

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING: 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

Who is eligible for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

F-1 students with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees in fields listed on the [STEM Designated Degree Program List](#) are eligible for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension.

What requirements must I meet to be eligible for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

- You must be currently authorized for Post-Completion OPT and working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to your field of study.
 - You must be employed for at least 20 hours per week.
 - You are not eligible for a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension if you are self-employed or employed as a volunteer.
- You must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in a field on the STEM Designated Degree Program list. A SEVIS-certified U.S. college or university with educational accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education must have conferred your degree. Only degrees received within 10 years of the date of your DSO recommendation for an OPT STEM Extension are eligible.
 - You may use a degree received from a U.S. school other than the University at Buffalo, provided that you meet all of the requirements listed in this section.
- At the time of application for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension, you must have a job or a job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify system.
- **Note:** Each student is permitted a lifetime maximum of two OPT STEM extensions. To qualify for a second OPT STEM Extension, your second STEM eligible degree must be at a higher level than your first STEM eligible degree and you must have a valid Post-Completion OPT EAD card. For example, if you applied for your first OPT STEM Extension on the basis of a Master's degree, you must complete a PhD in a STEM eligible degree in order to qualify for another OPT STEM Extension. Once you have been approved for two OPT STEM Extensions, you are not eligible for another OPT STEM Extension--even if you complete another STEM eligible degree at a higher level.

What Is E-Verify?

International Student and Scholar Services

Talbert Hall 210, Buffalo, NY 14260-1604
716.645.2258 (F) 716.645.6197
iss@buffalo.edu

buffalo.edu/international-student-and-scholar-services

[E-Verify](#) is an Internet-based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. Contact your employer to determine if they participate in E-Verify. ISSS does not maintain this information.

What must the employer do so that I can receive the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

- The employer must be registered in E-Verify and give its E-Verify number to the USCIS via the Form I-765.
- The employer must assist with the completion of, and sign off on, [Form I-983 “Training Plan for STEM OPT Students”](#). By signing this form, the employer is attesting to the following:
 - They have sufficient resources and personnel available, and are prepared to provide the training outlined in the Form I-983.
 - Note: DHS may conduct a site visit of any employer to ensure that the employer is able to meet the goals and objectives of the training program set forth in the Form I-983.
 - The STEM OPT student will not replace any full-time, part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. workers, and the employment terms and conditions (including pay, hours, duties and benefits) are consistent with those offered to U.S. workers in similar situations.
 - The employment opportunity will assist the student in reaching his/her training goals as outlined in Form I-983.
- The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the International Student Office within 5 days. Note: If the student has not reported to work for five consecutive business days without the employer’s consent, the employer is to consider the student to have left the job.
- The employer must review and sign a 12-month and final self-evaluation of the student’s performance.

I am currently on Post-Completion OPT. When should I apply for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

The earliest you can apply for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension is **90 days** prior to the expiration of your EAD card. **Your application must be received by the USCIS before your current OPT EAD card expires.**

I am currently on Post-Completion OPT. How do I apply for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension?

STEP 1: Prepare your application and submit it online to ISSS following the directions below:

1. [Pay the UB OPT fee](#). The fee is \$55 and must be paid online. It cannot be charged to your student account. After paying the fee, **remember to print the receipt**.
2. Login to the [myISSS Student Portal](#)). Click on “F-1 Practical Training Applications” and then “Application for 24-Month OPT STEM Extension”.
3. Complete the entire “Application for 24-Month OPT STEM Extension” E-form and upload all required documents. Only documents saved as PDF or JPEG are acceptable. You must submit the following documents:

- Form I-765 (*fillable on ISSS website*)
 - **Before completing Form I-765, be sure to select the correct form on the ISSS website.** Choose the one which contains the appropriate code for the 24-Month STEM Extension, which is: (C)(3)(C)
 - Before uploading your Form I-765 to myISSS, remember to print the form, sign it, scan it, and save the completed form as a PDF or JPEG.
 - **Be sure the address you use on the Form I-765 is an address where you will receive mail in 3-4 months.** We do not recommend changing your address with the USCIS while your OPT application is pending.
- [Form G-1145](#) (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (*fillable on ISSS website*))
- [Form I-983](#) (“Training Plan for STEM OPT Students”). The form must be complete, including all required signatures. For assistance completing Form I-983, please visit the resources and tutorial found on the [Study in the States STEM OPT HUB](#). Below is additional information that will be helpful when completing “**Section 1: Student Information**”:
 - **Name of School Recommending STEM OPT: State University of New York at Buffalo** (if you are applying on the basis of a degree earned at the University at Buffalo). If you are applying on the basis of a degree earned at another school, you should enter that school’s name as it appears on your old I-20.
 - **UB’s SEVIS School Code is “BUF214F00010000”.**
 - **Your SEVIS ID Number** can be found at the top of your I-20. It begins with the letter “N”.
 - **Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information.** If you are applying on the basis of a degree earned at the University at Buffalo, you should use the following contact information:
 - Mary Vakeva
 - International Student & Scholar Services
 - University at Buffalo
 - 210 Talbert Hall
 - Buffalo, NY 14260
 - 716-645-2258
 - Email: jsss@buffalo.edu
 - **Your CIP Code can be found in the Program of Study section on Page 1 of your I-20.** It is the 6-digit number that appears after your major field of study. Note: If you are applying on the basis of a degree earned from another school, the CIP code can be found on page 1 of the new format I-20 and page 3 of the previous format I-20. If your I-20 does not indicate the CIP code for that degree, please contact us for guidance on the documents you will need to show your eligibility for the 24-Month STEM Extension.
 - If you are applying for the 24-Month STEM Extension based on your most recently completed degree from the University at Buffalo, you should answer “No” to the question asking if your application is based on a prior degree. If your application is based on a prior degree, you should answer “Yes”.
 - **Your Employment Authorization Number can be found on your EAD card.** It is a nine-digit number, also known as the “A” number or “USCIS number”.
 - **STEM OPT Requested Period.** This is the period of time during which you will be authorized for the 24-Month STEM Extension. Enter the day after your current EAD ends for the start date, and add 24 months to determine the end date.

Below is additional information that will be helpful when completing “**Section 3: Employer Information**”:

- **Start Date of Employment:** This refers to the date you will begin STEM OPT training with your employer. Note: If you are continuing employment with your current employer, this date will be the first day of your OPT STEM Extension. If you are starting new employment, this date will be the start date of your new employment.
 - **UB OPT Fee receipt.** (See #1 above for information on how to pay the fee)
 - **Photocopy of your diploma indicating completion of a STEM eligible degree or transcripts indicating that you have completed all degree requirements with the exception of your thesis/dissertation.** Note: It must specify your field of study. If not, you must include a photocopy of your official transcript, which must confirm that your degree was conferred.
 - Note: If you are applying on the basis of a degree received from another U.S. educational institution, you will also be required to upload proof that this degree was in a STEM eligible field. A copy of your previous school's I-20 and transcript may suffice. If additional documentation is needed, we will contact you.
 - **Choose your preferred mailing or pick-up option and provide the requested information.**
4. After providing all required information and uploading all of the required documents, **remember to click the “submit” button.** ISSS will review your OPT STEM application and notify you if any additional information is needed.
 5. When your application is complete, ISSS will enter your OPT STEM recommendation into the SEVIS system, which will produce a new I-20 with the OPT STEM recommendation. **ISSS processing time is 7-10 business days.**
 6. You will receive an email confirming that your OPT STEM I-20 is ready. We will mail your I-20 to you if you indicated on the E-form that you would like it mailed.

STEP 2: Submit your complete paper 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application for an Employment Authorization Document (“EAD Card”) to the USCIS Service Center.

The USCIS must receive the following documents **before your current EAD expires AND within 60 days of the issuance of your I-20 with the OPT STEM recommendation.**

- **Original Form I-765.** Note: Be sure to submit the original document with your signature in **BLUE** ink.
- **Form G-1145** (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance)
- **Photocopy of your diploma or transcripts indicating that you have completed all degree requirements with the exception of your thesis/dissertation.**
 - Note: Your diploma must specify your field of study. If not, you must include a photocopy of your official transcript.
 - Note: If you are applying for the OPT STEM Extension on the basis of a degree received from another school, you must also submit your transcript from the previous school.
- **Photocopy of EAD card(s)**
- **Photocopy of your employment letter**
- **Application fee of \$410.** This should be a check (from a U.S. bank) or a money order payable to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”.
 - Write the 11-digit number from your newest I-94 (card or electronic print-out) on your check or money order.
 - Don't forget to sign and date the check. (*Please see attached example of a properly written check*)

- Photocopy of your current I-20 – page 1 and page 2 with OPT STEM recommendation
- Photocopies of all previous I-20's
- Photocopies of your current, valid passport (biographic and photo pages) and U.S. visa stamp page in your passport. If your passport has expired, please go to ISSS, Talbert Hall 210 for advice.
- Photocopy of the front and back of your most recent I-94 Card OR print-out of electronic I-94 (available at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search>)
- Two (2) identical natural color photographs of yourself, taken within 30 days of your application and not previously used. If your photos do not meet USCIS requirements exactly, your EAD card will not be issued.
 - Please see attached specifications for the photos
 - In pencil, please write your name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo

Be sure to photocopy your entire OPT application for your personal records. Note: ISSS does not keep copies of your application!

Where do I send my OPT application?

Send your application to: Via express courier (e.g. FedEx, UPS):

USCIS
 Attn: AOS
 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
 Suite 400
 Lewisville, TX 75067

Via U.S. Postal Service (regular mail):

USCIS
 PO Box 660867
 Dallas, TX 75266

Note: If your mailing address in item #3 on your Form I-765 is not in New York State, please refer to the last page of this handout for the USCIS mailing address information.

Note: Since it isn't clear which address should be used for USPS Priority Mail, we recommend that you use UPS or Fedex when you mail your application to the USCIS.

How should I mail my OPT application?

You should mail your OPT application by a **reliable, overnight mail delivery service** (e.g. UPS, FedEx) to the USCIS Lockbox that has jurisdiction over the address you listed in item #3 on your Form I-765. Utilizing an overnight mail service will enable you to track your mailed application and its delivery. Be sure to save your receipt.

How long is the OPT application process?

Processing time at the USCIS is estimated to be 6-12 weeks. However, processing times vary widely depending on the time of year and the workload at the USCIS Lockbox to which you send your application.

After I receive my EAD card, what must I do?

- Upload a photocopy of your EAD card by logging on to [myISSS](#) 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.
- **Notify ISSS about the following information:**
 - Any change in your name
 - Any change in your residential address (ISSS must be notified within ten days of your move.)
 - 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, or any other change in your employment details.
 - To report changes in employment information, log onto [myISSS](#) using your UBIT Name and Password. Once you have logged on, choose the “Add or Update OPT Employment” E-Form and submit the required information.
 - **Note: A new Form I-983 must be submitted to ISSS within 10 days of any change in employment details.**
 - Any interruption of employment lasting longer than 10 days
 - Any change in your immigration status (e.g. change to H-1B)
 - Report any employer non-compliance to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). If you believe that your employer is not complying with the terms and conditions of the 24-Month STEM OPT regulations or the Form I-983 Training Plan, contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at sevp@ice.dhs.gov or the [Department of Homeland Security](#).
- **Submit the 6-Month Report.** Students on the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension must also submit a report to the 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, log onto [myISSS](#) 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 (see above) and include a pre-paid shipping label so we can mail your I-20 back to you.

Do I have to maintain employment?

Yes. However, the Final OPT Rule published on March 11, 2016 permits F-1 students who are authorized for the 24-Month OPT STEM Extension 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 and Final Evaluation to ISSS within 10 days of the change.

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

Any employment you choose while on the 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 a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension.

Note: If you are employed by the UB Research Foundation and intend to apply for a 24-Month OPT STEM Extension using this employment, you should contact Bob Palmer (rp9@buffalo.edu) or Sharon Chimera (schimera@buffalo.edu) for assistance in completing Form I-983.

Can I work while my 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application is pending?

Yes. Your application to the USCIS automatically extends your work authorization for up to 180 days while your application is pending.

Can I change employers while my 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application is pending?

Yes. However, you are required to report any change of employment to ISSS and to the USCIS. ISSS must issue you a new I-20 reflecting your new employment information. **Note:** **Your new employer**

must be registered in E-verify and you must submit a new Form I-983 and Final Evaluation to ISSS.

Contact ISSS for instructions on how to report your new employment to the USCIS.

Can I travel outside the U.S. while my 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application is pending and after my Post-Completion OPT EAD Card has expired?

We do not recommend traveling after your EAD Card has expired and while you have a pending 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application.

After I receive my new EAD card, what should I carry when I re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?

- **Employment letter on employer's letterhead verifying your OPT employment**
- **Both EAD cards**
- I-20 with OPT recommendations and a valid signature (not more than 6 months old) from ISSS on page 2.
- Originals of all previous I-20's
- Valid F-1 visa
- Valid passport

IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- **While your 24-Month OPT STEM Extension application is pending, we strongly advise against changing the address listed on Form I-765.** The USCIS does not always process change of address notifications in a timely manner. Changing your address while your application is still pending may result in your being required to file a new application with a new fee because you did not receive your EAD Card. **Note: EAD cards may also not be forwarded by the U.S. Post Office to your new address.** Therefore, you must be certain that the address you list in item #3 of your Form I-765 is (and will be) your address when your application is processed, which could be 3-4 months after you submit it to USCIS.
- **If you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level at UB,** then your OPT authorization will automatically be terminated.
- If you are accepted to begin another degree program at UB and your 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 OPT, you are still in F-1 status.

10/17