

## STEM OPT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Follow the eligibility criteria to determine if you qualify for STEM OPT application:

- ☐ Be under active F-1 status.
- ☐ Have been granted OPT and currently be in a valid period of post-completion OPT.
- ☐ Have earned a [STEM designated degree](#) from a school that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency and is certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) at the time you submit your STEM OPT extension application.
  - i. Previously obtained STEM degrees: If you are an F-1 student participating in a 12-month period of post-completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree, you *may* be eligible to use a previous STEM degree from a U.S. institution of higher education to apply for a STEM OPT extension. You must have received both degrees from currently accredited and SEVP-certified institutions and cannot have already received a STEM OPT extension based on this previous degree. The practical training opportunity also must be directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree.
- ☐ Be currently employee for an employer who meets all the requirements listed under the in the [STEM OPT Employer Responsibilities section](#).
- ☐ Employer **MUST** be enrolled in the **E-Verify** employment eligibility verification program (<https://www.e-verify.gov/>).
- ☐ Be able to complete the form I-983 Training Plan along with your E-Verify employer (for an overview of Form I-983, visit: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983>).

### A. Things to Keep in Mind Prior to Applying for STEM OPT:

- ☐ If you fulfill the eligibility categories listed above, you will be able to apply for STEM OPT up to 90 days BEFORE your Post-Completion OPT employment authorization expires. You will **not** be able to apply for STEM OPT after your Post-Completion OPT has expired.
- ☐ STEM OPT **MUST** be recommended in SEVIS by your DSO **PRIOR** to sending your application.
- ☐ STEM OPT application package or online application needs to be sent to USCIS within 60 days of the STEM OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
- ☐ You can now apply online or by mail.
- ☐ Please visit the USCIS website to access the forms required for the STEM OPT application <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.
- ☐ If you are applying online, you will first need to create an account at: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>.
- ☐ STEM OPT employment must be in a job that is **directly related to your major field of study**.
- ☐ STEM OPT employment must be paid.
- ☐ Employment must be full-time (more than 20 hrs./week).

## B. Applying for STEM OPT Approval:


1. Complete the I-983 Training Plan with your employer: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-employers/employers-and-the-form-i-983>. \*See instructions at the end\*
2. Submit your completed I-983 to your DSO for review and approval.
  - ☐ Once your I-983 has been reviewed and approved, your DSO will recommend your STEM OPT in SEVIS and generate a new I-20 listing this recommendation.
  - ☐ STEM OPT **must** be recommended in SEVIS by your DSO prior to sending your application.
3. Prepare your STEM OPT application to be submitted to USCIS:
  - ☐ **\$410 application fee.** If you apply online, you will be able to pay with a valid credit/debit card or by providing your bank routing and checking account numbers. If you are applying by mail, you will need either a check or money order, payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**.
  - ☐ IF applying by mail, please complete the latest edition of the Form I-765 found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>. If you are applying online, you will first need to create an account at: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>.
  - ☐ Apply for STEM OPT under the category **(c)(3)(C)**.
  - ☐ Copy of your **new** signed I-20, showing the recommendation for STEM Optional Practical Training. ***Don't forget to sign your I-20 prior to making the copy or scanning!***
  - ☐ Copy of evidence of degree (Transcript, diploma is an option as well).
  - ☐ Copy of your current EAD card (front and back).
  - ☐ Copy of your most recent Form I-94.
  - ☐ Copies of previous I-20 forms if you have had CPT and OPT authorizations.
  - ☐ Copy of your passport's biographical information page, also include expired passports.
  - ☐ Copy of F-1 visa stamp (exception: Canadian students)
  - ☐ Recently taken **passport photo** (no eyeglasses!). If you are applying online, you will only need one digital photo for the online application, but if you are applying by mail, you will need two identical photos. Here are some useful tips for the digital photo: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html>.
4. STEM OPT **online** applications:

If you are submitting your STEM OPT application **online**, you will need to upload your documents into your online application, follow these useful tips from USCIS (<https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/tips-for-filing-forms-online>):

  - ☐ Use a scanner or take pictures of each document. Make sure each image you attach is clear and that all text is readable.
  - ☐ Files must not be larger than 6MB in size.
  - ☐ Files must be in one of these formats: PDF, JPG, or JPEG. For some forms, we also accept files in TIF or TIFF format.
  - ☐ Do not encrypt or password protect your files.
  - ☐ If your documents are in a foreign language, upload an English translation along with the original.

**DO NOT CLICK SUBMIT UNTIL ALL YOUR DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PROPERLY UPLOADED, YOUR ONLINE APPLICATION IS COMPLETED AND, OF COURSE, YOUR STEM OPT HAS BEEN RECOMMENDED BY YOUR DSO IN SEVIS AND YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR NEW I-20.**

#### EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS

TYPE	FULL/PART-TIME	STATUS	START DATE	END DATE
POST-COMPLETION OPT	FULL TIME	APPROVED		
STEM OPT	FULL TIME	REQUESTED		

**IF you are mailing** your application, please send your completed STEM OPT application package to:

**USCIS Chicago Lockbox**

**U.S. Postal Service (USPS)**

Attn: I-765 C03

P.O. Box 805373

Chicago, IL 60680-5374

**FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:**

USCIS

Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)

131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor

Chicago, IL 60603-5517

- Premium Processing:** you now have the choice to request premium or expedited processing for your I-765 application. To request premium processing, you will need to complete the form I-907 and pay a fee of \$1,500, this is in addition to the \$410 paid for the I-765 application.

Premium processing guarantees that your I-765 will be reviewed within 30 days. This does not guarantee approval, just guarantees that you will receive either an approval notice, a denial notice, a notice of intent to deny, a request for evidence or information, or an investigation for fraud or misrepresentation within that time frame.

To learn more about premium processing, visit: <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/all-forms/how-do-i-request-premium-processing>.

#### **C. Waiting for your STEM OPT Approval**

After you submit your application for STEM OPT to USCIS, you should receive an email and/or text message as well as a receipt notice by postal mail, this is the form I-797C, confirming that USCIS has received your application. This notice will include a Receipt Number which can use to check the status of your application on the USCIS website at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. If

you have filed your application online, you should be able to check the status directly in your account: <https://myaccount.uscis.gov/>.

We do **not** recommend, that you leave the United States (U.S.) while your STEM OPT application is under review or pending, because you may not be able to show evidence of your legal status when you return to the U.S. Also, if you were to receive an RFI (Request for Information) or an RFE (Request for Evidence) from USCIS, you will not be able to reply to USCIS in a timely manner if you are abroad.

If you have submitted your STEM OPT application prior to the end of your regular Post-Completion OPT, you may continue to work on your expired EAD for OPT up to 180 days while your STEM OPT petition is pending.

#### **D. After your STEM OPT Approval**

Because your F-1 status continues during STEM OPT, you are required by law to report changes to the following information to International Student Services (ISS) within 10 days:

- ☐ Residence address in the United States.
- ☐ Email Address.
- ☐ Legal Name.
- ☐ Telephone Number.
- ☐ U.S. Legal Status, inform us if you are planning on changing your status to H1-B, J-1, H-4 etc.
- ☐ Any changes on the information about your employer, including employer name, address, and starting date, decrease in payment rate, job termination, will also require an update to the I-983 Training Plan.
- ☐ Change of employers, will require the completion of the Final Evaluation within the I-983 Training Plan with the previous employer and a brand new I-983 Training Plan with the new employer.

#### **E. STEM OPT Reporting**

1. **Validation Report:** Every six months, STEM OPT students must report to their DSO to confirm that their SEVIS record is accurate, reviewing address, employer name and address, status of the current employment. Students will receive an email reminder from SEVP 30 days prior to the validation report due date.
2. **Annual Self Evaluations:** STEM OPT students must complete the annual self-evaluations, part of the I-983 Training Plan at:
  - ☐ 12 months after the start of the STEM OPT and
  - ☐ Final evaluation at the end of the STEM OPT period.Once more STEM OPT students will receive a reminder 30 days prior to the self-evaluations due date.
3. As mentioned above, changes to the existing I-983 Training Plan must be reported within 10 days. STEM OPT students, should review the I-983 Training Plan with their supervisors regularly, to ensure the accuracy of the information provided there.

4. Again, if the STEM OPT student were to change employers, he/she must ensure that the new employer is enrolled in the E-Verify program; the students must submit a new form I-983 to the DSO within 10 days of the change of employment.
5. Report the termination or loss of employment. STEM OPT students receive an additional 60 days of unemployment during the STEM OPT period. This is added to any remaining unused unemployment days, from the 90 days of unemployment from the bringing the maximum of unemployment days to 150 days total.
6. Employer noncompliance, if the STEM OPT student believes that the current employer is not in compliance with the regulations of the STEM OPT program and/or the i-983 Training Plan established, the students can report this to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Violations can be reported at:  
<https://www.ice.gov/webform/hsi-tip-form>.

**F. Traveling outside of the United States during STEM OPT**

During STEM OPT you may travel out of the United States and return after a temporary absence. Remember that your DSO must sign the second page of your most recent I-20 prior to your departure. Travel endorsement signatures during the STEM OPT period are valid for 6 months. You are still required to have an unexpired F-1 visa stamp in order to re-enter the U.S., you will also need to carry your valid EAD card.

Contact your DSO to arrange for a signature on your I-20 at least two weeks before your departure. If you will travel frequently during your STEM OPT, it is not necessary to obtain a new signature for each reentry to the United States.

**G. At the End of Your STEM OPT**

Your STEM OPT is automatically terminated if you transfer to another school or begin studies in another educational program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

If you decide to leave the U.S. before the STEM OPT's end date on your EAD, and do not plan to return to the U.S., please contact your DSO with information about your date of departure and last date at work.

IF you have maintained status, after the end date of your STEM OPT period, you will receive a 60-day grace period. During this "grace period" you may transfer to another college or university, change to another visa status, or prepare to depart from the U.S. BUT, you may **not** continue with your employment.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

OMB APPROVAL NO. 1653-0054  
EXPIRATION DATE: 5/31/2025

**TRAINING PLAN FOR STEM OPT STUDENTS**  
Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Optional Practical Training (OPT)

SECTION 1: STUDENT INFORMATION (Completed by Student)			
Student Name (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name):		Student Email Address:	
Name of School Recommending STEM OPT:	Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned:	SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix):	
Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information:		Student SEVIS ID No.:	STEM OPT Requested Period (mm-dd-yyyy): From: _____ To: _____
Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code:		Find this information on your I-20 under the <b>Program of Study</b> look at your Education Level and Major	
Level/Type of Qualifying Degree:		Date Awarded (mm-dd-yyyy):	
Based on Prior Degree? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Official day of graduation, see your transcript and/or diploma	
Employment Authorization Number:		This is your USCIS # or A# on the front of your EAD card	

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS**

SECTION 3: EMPLOYER INFORMATION (Completed by Employer)			
Employer Name:		Street Address:	Suite:
Employer Website URL:		City:	State: ZIP Code:
Employer ID Number (EIN):	Number of Full-Time Employees in U.S.:	North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code:	
OPT Hours Per Week (must be at least 20 hours/week):	Compensation:		
Start Date of Employment (mm-dd-yyyy):	A. Salary Amount and Frequency: _____		
	B. Other Compensation (Type and Estimated Amount or Value):		
	1. _____		
	2. _____		
	3. _____		
	4. _____		

**FORM I-983**