Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization related to an F-1 student’s academic program. Its purpose is to provide authorization to obtain employment experience in the field of study, and to complement a completed degree. F-1 students qualify for an initial 12 months of OPT per higher degree level.

OPT STEM extensions (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)
Apply early! You may submit your OPT STEM extension request to USCIS (US Customs and Immigration Services) up to 90 days prior to your current EAD expiration date, but you must apply before your current EAD expires. Work authorization will extend throughout the pending period of the extension request up to 180 days.

There have been many recent changes to the OPT STEM program. For a full overview of these changes, you can visit the Department of Homeland Security’s website at https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub.

OPT STEM Eligibility Requirements
All OPT employment must be directly related to the major field of study on the I-20. You must currently be authorized for an initial period of 12 months of OPT and not have exceeded 90 days of unemployment. If you have exceeded 90 days of unemployment while on OPT, you are not eligible for a STEM extension. STEM graduates who are employed in their degree field by a US employer who is enrolled in E-Verify may apply for an additional 24 months of OPT for a total of 36 months. OPT STEM applicants must have successfully completed a degree on the STEM Designated Degree Program list.

You can apply for two non-consecutive STEM extensions if you earn two STEM degrees. To verify an OPT STEM major, go to www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm.

STEM Extension Application Procedure

STEP 1: ISS Procedures
1. Take the OPT STEM workshop on D2L.
2. Complete the Form I-983. Print this online at www.uscis.gov. You and your prospective employer must work together to complete this form. It must clearly describe how the training opportunity being offered by the employer has a direct relationship to your qualifying STEM degree.
3. Submit the online form for an OPT STEM Extension I-20 Request on the ISS website (under “Forms”).
4. Submit a check or money order for payable to the University of Oklahoma ($200 for 24-month extension), or pay the maintenance fee online with a credit card when submitting your request for an I-20. OU charges work authorization extension maintenance fee to continue maintaining your record for the additional 24 months you will remain in F-1 status with OU.
5. ISS will review your documents and prepare a recommendation (new I-20) for you if you are eligible for a STEM extension. This may take 3-10 business days.
6. Your new I-20 recommending you for a STEM extension will be sent to you. Sign it, make a copy, and include it with your application.
7. Send or email a copy of your signed STEM OPT I-20 to the OU ISS office.
8. If you will not be picking up your documents directly from ISS, use eShip Global to set up a shipment. Go to our website and click the Mailing Immigration Documents link under Immigration & Visa. Follow the instructions.
**STEP 2: Prepare your Application to USCIS**

   a. On #16, indicate (c)(3)(C).
   b. For #17, provide employer’s e-Verify information.
2. Submit 2 photos made to USCIS specifications. See instructions at ([www.uscis.gov/files/form/m-603.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/m-603.pdf)). Write your name and I-94 admission number on the back of photos. Do not cut or alter the photos in any way. We recommend you place your photos in a small envelope or plastic bags so that they will not get lost.
3. Obtain a check or money order for $410 payable to “Department of Homeland Security.”
4. Include a photocopy of pages 1 and 2 of the I-20 showing the OPT STEM recommendation. Make sure to sign it! USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the I-20 being issued to you. If it has been more than 60 days since the ISS office issued your STEM OPT I-20, please request a new one. **FAILING TO SUBMIT YOUR STEM OPT I-20 AND YOUR APPLICATION WITHIN 60 DAYS OF THE STEM OPT I-20 CREATION DATE MAY RESULT IN A DENIAL OF YOUR STEM OPT REQUEST BY THE USCIS.**
5. Photocopy of your valid passport photo page and passport expiration page.
6. Photocopy of your student visa, or prior visa if you entered the US in a status other than F-1
7. Photocopy of your most recent I-94 card (front and back or electronic printout)
8. Photocopy of your current OPT I-20
9. Photocopy of previous EAD card
10. Submit an official OU transcript to show that you have completed a STEM degree.

**STEP 3: Mail your Application to USCIS**

1. Make a copy of the entire application packet for your records
2. Mail the application to the appropriate USCIS Service Center based upon the address you list on the I-765 form. Visit the USCIS website at [http://www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) for the proper mailing address.

**OPT STEM Reporting Requirements**

It is your responsibility to provide changes in information to the ISS office. OU ISS is not responsible for you or your employer’s reporting responsibilities, nor for advising your employer of their reporting responsibilities.

**Documents**

1. Submit a copy of your signed STEM I-20 to the OU ISS office
2. Submit a copy of your extended EAD card to the OU ISS office for record keeping.

**Employment and address**

1. You must report your US employer, work address, and residential address **every 6 months**, or **within 10 days of any change**. You can do this on the ISS website.
2. If you change employers, your new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify, and you must submit a new I-983 as well as a Final Evaluation for your previous employer.
3. You must report start and end dates of any period of unemployment while on OPT. More than 150 days of unemployment during OPT STEM extension period (counted from your EAD start date) will result in the loss of your F-1 status.
4. Your US employer must report to OU ISS within 48 hours if you have left their employment.
**Evaluations**

Throughout your employment, you must submit self-evaluations through the Form I-983.

1. Complete the first “Evaluation of Student Progress” portion **within 12 months** of your listed OPT STEM start date. At the end of the STEM extension, you must conduct a second, final assessment.
2. Once the evaluations are complete, collect signatures from your employer and return the form to ISS. We will keep it in your record.

This process may be subject to change due to changes in the regulations. Please contact us at iss@ou.edu if you have any questions.

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