Maintaining F-1 Status While on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension

What must I do to maintain my F-1 status while on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

To maintain your F-1 status while on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension, you must satisfy all of the following requirements:

- **Work at least 20 hours per week in (a) job(s) directly related to your field of study.** Note: All employment must be with an E-Verified employer and a separate Form I-983 must be submitted to ISSS for each employer.

- **Not exceed the allotted 150 days of unemployment time.** For additional information, read the section titled “Do I have to find a job?”

- **Report your employment and U.S. address information to ISSS.** Refer to the section titled “How do I update my Student Contact Information and OPT Employment Information” for instructions on how to report your information to ISSS. Notify ISSS of the following:
  - Any change of employer, Employer Identification Number or employer’s address plus any change or deviation from the training plan outlined on Form I-983, any reduction in compensation not tied to a reduction in work hours, any decrease in the number of hours worked per week, etc.
    - **Note:** A new Form I-983 must be submitted to ISSS within 10 days of any change in employment details.

- **Submit the 6-Month Report.** Students on the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension must also submit a report to their school every six months. When the school receives the report, it will notify SEVIS that the student has complied with this reporting requirement. **Note:** If students do not submit the required six-month report, their SEVIS record is supposed to automatically terminate. Therefore, it is imperative that you not only maintain employment, but that you report it to the ISSS office and submit the required six-month report in a timely fashion.

- **Submit the 12-Month and Final Evaluations.** In addition to the 6-Month Report, the student and the student’s employer must complete a performance evaluation every 12 months, and at the end of the employment period. The required forms are available on the ISSS website. To submit a completed evaluation, Login to the myISSS portal using your UBIT name and password, and choose the E-form most appropriate for your situation: “24-Month OPT STEM - 12 Month Evaluation” or “24-Month OPT STEM - Final Evaluation”. ISSS must receive the completed evaluations within 10 days of the 12-month period, and/or within 10 days of the end of employment. **Note:** If you leave an employer, you are required to submit the Final Evaluation to ISSS within 10 days of your employment end date.

- **Every six months, mail your I-20 to ISSS for a new travel signature.** Update your OPT E-Forms and include a pre-paid shipping label so we can mail your I-20 back to you.
• Report any change in your residential address. Note: ISSS must be notified within ten days of your move.)
• Report any change in your name (email isss@buffalo.edu).
• Report any interruption of employment lasting longer than 10 days.
• Report any change in your immigration status (e.g. change to H-1B) (email isss@buffalo.edu)

Do I have to maintain employment?

Yes. However, F-1 students who are authorized for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension are permitted to be unemployed for 60 days in addition to the 90 days allotted for Post-Completion OPT. The maximum period of unemployment allowed is therefore 150 days during the entire OPT period.

If you are approved for a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension and exceed 150 days of unemployment, the Department of Homeland Security will automatically terminate your SEVIS record in the future. This means that your F-1 status and employment authorization will no longer be valid, and you will have to leave the U.S. immediately. Possible consequences to remaining in the U.S. after the 150-day deadline without a job include denial of future immigration benefits, detention and deportation, etc.

Therefore, to maintain your F-1 status, you must update your employment history with ISSS and report any changes in employment to ISSS as soon as you accept a new job offer or as soon as any changes occur. If you change employers, you must submit a new Form I-983 to ISSS within 10 days of the change.

How are the 150 days of unemployment counted?

Each day of unemployment (including weekends) is counted towards the 150-day requirement for students on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension. Time spent outside the U.S. counts as unemployment unless the travel was work-related or during an official leave from one’s job.

What types of employment are acceptable while on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

Any employment you choose while on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension must meet the following conditions:
• The employer must participate in the E-verify Program.
• You must work a minimum of 20 hours per week.
• Your work must be directly related to your STEM program of study.
• If you are employed by more than one employer, each employer must complete a Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students).
• You must be employed by the employer that signed the Form I-983 (Training Plan for STEM OPT Students) and that employer must provide the practical training experience.

Note: Self-employment and volunteer/unpaid employment are NOT permitted on the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension.
Note: It is essential that you keep documentation (e.g. employment letters, contracts, timesheets, pay stubs, Form I-983, etc.) of all of your employment while on OPT. Such documentation should include the position held, proof of the duration of that position, contact information for your supervisor and a description of the work.

How do I request a new signature on my OPT I-20?

Your OPT I-20 must be signed by a Designated School Official (DSO) every 6 months. To request a new signature on your OPT I-20, please do the following:

1. Update your OPT E-forms. You must update your OPT E-forms even if the information you last submitted has not changed. Follow the directions below to update your employment and U.S. address.
2. Mail your original OPT STEM Extension I-20 to ISSS, 210 Talbert Hall, Buffalo NY 14260.
   a. Include a pre-paid shipping label so we can mail your I-20 back to you. If a friend will drop off and/or pick up your I-20, you must send an email to isss@buffalo.edu authorizing him/her to do so. The email must include your friend’s name.
   b. You should receive notification that your I-20 is ready for pick-up or mailing within 3-5 business days of arrival in the ISSS office.

How do I update my Student Contact Information and OPT Employment Information?

Login to the myISSS portal using your UBIT name and password. Once you have logged on, enter your current residential address on the “Update OPT Student Contact Information” E-Form. Then, update your employment information on the “Add or Update OPT Employment” E-Form. You will be required to upload a copy of your EAD card (front side only).

If you previously reported employment to ISSS and are no longer working for that employer, you must report your end date of employment. To report your employment end date, first enter your previous employer’s information on the “Add or Update OPT Employment” E-Form. Then, on the same E-Form, enter your new employment details. You can report up to three employers on the same E-Form.

Note: You will be required to submit a new Form I-983 when reporting any change in employment details.

How long can I remain in the U.S. after my EAD expires?

All students on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension have a 60-day grace period after their EAD expires. You are permitted to remain inside the U.S. during those 60 days to prepare for your departure, apply to change your status (if eligible) or begin a new degree program. If you are not admitted to a new degree program or do not submit a change-of-status application before the end of the 60 days, you must leave the U.S. Note: During your 60-day grace period, you may not work.

PLEASE REMEMBER:
• If you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level at UB, then your STEM OPT authorization will automatically be terminated.
• If you are accepted to begin another degree program at UB and your STEM OPT has not yet expired, your OPT will terminate on the first day of classes for your new degree program.
• If you later decide not to mail your 24-month OPT STEM Extension application to USCIS for any reason, you must notify ISSS immediately so that we can cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
• While on a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension, you are still in **F-1 status**.