Planning Ahead for your STEM Extension of OPT

Based on your field of study as listed on your I-20, you are in a field that is eligible to apply for the 24-month STEM extension of OPT. Keep this handout with your immigration documents so you and your employer can refer to it when you are ready to apply for STEM. There are strict criteria the STEM employment must meet. Failure to meet all criteria will result in the denial of your application and/or violation of your F-1 status.

First, is your employment STEM eligible? Check with your employer to be sure your job is eligible for STEM OPT. If ALL of the following are TRUE for your employment situation, you and can apply for STEM based off of that job. Every job you have on STEM must meet all of these criteria.

- Employer is E-Verified
- Employer will provide the student with formal training and learning objectives as outlined in Form I-983
- Student will be working at least 20 hours per week
- Student is not self-employed
- Student is not an independent contractor
- Student is not in an unpaid position
- Student is not in a volunteer position
- There is a bona-fide employer-employee relationship
- Student is not employed by a staffing or temporary agency to work at another company’s worksite
- Student is not employed through a consulting firm arrangement that provides labor for hire
- The employer that signs the Form I-983 is the same entity that employs the student and provides the practical training experience

If your employment situation does not meet ALL of the criteria above, either do not accept that offer of employment, or work with them to see if arrangements can be made to make the employment situation eligible for STEM. For example, can your employer hire you directly instead of through a temporary or staffing agency? Can they enroll in E-Verify?

When you are certain your employment meets STEM criteria:

- **When to apply**: USCIS will accept your application no earlier than 90 days prior to your current EAD card expiration date. USCIS must be in receipt of your application by your EAD card expiration.
- **Application information and instructions**: [https://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/24-month](https://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/24-month) (read all resources thoroughly, please!)

For more information:

- DHS Guidance on STEM eligibility: [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-determining-stem-opt-extension-eligibility](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-determining-stem-opt-extension-eligibility)
- Questions? Email optstem@rit.edu