

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 degree](#) (based on the Classification of Instructional Program [CIP] code on page 1 of their current I-20)
- Must be in their initial, 12-month Post-Completion OPT period (EAD card must not have already expired)
- Must not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment time during their initial, 12-month OPT period
- Must have a bona fide employer-employee relationship with an employer enrolled in [E-Verify](#) (self-employment not eligible)
- 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 not eligible.
- Must be within the U.S. 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 initial, 12-month OPT EAD card end date.
- All documents listed in the STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Checklist (on the [STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form](#)) must be submitted to the Dashew Center to request a STEM OPT Extension I-20 before a STEM OPT Extension application can be submitted to USCIS for processing.
- USCIS must receive a student's STEM OPT Extension application by the end date of the student's initial 12-month OPT period (as indicated on their EAD card).
- USCIS requires approximately 3-5 months to approve a STEM OPT Extension application.

- Students with a timely filed STEM OPT Extension application may continue employment for up to 180 days after their initial, 12-month OPT EAD card end date while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- Step 1:** Report all of your OPT employment information through the [SEVP Portal](#)
- Step 2:** Complete the [STEM OPT Extension Online Workshop](#)
- Step 3:** Pay the \$380 DCISS [STEM OPT Extension Administrative Processing Fee](#)
Log in to your DCISS account to pay the fee online.
Print the 'Payment History' screen from your DCISS account to submit with your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request.
- Step 4:** Prepare and complete your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request materials
- Step 5:** Schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor
- To schedule an appointment, email: oissassi@saonet.ucla.edu.
Please include:
- First and last name
 - UCLA UID
 - Reason for appointment
- Note: Please make sure to include "Appointment Request" in the subject line
- Step 6:** Email your STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request documents to the F-1 Counselor you had an appointment with.
- Step 7:** Receive your STEM OPT Extension I-20 via email or by FedEx (to the address you provided on your [F-1 Document Shipping Request Form](#))
- Step 8:** Prepare your STEM OPT Extension application for submission to USCIS for processing
(see [STEM OPT Extension Application Submission Instructions](#))

STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Checklist:

- Completed [STEM OPT Extension I-20 Request Form](#)
- \$380 DCISS [STEM OPT Extension Administrative Processing Fee](#) Payment Receipt
- Completed [Form I-983](#) (See [Form I-983 Instructions](#). For a sample form, see the [STEM OPT Extension Workshop](#))
- 1 copy of your I-94 Admission Record
 - **Electronic I-94:** Access and print record here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>

- **OR Paper I-94:** Please copy both front and back sides
- 1 copy of your most recent U.S. entry stamp in passport**
- 1 copy of your passport biographical page** (must be valid at least 6 months into the future from your STEM OPT Extension application submission date)
- 1 copy of your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) Card** (front and back sides)
- 1 copy of your STEM degree diploma or official transcript**
- Employment verification letter from employer** (*must include: job title, supervisor's name, employer's contact information, and employer's E-Verify ID*)
- 1 copy of your most recent OPT I-20** (pages 1 &2)

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

- Copy of your previous STEM degree I-20
- Copy of your previous STEM degree diploma or official transcript
- Copy of most your recent UCLA diploma or official transcript

AFTER YOU RECEIVE YOUR NEW STEM OPT EXTENSION I-20:

Please sign the bottom of page 1 of the STEM OPT Extension I-20 and make a copy of pages 1 and 2 to include with your STEM OPT Extension application (if submitting your application by mail), or save your I-20 PDF document with an electronically reproduced original signature (if submitting your application online).

Please refer to the [STEM OPT Extension Application Submission Instructions](#) for guidance on how to prepare your STEM OPT Extension application for submission to USCIS for processing.

NOTE: USCIS must receive your STEM OPT Extension application within 60 days of your STEM OPT Extension I-20 issue date. Applications received by USCIS more than 60 days after your STEM OPT Extension I-20 issue date will be denied.

Notice of Action Receipt Notice:

- For applications submitted by mail: you will receive a *Notice of Action* receipt in the mail (to the 'Mailing Address' you provided on your I-765 Form) from USCIS approximately 3-4 weeks from the date your STEM OPT Extension application was received by USCIS. This receipt notice will include your application receipt number.
- For applications submitted online: you will be issued an application receipt number immediately after submitting your application online and will be able to access your application receipt notice through your USCIS account.

You can check the status of your STEM OPT Extension application with your application receipt number on the [USCIS Case Status](#) page.

- Students with a timely filed STEM OPT Extension application may continue employment for up to 180 days after their initial, 12-month OPT EAD card end date while their STEM OPT Extension application is pending.
 - If you do not receive your STEM OPT Extension EAD card by your initial, 12-month 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 visit the [USCIS Foreign Academic Students](#) page.

STEM OPT EXTENSION REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Students on the STEM OPT Extension must report the following information to maintain valid F-1 status during their STEM OPT Extension period:

1. You must confirm the following information to the Dashew Center every *6 months* during your STEM OPT Extension period by submitting a completed [STEM OPT Extension Reporting Form](#) to OPT@saonet.ucla.edu:
 - Your legal name
 - Your residential address
 - Employer's name and address
 - Status of current employment

2. Self-Evaluations

Students must submit **two** self-evaluations during their STEM OPT Extension period to OPT@saonet.ucla.edu (*provide your UID in the email*)

- 12-month self-evaluation: submit the top half of page 5 of [Form I-983](#) no later than 10 days after the 12-month mark of your STEM OPT Extension period
 - Final self-evaluation: submit the bottom half of page 5 of [Form I-983](#) no later than 10 days after your STEM OPT Extension EAD card end date
3. Report material changes to an existing Form I-983 by submitting an updated Form I-983 to OPT@saonet.ucla.edu (*provide your UID in your email*) within 10 days of the change.

Material changes or deviations from the original Form I-983 may include, but are not limited to:

- Any change of the employer's EIN.
- Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
- Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity.
- Changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on Form I-983.

4. Unemployment

Report unemployment by submitting a final self-evaluation (bottom half of page 5 of [Form I-983](#)) for your previous employment to OPT@saonet.ucla.edu (provide your UID in the email) within 10 days of your last day of employment.

5. Changing Employers

Students who change employment during their STEM OPT Extension period must submit the following to OPT@saonet.ucla.edu (provide your UID in the email) within 10 days of the change:

- A completed final self-evaluation (bottom half of page 5 of [Form I-983](#)) to report your previous employment end date
- A completed Form I-983 to report your new employment start date
- A copy of your new employment verification letter (*must include: job title, supervisor's name, employer's contact information, and employer's E-Verify ID*)

6. 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:

- Contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by following the instructions on ICE.gov.
- 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.)

STEM OPT EMPLOYMENT TYPES

- **Paid Employment** - A student must work at least 20 hours per week.
- **Multiple Employers** - A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be at least 20 hours per week, paid, related to their degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify. Students must submit a completed Form I-983 for each employer.
- **Work for Hire** - This is commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than employment relationship. The company for whom the student is providing services must be registered with E-Verify. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.

- **Employment through Third Party Employers and Staffing Agencies** - Employment must constitute a bona fide employer-employee relationship. Form I-983 must be signed by the E-Verified employer who is providing the practical training experience. The staffing placement agency cannot complete and sign the Form I-983 as an employer unless:
 - The staffing placement agency is an E-Verified employer of the student, and
 - The staffing/placement agency provides and oversees the training

UNEMPLOYMENT DURING OPT

F-1 students with an authorized 24-month STEM OPT Extension will have an additional 60 days (including weekends and holidays) of allowed unemployment time for a total of **150 calendar days** during their 36-month (12 month initial + 24 month STEM) OPT period.

COVID-19 ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students currently participating in STEM OPT may work remotely if their employer has an office outside of the United States or the employer can assess student engagement using electronic means. Students engaging in remote employment should report their employer's address (and not the address where the remote employment is taking place) on their I-983 Form.

Additional Questions?

Please review the [STEM OPT Extension Workshop](#), the [COVID-19 Updates](#) page, or contact the [Virtual Dashew Center Front Desk](#) to schedule an appointment with an F-1 Counselor.