F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)
24 Month STEM Extension Information Packet

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(This form must be submitted to ISS to begin the STEM Extension
Application Process)

The ISS staff encourages all students applying for a STEM extension to use the
Planning Tool for 24-Month Extension of OPT provided by the Department of
Homeland Security. The Planning Tool is available at:

planning-tool-for-24-month-extension-of-stem-opt

10/2017
Overview of STEM Extension OPT
F-1 students on OPT who have received a degree in certain fields, referred to as “STEM” fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics), will have an opportunity to apply for a 24-month extension of their regular 12 month OPT period. Students who file an application for the 24-month OPT extension before the end date of the first OPT period, will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever is first. You may apply up to 90 days before the end of your 12 months of post completion OPT.

Eligibility Requirements
Students must meet the following criteria in order to be eligible for a STEM Extension:

1. Maintaining valid F-1 status and pursuing authorized OPT employment in their field of study
2. Completed a Bachelor, Master, or Doctorate degree in a USCIS-designated STEM field at a DHS-approved school.
   Students who have not completed their thesis or final project must submit an official RIT transcript and a letter from their academic department on RIT letterhead stating the following: "This student has completed all requirements for the degree except the thesis/final project."
   * The new 24-month extension rules do permit STEM extensions based on a prior STEM degree. This prior degree must be in a USCIS-designated STEM field at a DHS-approved school. In order to qualify for an extension based on a prior degree, the extension must be preceded by a regular 12-month OPT period.
3. Employed by an eligible employer which is enrolled in the DHS E-Verify database

STEM Fields
It is important to note that each major at RIT has a particular CIP (Classification of Instructional Programs) Code. In order to qualify for the 24 month extension, the CIP code for your program must appear on the designated codes list. A detailed list of federally approved STEM fields is available at: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm

E-Verify
E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). E-Verify is currently free to employers and is available in all 50 states. E-Verify provides an automated link to federal databases to help employers determine employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security numbers. For more information: http://www.dhs.gov/e-verify
An E-Verify Search Tool is available at: http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/about-program/e-verify-employers-search-tool

Types of Employment
Only paid employment is allowed on STEM OPT. Volunteer or unpaid positions are NOT eligible for STEM OPT employment.

The new 24-month STEM extension rule states that to be eligible for a STEM extension, students must be a “bona fide” employee of the employer. That means that the employer who is providing the training experience must be the same entity that employs the student (pays the
student) and signs the training plan. Certain types of employment are NOT allowed under the new regulations: sole proprietorships, employment through “temp” agencies, employment through consulting firm arrangements that provide labor for hire, and other relationships that do not constitute a bona fide employer-employee relationship.

Working with multiple employers at the same time is permitted, given that each employer must fully comply with the requirements of this rule and employ the student for no less than 20 hours per week.

Self-employment is NOT permitted on a STEM OPT extension; however, it is possible to work at a new start-up, as long as all regulatory requirements are met, including that the employer adheres to the training plan requirements, remains in good standing with E-Verify, will provide compensation to the STEM OPT student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers, and has the resources to comply with the proposed training plan. Students must be able to show that they are bona fide employees of the company and they cannot sign their own training plans as both the employer and the employee.

OPT STEM Extension Application Procedures

Step One:
Fill out the Information Sheet for OPT 24 Month STEM Extension (page 8 of this document) and Form I-765 available online at http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf

Step Two:

Step Three:
Fax, mail, or drop off the Information Sheet, completed Form I-765, and Form I-983 to International Student Services. An ISS advisor will print out a new I-20 for you which will include a recommendation for your OPT extension. The new I-20 will be mailed to you with an instruction sheet. You will send a copy of this new I-20 with your completed application.

Step Four:
1. The documents below must be received by the appropriate USCIS Service Center within 60 days of the creation of the STEM I-20:
   - Original Form I-765
   - Form G-1145 http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145
   - A photocopy of page 1 and page 2 of the new I-20 with the ISS advisor's recommendation for STEM Extension Optional Practical Training on page 2. Please make sure you sign and date page 1.
   - A copy of your I-94 number printed from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html (or a copy of both sides of your I-94 card, if you have one).
   - A copy of the photo page (identification page) of your passport. Also include any extra pages that record extensions of the validity of your passport).
   - A copy of the F1 visa page of your passport (even if the visa has expired)
   - A copy of ALL previous I-20s that have been issued to you (instruction pages are not needed)
   - A copy of your previous EAD card
   - A copy of your transcripts and diploma. If you have not completed your
degree you must submit an official RIT transcript and a letter from your academic department stating that you have completed all requirements of your degree excluding the thesis/final project.

- Two passport type photographs. If you wear glasses please be sure to remove them before the photo is taken. Print your name and I-94 card number lightly in pencil on the back of each photo. Put the photos in an envelope and attach it to front of the I-765.
- Job offer letter
- I-765 Fee. You will find the current filing fee at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765 Checks may be made payable to the Department of Homeland Security. You may send a money order or a personal check drawn on a U.S. bank, NO CASH. Please do not sign the back of your check. Attach the check to the front of the I-765.

2. Copy the entire application for your records.

3. Staple all above documents together and send them by certified mail with a return receipt OR Federal Express (so that you have a tracking number) to the U.S. Service Center with jurisdiction over your current residence. The USCIS Service Center Filing Chart is available on page five of this document and in the USCIS I-765 Filing Instructions online at http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765instr.pdf (page 10).

4. You will receive a Receipt Notice (Form I-797) from the USCIS within 2-3 weeks.

5. Track the status of your application and current processing times through USCIS, using the Receipt Notice: https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

6. Authorization is granted by the EAD card (Employment Authorization Document):
   - The EAD will be mailed only to the address listed on Form I-765. Government mail cannot be forwarded, so you must notify USCIS immediately if your residential address changes.
   - You may continue working up to 180 days after your 12-month OPT expires, while the STEM Extension is pending. Provide a copy of your Receipt Notice to your employer.

Instructions for filling out form I-765 for the 24 month extension

1. Please complete the form online and print it rather than filling it out by hand.
2. Check first box “renewal”; fill out lines 1 through 24; sign and date:
3. #3 Return Address: This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 3 ½ months. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the USCIS envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the card is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your card will be returned.
4. #10 Alien Registration Number: You can use your I-94 number found on your online I-94 record (or the paper I-94 card that you received when you entered the US, if you have a paper card) OR the A# listed on your current OPT card.
5. #11 Previous employment authorization: Because you are applying for a 24 month extension, please answer “yes” and complete the related information. “Dates” should be the dates on your EAD card.
6. #16 Eligibility Categories: for the 24 month extension of OPT write: (c) (3) (C)
7. #24 Complete this section with your degree field and your employer’s “E-Verify” number. Degree field example: MS in Computer Science
8. Certification: Remember to sign and date the I-765 in blue ink
Instructions for filling out form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students
https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

Additional Information Regarding STEM Extension

Reporting Requirements
During the STEM Extension OPT, your valid F-1 status will remain dependent on pursuing authorized employment and reporting all required information through the ISS website at: http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/OPTreporting.html

Changes in the following information must be reported within 10 days of any change.
- Change in name, personal address, or email address
- Name and address of employer(s)
- Change in employer information
- Any interruption of employment
- Notification of any changes in your immigration status or departure from the U.S.

Additionally, every six months, ISS is required to verify your employment information, regardless of whether you have changed jobs. When your name appears on the SEVIS Alert for verification, ISS will use your most recently submitted email address and ask you to respond with current address and employer information. FAILURE TO RESPOND will result in termination of your SEVIS record, so it is imperative that you reply to the ISS request.

Employer Reporting Requirements
Employers must agree to notify ISS within 48 hours of any termination of employment or departure of the F-1 worker previously authorized for STEM Extension OPT through RIT.

150-Day Unemployment Limit
The cumulative Unemployment Limit is extended to 150 days once the STEM Extension is approved. However, this does not replenish any days reported as unemployed during the regular 12-month OPT authorization. Whatever remains of the initial 90-day allotment is increased only by an additional 60 days throughout the 24 months of STEM Extension OPT. Therefore, if you are unemployed for an aggregate of more than 150 days during your complete 36 months of authorized OPT, your work permission will be terminated and your F-1 status is ended. No grace period currently exists for students who exceed this limit. Periods of unemployment are monitored through the required OPT reporting, so it is important to provide ISS with timely and accurate information. Volunteer, unpaid, and part-time activities (fewer than 20 hours per week) may NOT be used to satisfy the employment qualification for STEM OPT reporting purposes. Please contact ISS to speak with an advisor about any specific concerns.

Travel Outside the U.S.
Authorization for the STEM Extension OPT extends your eligibility for valid F-1 status and ability to travel. However, in order to document your status, you must prove that work authorization is granted by showing an unexpired EAD card when traveling. While the STEM Extension application is pending, you may continue to travel using the current EAD card authorizing your regular 12-month OPT. Once that card expires, do not travel until the new STEM Extension EAD card is received. Travel at any time during F-1 OPT requires the following documents:
1. Valid passport
2. Current I-20, signed for travel by an ISS advisor within the past six months.
3. Valid F-1 visa stamp
4. Unexpired EAD card. You may also be asked to demonstrate that you are using your OPT appropriately, by showing proof of current employment.
5. Letter from employer verifying employment.

Additional Considerations

Selecting OPT dates: The STEM Extension OPT will begin immediately after the expiration of your 12-month OPT authorization. There is no option to delay the start date of the extension.

OPT Cap Gap Extensions: F-1 students with a pending or approved H-1B petition are eligible for an automatic extension of their F-1 status and valid OPT work permission. The purpose of this extension is to cover any lapse in status and expiring employment authorization before the H-1B Temporary Worker status can begin (usually limited to Oct 1st). H-1B petitions filed by cap-exempt employers are not intended for this benefit. You are still eligible for the Cap Gap Extension after being approved for the STEM Extension OPT, provided you maintain F-1 status throughout that time and your employer files the H-1B petition on your behalf.
Where to File Your Application

Applicants for a 24 Month STEM Extension of Optional Practical Training must send their application to either the Phoenix, AZ or Dallas, TX lockbox depending on where they live.

USCIS Phoenix and Dallas Lockbox Facilities

If you live in:

Mail your application to: USCIS Phoenix Lockbox

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

If you live in:
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia

Mail your application to: USCIS Dallas Lockbox

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

For additional information about the 24-month STEM OPT Extension Rule:

https://studyinthesestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub

www.nafsa.org/stemoptrule
OPT STEM Extension I-20 Request Form

An ISS advisor will make a recommendation for your OPT extension in the SEVIS database and print out a new I-20 with the recommendation and extension dates printed on page 2.

I am submitting completed Training Plan (Form I-983) ☐ Yes ☐ No

Note: ISS staff will not be able to prepare updated STEM I-20 without Form I-983

If applying for a STEM extension based on a prior STEM degree please complete the OPT STEM I-20 Request - Prior Degree Form on the ISS website.

FIRST NAME: ___________________ LAST NAME: ___________________

University ID# ___________________ Telephone #: ___________________

SEVIS ID: N________________________ Preferred Email: ___________________

Current OPT Dates (as listed on your OPT card): ___________ to ___________

Degree Completion Date: ___________ (if not complete please see Eligibility Requirements on page 1)

Degree Field (field in which you earned your RIT degree) ___________________

Your employer information will be taken from your Form I-983

REQUIRED: Explain how your employment is related to your course of study:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Address to which we should mail the new STEM I-20:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

After typing your responses above, please save this completed form (page 8 only) as a PDF file and send it with a completed Training Plan (Form I-983) to ISS for your OPT STEM I-20. The documents may be sent in the mail, dropped off at our front desk, or scanned and emailed to optstem@rit.edu.

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