OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

*Starting January 14, 2019, all STEM-eligible students should submit STEM OPT Extension requests through the ISOGateway. After logging into ISOGateway, select F-1 Practical Training, and then STEM OPT, and then STEM OPT Extension Request.

The Department of Homeland Security published a new final rule on OPT STEM extensions that allows for a 24-month STEM extension.

You can find more information about the 24-month extension at https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub

ELIGIBILITY: 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

- Degree must have been received from an SEVP accredited school
    - Can be based on a prior STEM degree if no STEM extension was used at the time of completion
- Maximum of 2 STEM degrees allowed per lifetime
    - Previous use of STEM Extension = 1 use
- Student cannot have accumulated 90 days of unemployment while participating in Post-Completion OPT, while on STEM an additional 60 days are allowed for a total of 150 days
- Employer must complete I-983 training plan and notify ISO upon departure of student from employment
- Employer must participate in the E-Verify program
- Employment must be at least 20 hours/week for each employer (an I-983 must be submitted to the GW ISO for every employer during the STEM 24-month, prior to engaging in employment)
- Wages must be commensurate with similarly situated US workers
- STEM OPT students cannot replace US works
- Student must submit all required evaluations at 12-/24- month mark AND/OR upon departure from any STEM employer
- Student must report employment and current living address to GW ISO every 6 months

WHAT SHOULD I SUBMIT TO THE ISO, TO REQUEST AN UPDATED I-20 THAT INCLUDES A RECOMMENDATION FOR THE OPT STEM 24-MONTH EXTENSION?

All applications for OPT STEM will be submitted through the ISOGateWay. Below you will find a list of required materials that you will need to prepare in order to complete the online submission. **After logging into ISOGateway, select F-1 Practical Training, and then choose STEM OPT, and then STEM OPT Extension Request.**
Applications can be submitted up to 90 days before the end date on your current OPT EAD.

You will need to upload the following:

- ☐ Completed I-765
- ☐ Copy of most recent I-94 card front and back or printed copy from online accessible I-94
- ☐ Passport & Visa (if applicable)
- ☐ Employment offer letter* including:
  - o Certification that you are currently employed by the company, or that you have been offered a position at that company
  - o Salary/compensation information
  - o Certification that you are/will be working at least 20 hours/week
  - o Brief explanation of your duties and how they relate to the STEM field in which you received your degree
  - o Certification that the employer is registered with, or participates in the E-Verify program
  - o Primary location of employment (address)
  - o Your supervisor's name, title, phone number, and email address
    *Please note only compensated positions are allowed; no self-employment or staffing agencies are allowed. There must be a bona-fide employer-employee relationship. If you are unsure of this, please contact your HR department. Your employer must be E-Verified and must have a Federal Employer Identification Number. If you are applying for the STEM extension with multiple employers please provide additional employment offer letters for each employer.
- ☐ Paragraph explaining how employment is directly related to the major field of study
- ☐ Completed I-983 with all required signatures
  - o If you are applying for the STEM extension with multiple employers please provide an additional I-983 for each employer.
  - o A tutorial and instructions on how to complete the I-983 can be found at Study in the States – STEM OPT HUB
  - o Questions about completing the form I-983 should be directed to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)
- ☐ Copy of Diploma and official transcript (if based on previous degree from another qualifying institution)*

*IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THE STEM EXTENSION BASED ON A PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DEGREE:

- ☐ Your previous degree cannot have been conferred more than 10 years ago at the time of application and must have been received from a currently accredited and SEVP-certified institution
- ☐ Your previous degree is assigned a STEM eligible code found on the STEM Designated Degree Program List at the time of application
- ☐ You haven't already received a STEM OPT extension based on this previous degree
- ☐ Your practical training opportunity is directly related to the previously obtained STEM degree
- ☐ Your employer must meet the criteria listed above

To be eligible for the STEM 24-month extension based on a previous degree, you will need to provide proof of your previous degree, if that degree was not awarded by GW. This proof must include **(1)** Copy of transcripts from the previous STEM degree **(2)** letter written within the past 6-months, on letterhead, signed by the University Registrar from the school where you received your STEM degree, certifying - the degree level & major field of study, date earned and the current CIP code of the program of study **(3)** Written verification that you were not issued an OPT STEM extension based on the previously attained degree **(4)** Copy of your I-20 or DS-2019 if you had one at the time you received your previous degree **(5)** Copy of diploma (optional).

WHEN SHOULD I SUBMIT MY OPT STEM EXTENSION APPLICATION TO USCIS?

After submitting your request to the ISO via the ISOGateWay, you will receive an email notification when your new I-20 with the OPT-STEM extension recommendation is ready. Your complete application, including the updated I-20, must be <u>received</u> by USCIS within 60 days of I-20 issuance <u>and</u> before your current OPT authorization expires (see expiration date on your EAD card). For students applying for the additional 7-month extension, please refer to specific eligibility requirements for that extension.

WHAT DOCUMENTS SHOULD I SEND TO USCIS?

Your application to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must include the following documents:

- ☐ Personal check or money order for $410.
    - o *DO NOT send cash.* The check should be made out to "Department of Homeland Security". **NOTE**: the filing fee for I-765 applications will be $410 for ALL applications received on or after December 23rd, 2016.
- ☐ 2 passport style photos in a clear Ziploc bag
- ☐ Completed, dated, signed in ink, **original** I-765
- ☐ Form G-1145 (if you would like to receive electronic notifications regarding your case)
- ☐ Original employer letter supporting the 24- or 7-month extension and verification of employment
- ☐ Official degree transcripts and a copy of diploma if available
- ☐ Copy of the most recent Form I-20, signed by ISO Advisor and student, containing the 24- or additional 7-month STEM Extension recommendation
- ☐ Copies of all previously issued I-20s
- ☐ Copy of your passport
- ☐ Copy I-94 card front and back or printed copy from online accessible I-94
    - o In May 2013, CBP began issuing digital I-94 documents, if you have a digital I-94 you must include a printed copy
- ☐ Copy of F-1 visa
- ☐ Copy of your current EAD card front and back
- ☐ Copy of any previous EAD cards (if applicable)

WHERE SHOULD I MAIL MY OPT STEM EXTENSION APPLICATION?

If the address on your I-765 is in:	Mail your application to:
Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Northern Mariana Islands.	**USCIS Phoenix Lockbox** For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia	**USCIS Dallas Lockbox** For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266 For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067

SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

- Employment must be directly related to your course of study
- All employers must be E-Verify program participants
- Time spent outside the United States, if not employed by a U.S. employer, is counted towards the 150-day period of unemployment. To count as "employed" a student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student's employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week for each employer during the period of reported employment.

SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS ON OPT 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

Please note that students on post-completion OPT who have a STEM extension are subject to all reporting requirements of students participating in post-completion OPT as well as the following special reporting requirements:

- **6-Month Validations:** All F-1 students on post-completion OPT students who have a STEM extension approved by USCIS are required to send a "validation report" to the ISO every 6 months, and it must be received by the ISO within 15 days of the 6-, 12- & 18- month mark dates. You can do this by acessing ISOGateway and submitting a STEM Validation Report e-form.
- **12-/24-Month & Final Evaluations:** Students must submit self-evaluations to the ISO via the I-983 within 10 days of the 12th and 24th month marks of the STEM OPT extension; and/or within 10 days of the conclusion of employment with an employer, whichever comes first. You can do this by acessing ISOGateway and submitting a STEM 12 and 24-Month Evaluation e-form.
- **Updated I-983**: Students must submit an updated I-983 within 10 days of the change when there are material changes to the form I-983 including, but not limited to:

    - Any change of the employer's Employer Identification Number, (i.e., the company's Federal Tax ID number) resulting from a change in the employer's ownership or structure
    - Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked
    - Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity
    - Changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983

- **Employer Reporting:** Students who have STEM extensions must inform their OPT employers that federal regulations require the employer to notify the ISO within 5 days if employment should cease. OPT STEM employers can contact us at iso@gwu.edu, our e-mail address reserved for OPT communications.
- **General Reporting:** Students are required to report to ISO within 10 days, any change in the following:
    - Legal Name
    - Residential address
    - Employer name and address
    - Change in status of current employment, including loss of employment, change of status to H-1B, transfer to another F-1 program, or change employers.

OTHER REMINDERS

- You must submit an electronic copy of your EAD card to the ISO as soon as you receive it. (Send an email to iso@gwu.edu with your card attached to it).

International Services Office
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December 22, 2016