



Effective April 8, 2008, F-1 students that have received a bachelor's, master's, and/or doctoral degree in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields can apply to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a one-time 17 month extension of an initial post-completion OPT employment authorization thereby extending OPT to a total of 29 months.

## Eligibility

- Student must be a recipient of a bachelor's, master's, and/or doctoral degree in a STEM qualifying field.
  - University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston qualifying STEM field:

School	Degree	Education Level	Primary Major Code	Major/Minor Name	Concentration
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences	M.S.	Master's	26.0102	Biomedical Sciences, General (New)	
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences	Ph.D.	Doctorate	26.0102	Biomedical Sciences, General (New)	
School of Public Health	M.S.	Master's	51.2299	Public Health, Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biostatistics</li> <li>• Epidemiology</li> </ul>
School of Public Health	M.P.H.	Master's	51.2201	Public Health, General (MPH, DPH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biostatistics</li> <li>• Epidemiology and Disease Control</li> </ul>
School of Public Health	Dr.P.H.	Doctorate	51.2201	Public Health, General (MPH, DPH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Epidemiology and Disease Control</li> </ul>
School of Public Health	Ph.D.	Doctorate	51.2299	Public Health, Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biostatistics</li> <li>• Epidemiology</li> </ul>

- Student must be participating in an unexpired approved period of standard 12-month post-completion OPT granted on the basis of a degree listed in the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- Student must be currently employed or have a written job offer from an employer who participates in E-Verify and the employment must be directly related to the student's STEM major area of study.
  - It is the responsibility of the student to verify that his/her employer or prospective employer is registered with E-Verify.
  - A student engaged in the 17-month STEM OPT extension is able to change employers; however, all employers the student works for during the 17-month STEM OPT extension **must** be registered with E-Verify.
- Student has not previously been authorized for a 17-month STEM OPT extension.
- Student must agree to report any changes to student's information listed in the [OPT Student Reporting Requirement](#) form.

## Employer Responsibility

The student's employer or prospective employer must agree to report to The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston Office of International Affairs (OIA) if a student is terminated or leaves employment prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. The employer must report these changes to OIA within 48 hours of the event by sending an email to [utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu) that includes the name of the student employed, the student's SEVIS ID number (if available), and the date he/she has terminated or leaves employment. "An employer shall consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left the employment or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the consent of the employer, whichever occurs earlier" 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(4).

## Application Process

An application for the 17-month STEM OPT extension must be received by the USCIS Service Center before the expiration date of the current authorization period of standard 12-month post-completion OPT. OIA recommends that students apply for the 17-month STEM OPT extension no earlier than 120 days prior to the expiration date of their current EAD. If a student has properly filed for the STEM OPT extension, the student's period of STEM extension OPT starts the day after the expiration of the student's original period of approved OPT. Provided that the STEM OPT extension was timely filed with USCIS, **a student is permitted to work up to 180 days after the expiration of the current OPT while the extension application is pending.**

### Note:

Students whose OPT has expired but have a request for the 17-month STEM OPT extension pending with USCIS are strongly discouraged from traveling outside the U.S. until the extension application is approved and the student receives a new EAD. Please discuss the ramifications of traveling abroad while your extension is pending with your IVA.

### Step 1:

The following documents must be submitted to the Office of International Affairs (OIA) in order to determine eligibility for the 17-month STEM OPT extension. If you are at a Regional Campus, these documents must be submitted to the Regional Coordinator who will forward them to OIA:

- 1) Signed [OPT STEM Extension Information Packet](#)
- 2) Completed and signed [OPT STEM Extension Request Form](#)
- 3) Completed and signed Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
  - o Form I-765 can be downloaded at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website (USCIS) website [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)
  - o Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper code of (c)(3)(C) at Question 16.
  - o Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper degree "Biomedical Sciences, General (NEW)" where indicated at Question 17. Student must also indicate at Question 17 the employer name as listed in E-Verify as well as the E-Verify Client Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number for the employer with whom the student is seeking the 17-month STEM OPT extension.
- 4) Copy of all previously issued Form I-20(s)
- 5) Two copies of valid passport I.D. page(s) to include expiration date and renewal page, if applicable
- 6) Two copies of Form I-94 (front and back)
- 7) Two copies of visa stamp (unless exempt from visa requirements)
- 8) Two copies of all previously issued Employment Authorization Document(s) (EAD)
- 9) Original letter from current employer regarding how employment relates to the student's STEM qualifying degree
- 10) Two copies of your diploma and/or transcripts that indicate the level of the degree and the field of study
- 11) 2 passport style photos meeting specifications detailed on U.S. Department of State website ([http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition\\_874.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/composition/composition_874.html)) with name, date of birth, and A# (if applicable) lightly printed in pencil on the back of each photo
- 12) Filing fee of \$340.00 in the form of a check, money order, or cashier's check made payable in U.S. dollars to USCIS

### Step 2:

After reviewing all documents provided and the student's records and immigration history, if your IVA has determined that you are eligible for the STEM OPT extension, a new I-20 will be processed for you. Your IVA will then contact you to return to OIA to sign the Form I-20. If you are working at a Regional Campus, the Form I-20 with STEM OPT extension endorsement will be sent to the Regional Coordinator who will then contact you to sign the Form I-20.

### Step 3:

After the Form I-20 is signed and returned to your IVA, the OPT application will be mailed to USCIS.

### Note:

- OIA recommends that students apply for the 17-month STEM OPT extension no earlier than 120 days prior to the expiration date of their current EAD.
- It will take a minimum of 90-120 days to process the I-765 application once USCIS receives all required documents. After your STEM OPT extension application has been approved, your EAD will be sent directly to The Office of International Affairs. At that time we will notify you that we have received the OPT STEM EAD Card and determine the best mailing option at that time.

## Student Reporting Requirements

OIA is responsible for maintaining the SEVIS record of all students recommended for OPT, to include the 17-month STEM OPT extension, for the duration of the time that practical training is authorized. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has requested that schools ensure the accuracy of certain information in SEVIS for all students currently completing OPT. In order to comply with U.S. immigration regulations, it is the responsibility of the student to inform his/her International Visitor Advisor of any:

- Legal changes to his/her name within 10 days of the change;
  - Change of address within 10 days of the change;
  - New employment to include the employer's name, address, and begin date of employment;
  - Changes in the name and/or address of employment;
  - Duration of time not employed; and,
  - Changes in immigration status
- If any of the changes above occur during the time that you have been approved for the 17-month STEM OPT extension, you are obligated to report these changes by completing and signing the [OPT Student Reporting Requirement](#) form and returning it to your IVA to ensure timely and accurate reporting and maintenance of SEVIS data integrity.

### Note:

- Immigration regulations mandate that students approved for the 17-month STEM OPT extension complete the [OPT Student Reporting Requirement](#) form and return it to his/her IVA **every six months** starting from the date the STEM extension starts and ending when the student's F-1 status ends or STEM extension ends, whichever comes first. Student are required to complete this form every six months regardless if there are any changes to the information provided from previous reporting.

## Unemployment

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the **total OPT period** comprising any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization and the subsequent 17-month extension period 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(E).

I have read the above information; have been advised of the benefits and restrictions of the 17-month STEM OPT extension; and, I understand my obligations regarding student reporting requirements.

Name (Print)

Signature

Date