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

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: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-help-hub/learn-more/tools/planning-tool-for-24-month-extension-of-stem-opt

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

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.
   * 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 and fits the criteria outlined here https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-opt
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
You can find your CIP Code on your I-20.

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 on the ISS website https://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/24-month (under Procedures to Apply)

Step Two:

Step Three:
Email the STEM I-20 Request Form and Form I-983 to optstem@rit.edu
An ISS advisor will make a new I-20 for you with a recommendation for your OPT extension. The new I-20 will be emailed to you as a scan along with detailed instructions. Your I-20 will be mailed to the address you requested on the STEM I-20 Request Form. You will send a copy of your new I-20 with your completed application. Please make sure to sign the new I-20 before you include it with your application to USCIS. Do not mail the original copies of either form to ISS. We are only accepting scan copies sent to optstem@rit.edu

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.

   Please note that the documents must be mailed in the order they are listed below.

   Check or credit card payment must be placed on top of your application.

   - I-765 Fee. You will find the current fee at https://www.uscis.gov/i-765 There are two options for payment (NO CASH):
     1. Check or money order payable to the Department of Homeland Security. Please do not sign the back of your check.
     OR
     2. G-1450 Credit Card Authorization form
        Form and instructions are available at https://www.uscis.gov/forms
        - Form G-1145 http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145
        - Original Form I-765 https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
        - 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 the passport.
        - A copy of the F-1 visa page of your passport
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 25).

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.

   Please note: 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**

Complete instructions for filing the I-765 can be found at the link below:

https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

**REMEMBER TO INCLUDE ALL 7 PAGES OF THE I-765 EVEN IF SOME ARE BLANK**

**Part 1. Reason for Applying**

Check Box (1.c.) Renewal of Permission to Accept Employment

Be sure to attach a copy of your previous EAD Cards

**Part 2. Information About You – Your US Mailing Address**

You must provide a valid mailing address in the United States. You may list a valid U.S. residence, APO, or commercial address. You may also list a U.S. Post Office address (PO Box) if that is how you receive your mail. If your mail is sent to someone other than yourself, please include an “In Care Of Name” as part of your mailing address. If your U.S. mailing address is in a U.S. territory and it contains an urbanization name, list the urbanization name in the “In Care Of Name” space provided. USCIS will send your EAD to this address. Do not use the attorney’s, other legal representative’s address or the ISS mailing address.

- 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.
- 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
Part 2. Information About You – U.S. Physical Address
If your U.S. physical address – if it is the same as your mailing address, just type in your mailing address again. If it is different, type the address.

Part 2. Information About You – Information About Your Last Arrival in the United States

26. – Put your SEVIS ID Number (this is located on the top of your I-20

Part 2. Information About You – Information about your Eligibility Category
- Enter the code for the OPT STEM Extension: (c)(3)(C)

28.a. - Enter the name of your STEM degree

Part 3. Applicant’s Signature
Sign in BLUE ink

Instructions for filling out form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students
https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

Mandatory STEM Reporting Requirements
During the STEM Extension OPT, your valid F-1 status will remain dependent on pursuing authorized employment and reporting all required information.

Please visit the following link for all reporting requirements on STEM
https://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/iss/24-month-stem-opt-reporting-requirements

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.

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. Information can be found here: https://www.uscis.gov/forms/forms-information/uscis-phoenix-and-dallas-lockbox-facilities