.

   A period of student unemployment, caused by an employer's failure to comply with program requirements, on its own will not affect the STEM OPT student's status so long as the student reports changes in employment status and adheres to the overall unemployment limits.)

Additional Questions?

Please review the STEM OPT Extension Workshop document or schedule an appointment.