How to Apply For:

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

24-Month

STEM EXTENSION (OPT-X)

Updated November 2021
COVID-19 Updates

- USCIS is currently open and accepting OPT/STEM I-765 application processing. USCIS has NOT changed application timelines and deadlines due to COVID-19.
- Your OPT STEM application must be received and receipted by the last day of your Pos-Completion OPT.
- Currently there is no delay in I-765 processing time due to COVID-19. You can check the processing times [https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/)
- OPT/STEM I-765 applications MUST be submitted inside the U.S. That means that you must be physically present in the U.S. when your application is received by USCIS. USCIS has NOT made an exception to this due to COVID-19.
- USCIS still requires a handwritten signature for the I-765. NO DIGITAL or ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES.
Update your SEVP portal

Before you submit your OPTX (STEM) application to ISSSO be sure to log into the SEVP portal and verify/check your employment information. Be sure that all employment is available and accurate.

Do NOT delete any previous employment history, only add to the information that is already there.

For information on how to update your SEVP Portal account click here or use this link https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevp-portal-help/maintain-information/update-employer-information
What is the STEM OPT Extension?

Extension of Post-Completion Optional Practical Training for students who have completed a degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) fields.

Valid for an additional 24 months immediately following the initial 12 months of Post-Completion OPT.
Eligibility for STEM Extension

- Be a recipient of a U.S. Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctoral degree in a Science Technology Engineering or Math (STEM) designated degree program.
- Currently on approved Post Completion OPT and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment.
- Be employed or have a job offer (directly related to your field of study) for a minimum of 20 hours from an employer who is registered and maintains participation in the USCIS E-Verify Program.
- Employer completes and signs Form I-983 (employer must participate in E-Verify employer and have a valid EIN number).
- File within the required timeline.
Qualifying STEM Employer

• Employment on STEM OPT must be directly related to the STEM major
• Employer must be enrolled and maintain participation in E-verify
• Employment must be a full-time paid position
• Employee and employer must complete the form I-983 Training Plan and agree to make any modifications as necessary
ELIGIBILITY

Review the following categories to determine which applies to you, then follow the guidelines*:

**Category I (A)**—New 24-Month STEM OPT Request
**Category I (B)**—Second STEM OPT Extension
**Category II**—Currently on Post-Completion OPT, Non-STEM Major
Eligibility for STEM Extension

**Category I (A) — New 24-Month STEM OPT Request**

- Have to be in a period of Active Post-Completion OPT.
- The primary/secondary major is in a field listed on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List. *Your 6 digit CIP code is listed on pg. 1 of current Form I-20 next to your primary major.*
- You will be, or are currently working for an employer enrolled in the USCIS E-Verify system for a minimum of 20 hours per week.

**Category I (B) — Second STEM OPT Extension**

- Currently on approved Active Post-Completion OPT.
- Work for U.S. employer in a paid position at least 20 hours per week.
- You will be applying for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} STEM degree at a higher level than the one used for the first STEM OPT extension. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} STEM OPT cannot be a continuation of the 1\textsuperscript{st} STEM OPT.
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} STEM degree meets all of the same requirements as with the 1\textsuperscript{st} STEM OPT.
Eligibility for STEM Extension

**Category II — OPT STEM EXTENSION based on a previously obtained STEM degree from a U.S. based, SEVP-certified institution.** This is based on the following guidelines:

- Currently on Post-Completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree from UH.

- Earned the STEM degree within the previous 10 years of the date the DSO recommends the STEM OPT extension.

- Received current and prior degree from a US-accredited, SEVP-approved university, but did NOT benefit from a STEM OPT Extension with the prior degree.

- A new job offer relating to the prior STEM degree from an employer enrolled in the USCIS E-Verify system. The job on STEM OPT cannot be based on the Non-STEM post-completion OPT field of study.
Application Timeline

- The application window for OPT STEM Extension is 90 days prior to the Post Completion OPT EAD card end date at the earliest, up until the EAD card end date at the latest, received and properly filed with USCIS. Applications earlier than or later than this time window are not accepted by USCIS.

- The OPT-X application has to be properly filed with USCIS within 60 days from the OPT-X recommendation date on the I-20 or by the last day of the Post-Completion OPT, whichever comes first.

- *If the application is properly filed, a student can work up to 180 days past their period of Post-Completion OPT while pending a decision from USCIS.*

- Most employers may ask for the receipt notice from your filing in order for you to keep working.
Documents Required by ISSS for OPT-X Recommendation I-20

EMAIL THE FOLLOWING TO ISSSOHLP@CENTRAL.UH.EDU

✓ Student Reporting Obligation Form
✓ Form I-983 Training plan
✓ Copy of latest I-20, and previous I-20 if the application is based on a previous STEM degree.
✓ Copy of passport(s) that is valid for six months into the future
✓ Copy of your most recent visa page.
✓ Copy of most recent I-94.
✓ Job offer letter from the employer indicating: job title & job description on company letterhead.
✓ Copy of front AND back of your current EAD Card.
✓ Copy of diploma (s) OR official transcript(s) (proof of STEM degree)

MAIL THE FOLLOWING TO ISSSSO

✓ Complete Payment Coupon and a personal check OR money order made payable to University of Houston for $200—Include your UHID in the memo line (Please be sure that your name and address is printed on the top left corner of your check. Do not sign the back of the check.)
Mailing your Payment to ISSSO

Complete the Payment Coupon

Prepare a personal check OR money order made payable to University of Houston for $200—Include your UHID in the memo line

Mail the Payment Coupon AND the $200 check or money order together (Please be sure that your name and address is printed on the top left corner of your check. Do not sign the back of the check.)
Complete the form based on the dates you will be required to report.

**STEM OPT recipients must complete a "validation report" to the DSO**

**EVERY SIX MONTHS**

starting from the date the 24-month extension begins. Update the Self-Report on ISSS’s website and every time your personal or employment information changes.
I-983 Training Plan

Form I-983 must be submitted to ISSS at the time of application for any STEM OPT Extension. Form I-983 will be kept on record by ISSS for minimum 3 years and will not be mailed to USCIS.


- Pages 1 – 4 must be completed, all areas filled out and have original signatures.
- Page 5 (Top part – Student Progress report) must be completed and submitted after 1 year from the start date of your STEM OPT.
- Page 5 (Bottom part – Final Evaluation) must be completed and submitted at the end of the OPTX and/or the end of your employment.
Form I-983
Training Plan

Complete the following on SECTION 1

- Student Name: As listed on passport
- Student Email Address: Current
- Name of School Recommending STEM OPT: Enter University of Houston
- Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned: Enter the name of the school where your STEM degree was awarded. This may or may not be the same school recommending the STEM OPT.
- SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT
- DSO Name and Contact Information: Enter the name and contact information of DSO on your I-20
  - Student SEVIS ID Number: Enter your SEVIS number on your UH I-20
  - STEM OPT Requested Period: From should be the day AFTER your Post-completion OPT end

Based on Prior Degree?

- Check “Yes” if your STEM OPT is based on a previously-obtained U.S. STEM degree, and is not the same degree upon which your current OPT was granted. The date awarded for prior degree must be within 10 years of the time/date that the OPT Stem is recommended.
- Check “No” if your STEM OPT is based on your most recently obtained degree, and that is the degree upon which your current OPT is based.

Find on your I-20
- 6 digit code on page 1 of I-20
- 9 digit number on EAD card

University of Houston

Day after EAD card ends
STEM OPT End date

Enter Bachelors Masters, Ph.D.
Enter date degree was awarded. Prior degree must be within 10 years.

Must be original not electronic!
Form I-983 Training Plan

- The Employer EIN is **NOT** the same as the E-verify number listed on the I-765. This number is usually 9 digits long.
- Start Date of Employment should be the day your Stem Extension will start. The first day after your post completion OPT Ends.
- The Signature of Employer Official with Signatory Authority MUST BE original. CANNOT be electronic.
  - ISSS cannot determine the person responsible at your organization to complete and sign the form.
  - Keep in mind that your company will designate the person who is responsible for completing the training plan in your behalf,
  - You can check with your supervisor or human resources department if you are unsure

**9-digit number**
**OPT Stem Start Date**

---

Note: DHS may, at its discretion, conduct a site visit of the employer to ensure that program requirements are being met, including that the employer possesses and maintains the ability and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences consistent with this Plan.

**Must be original not electronic!**
### Form I-983 Training Plan

Section 5 of the form will be completed by the student and the employer. A different company employer cannot sign this part. It has to be the same employer that signs on page 2.

- **Site name**—Be sure to enter exactly where the physical location that the student works.
- **Site Address**—Be sure to list the full address, including suite or building number is applicable
- **Name of official**—This person will be recorded as the student's supervisor.
- **Official's phone number**—be sure that the phone number is complete and accurate
- **Official's Email**—be sure that the email address in complete and accurate
- **Please include the Student’s Official Job Title**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 5: TRAINING PLAN FOR STEM OPT STUDENTS (Completed by Student and Employer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Name</strong> (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer Name</strong>:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER SITE INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Name</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Address (Street, City, State, ZIP)</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Official</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official’s Title</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official’s Email</strong>:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** For the remaining fields in this section, employers who already have an internal/pre-existing training plan in place may fill in the details based on that plan.

**Student Role:** Describe the student's role with the employer and how that role is directly related to enhancing the student's knowledge obtained through his/her qualifying STEM degree.

**Goals and Objectives:** Describe how the assignment(s) with the employer will help the student achieve his or her specific objectives for work-based learning related to his or her STEM degree. The description must both specify the student’s goals regarding specific knowledge, skills, or techniques as well as the means by which they will be achieved.

Describe in DETAIL what assignments and responsibilities the student will have and how the training is related to the STEM degree. It would be helpful to include the student's official job title.

The goals listed here should be specific and measurable. The self-evaluations to be completed later should reflect and show how the goals listed here have been achieved.

**Explain in detail how the employer will oversee and supervise the student.**

**Explain in detail how the employer will evaluate the student.** Also indicate if the student gaining new knowledge and skills.
Form I-983
Training Plan

Be sure to read the following statements:

- Employer Official Certification
- Privacy Act Statement
- Paperwork Reduction Act
- Have employer sign with original signature.

You will submit page 5 with your application. Leave page 5 blank.
Form I-765
Training Plan

During the STEM OPT employment period, the student will be required to submit self-reported evaluations on their performance to ISSS.

The student evaluations will be completed by the student and reviewed by the supervisor. The evaluations are a shared responsibility of both the student and the employer. However the student is responsible for submitting the evaluation in a timely manner to ISSS.

Once the evaluation is complete both the student and employer must sign.

First evaluation--Required after completion of 12 months of STEM OPT period

Final evaluation--Due at conclusion of 24-month STEM OPT period
Submit the following documents to ISSS by email to isssohlp@central.uh.edu Include your PSID

- Student Reporting Obligation Form
- Form I-983 Training plan
- Copy of latest I-20, and previous I-20 if the application is based on a previous STEM degree.
- Copy of passport(s) that is valid for six months into the future
- Copy of your most recent visa page.
- Copy of most recent I-94.
- Job offer letter from the employer indicating: job title & job description on company letterhead.
- Copy of front and back of your current EAD Card.
- Copy of diploma(s) or official transcript(s) (proof of STEM degree)

Mail the following to our office. The address is below:

ISSSO
University of Houston
4465 University Drive, N203
Houston, TX 77204 – 3024

A personal check or money order made payable to University of Houston for $200 with the Payment Coupon
(Please be sure that your name and address is printed on the top left corner of your check. Do not sign the back of the check.)
OPT-X
Application Timeline

The ISSS Counselor will review your request and determine your eligibility.

If a 24-month extension is warranted, a recommendation for an OPT Extension will be processed in SEVIS which will generate a new I-20.

When you receive your new I-20, sign and date it, and include it with your OPTX application. Send a copy to ISSS to be placed in your file. **The original I-20 is for your use and records.**

Mail the completed application to the USCIS address provided by the Counselor, within 60 days of the issue date of the new I-20 **AND** before your current OPT expires. The Service Center must receive and receipt the application, before the current OPT expires.

Once this is done, you can work up to 180 days past your OPT end-date as you are pending for adjudication from USCIS.
You can now file your OPTX application Online with USCIS

- Create an account with USCIS. See video below or click the link to see their tutorial for support.

[Image: my.USCIS.gov]
After you create your account...

- After you review the USCIS.gov “How to Create a USCIS Online Account” webpage

- Click on the box to file a form online.
  - Select “Application for Employment Authorization”
  - Review the Form Overview Page. This is important information about your request to the U.S. Government.
  - Continue with each step of the application
You will be required to upload the following...

- DO NOT SUBMIT UNTIL you have uploaded all required documentation
  - I-94 record
  - Visa
  - Passport
  - Photos
  - OPT endorsed I-20
  - Previous CPT or OPT I-20s
  - Previous EAD cards

- PLEASE NOTE: If you submit your application and pay the fee to USCIS WITHOUT having proper information in the application, USCIS will deny your OPT application AND keep your fee.
Tips for Filing the Online Application

✧ Complete the form in its entirety as best as you can. You can skip the questions that you are not required to answer.

✧ Your form will save in draft status for 30 days. If you start the application and realize you messed up your OPT dates or need to get new photos taken, you can take a break and complete the form later.

✧ If you’re inactive for 15 minutes, you will be automatically logged out.

✧ Make sure you pick the correct eligibility category for your form! stem extension = (c)(3)(C))

✧ Make sure your files uploaded properly. Documents and photos can only be up to 6 MB and they only accept certain file types. If you are getting an error, check the error message and do what you need to do to correct it.

✧ REVIEW! Always review your application before you pay the fee. If you pay the fee and submit, you cannot make corrections.
Benefits of Filing Online

- You will receive a receipt notice immediately
- All notices are posted to your account
- You have more control of the application
- Note: Students who file a paper application can also create a USCIS account. You can link your paper application and receipt notice to the online account!
  - ISSSO recommends that you file your OPTX application online, however you may still mail your application if you choose. Please see the next slide on what application materials to mail to USCIS.
Please Note

If you are file the OPTX application online, which is preferred, then you must NOT also file the paper application. You cannot file both online and paper.
Here is the list of documents that will be mailed to the Service Center listed on [www.uscis.gov]:

- Form G-1145
- Filing Fee of $410—You can pay by:
  - A check or money order – made payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security.”
  - Form G-1450– to pay by credit card you must fill out Form G-1450 and attach it to your application.
  - DO NOT SEND CASH
- Form I-765 (all pages)
- Two “passport” photos. Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo.
- A copy (NOT original) of page 1 and 2 of the new STEM Extension I-20 from with recommendation for STEM OPT on page 2. Be sure you have signed the document. This I-20 cannot be more than 60 days old when it arrives at USCIS or OPT will be denied!
- A copy of your I-94 record
- A copy Passport
- A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).
- A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card(s) FRONT and BACK
- Proof of degree completion: Official transcripts confirming your degree and/or a copy of your diploma

**GET A TRACKING NUMBER FOR YOUR PACKAGE**

Keep a copy of all documents you send for your personal record.
What do I do If I get an RFE?

1. Provide ISSS DSO with a scanned copy of the Request for Evidence (RFE)

2. A DSO will review the RFE and assist you with compiling the requested information

3. Respond to USCIS by following mailing instructions on the RFE. Remember this is your petition and your responsibility.
OPT STEM Extension USCIS Approval

Once you are approved by USCIS and have your EAD card. Do the following:

1. Complete the OPT Self report at http://www.uh.edu/oisss/opt-details/
2. Send a copy of the front and back of your EAD card to SEVIS@central.uh.edu. Include your student ID in the email.
Maintaining Status During STEM Extension
Reporting Requirements – 6 months Reporting

Update the Self-Report on ISSS’s website every 6 months and every time your personal or employment information changes. Go to http://www.uh.edu/oisss/opt-details/, then click on OPT SELF REPORT and UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION!

The “Student Reporting Obligations” Form is a reminder of your reporting dates. Use it to mark your calendar ahead of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT Reporting Obligations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students applying for STEM OPT Extension must abide by the following Reporting Obligations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-month Validity Reports: I must submit an OPT-Self Report on ISSS website on my scheduled validation reporting dates even if I don’t have any personal nor employment changes (Please fill out prior to submission):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reporting Date #1:</strong> <strong>Date after OPT ends</strong> (This is the first day after your Post-OPT expires)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reporting Date #2:</strong> <strong>mm/dd/yyyy</strong> ----&gt; (6 months after date #1) <strong>Fill out all reporting dates for ISSS and then keep it as a reminder to report</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reporting Date #3:</strong> _____________ (6 months after date #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reporting Date #4:</strong> _____________ (6 months after date #3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <strong>Reporting Date #5:</strong> _____________ (last day of OPT-Extension, 24months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maintaining Status During STEM Extension
Reporting Requirements

12 Month Requirement
First evaluation
Required after completion of 12 months of STEM OPT period

24 Month Requirement
Final evaluation
Due at conclusion of 24-month STEM OPT period
Maintaining Status During STEM Extension Reporting Requirements

- Students on OPT have 90 days of unemployment. You will receive an additional time of 60 days during the period of OPT-X. The accumulative unemployment days cannot exceed 150.

- On OPT-X you have 5 business days to report changes in employment, ending or starting a new job. This includes updated I-983’s.

- On October 26th, 2018, SEVP will begin counting days of unemployment for each student. Once the function is fully implemented, any students breaching the max days of unemployment will be auto-terminated.
Maintaining Status During STEM Extension Reporting Requirements
Change of employer

If you change employer while OPTX is pending or approved your must send the following to SEVIS@central.uh.edu.

✓ Have current employer complete a Final Evaluation (page 5 of I-983)
✓ Have new employer to complete a new I-983 (pages 1-4)
✓ Complete OPT Self report
Travel on OPT-X
What You Should Know

In most cases, you should not travel outside of the U.S. if your EAD is expired and the 24-month extension request is pending. Wait until you receive the new EAD before traveling. You will be unable to apply for a new VISA until you are on an approved period of STEM-OPT.

In order to travel while on OPT, please see the required documents below:

✓ I-20 (endorsed on the 2nd page that is no older than six months upon return to the U.S. This signature can be given by either coming to our office, sending it to us, or asking for a reprint, sevis@central.uh.edu).
✓ Passport that is valid within six months or more
✓ Valid VISA
✓ STEM OPT EAD card
✓ Job offer letter and/or a letter from employer stating that they know you are leaving the country and for what reason
- After you have mailed your application and received your I-797 receipt notice from USCIS, you can check the status of your application at www.uscis.gov, click “check case status,” and enter the receipt number provided on your receipt notice.

- You may continue to work up to 180 days while your OPT stem extension is pending.

- Once approved for OPTX, you are required to submit a scanned copy of the front and back of your new STEM EAD card to our office via email at sevis@central.uh.edu.

- The travel endorsement is valid for 1 year while you are on OPT/OPTX. It is recommended to be within 6 months and have the employment information on the I-20, but it’s not required by law.

- You are required to submit a Six-Month Validity Report to confirm your information every six months on the UH ISSS website: http://www.uh.edu/oiss/ Click Optional Practical Training—Click OPT Self-Report.

- I-983 Annual Evaluation must be submitted 12 months from the OPT start date or the start date from working for the company whichever comes later. 12-month Evaluation: Complete the top half of page 5 on the I-983. Submit to sevis@central.uh.edu.

- I-983 Final Evaluation must be submitted at the end of the OPTX or at the end of employment within five business days. 24-month (Final Evaluation): Complete the bottom half of page 5 on the I-983. Submit to sevis@central.uh.edu.

- If you change employers while your OPTX is pending, you must do the following:
  - Submit a final evaluation from previous employer to our office via email at sevis@central.uh.edu.
  - Submit a new I-983 from new employer to our office via email at sevis@central.uh.edu.
  - Include the new company E-verify name and number.

- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE) contact our office immediately.
I-765 Filing Fee  https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
I-765 Form --  https://www.uscis.gov/i-765

ONLINE STATUS CHECK

- The status of your application can be checked online with your receipt number (See I-797):
  https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

ONLINE REQUEST FOR UPDATE

- You can request an update if you haven’t received your card after 90 days:
  https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do

AUTHORIZATION

- The USCIS has the final authority to grant OPT.

SOURCES

- 8 CFR 214, 274a

- USPS Informed Delivery – Use this to find out what is coming in your mail each day as it will help you see when your EAD card will arrive.
  https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action