OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

WHAT IS THE 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION?

The Department of Homeland Security published a new final rule on OPT STEM extensions that allows for a 24-month STEM extension instead of the previous 17-month STEM extension. These recent changes were a result of the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers (“WashTech”) suing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) over their approval of OPT and OPT STEM extensions. This new final rule is effective as of May 10, 2016.

Applications for the 17-month STEM Extension will be processed by USCIS until May 10th 2016. After this date all pending 17-month extensions will be converted into 24-month extensions and all new applications must request the 24-month STEM extension. Students currently holding an approved 17-month STEM extension may be eligible to apply for the remaining 7 months of OPT STEM.

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

QUICK CHANGES: 17- VS 24- MONTH STEM INCLUDING ADDITIONAL 7-MONTH EXTENSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Now – current rule</th>
<th>May 10 – new rule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration and dates</td>
<td>• 17 month extension</td>
<td>• 24 month extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td>• School accreditation not required</td>
<td>• SEVP accredited schools required</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be based on current degree</td>
<td>• Can be based on prior STEM degree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• New STEM degree list</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repeat eligibility</td>
<td>• None – 1 per lifetime</td>
<td>• 2 per lifetime (second, only after higher degree)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Previous use of STEM Extension = 1 use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting requirements</td>
<td>• Yes, every 6 months</td>
<td>• i-983 training plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evaluations every 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reporting every 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. worker protections</td>
<td>• Non-specific</td>
<td>• No volunteer, no self-employ, no staffing agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Must be at least 20 hours per week for each employer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wages commensurate with similarly situated U.S. workers</td>
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<td>• STEM OPT student cannot replace a U.S. worker; site visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>• OPT 90 + STEM 30 (Additional) = 120 total days</td>
<td>• OPT 90 + STEM 60 (Additional) = 150 total days</td>
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</table>

WHAT DO I NEED TO SUBMIT TO THE ISO TO REQUEST A RECOMMENDATION FOR THE OPT STEM 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. To begin, log-on to ISOGateway and choose the application option under F-1 Practical Training \(\rightarrow\) OPT that best describes your request.
Applications processed by the ISO AFTER May 10th 2016 (this includes students applying for the additional 7-month STEM Extension/USCIS RFEs and the 24 month STEM Extension). You will need to upload the following:

- Completed I-765
- Employment offer letter:
  - 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.
- I-94 card
- Cover letter explaining how the employment is directly related to the major field of study
- Completed I-983 with all required signatures
  - If you are applying for the STEM extension with multiple employers please provide an additional I-983 for each employer.
- Copy of Diploma and official transcript (if based on previous degree from another qualifying institution)*

* 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).

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

WHEN SHOULD I SUBMIT MY OPT STEM EXTENSION APPLICATION?

Your application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of I-20 issuance and 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:

- $380 check or money order made out to “Department of Homeland Security”
- 2 passport style photos in a clear Ziploc bag
- Cover letter to USCIS – explaining your intent to apply for the 7-month STEM Extension, 24 month STEM extension or when responding to a RFE
- Completed, dated, signed in blue ink, original I-765
- Form G-1145 (if you would like to receive electronic notifications regarding your case)
- Original employer letter supporting the 17-/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 17-/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
  - 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)

*SPECIAL FILING INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS WHO MUST FILE FOR THE 7-MONTH STEM EXTENSION BEFORE MAY 23RD 2016:

- File Form I-765 with filing fee and supporting documents listed above without the Form I-20 7-month STEM extension recommendation. USCIS will send an RFE for the Form I-20. Students filing after May 23rd 2016 must have the Form I-20 with the recommendation.
- You must include a cover letter stating:
  - Due to new regulations, I must apply for the seven-month extension of my STEM OPT before SEVIS supports it. I will send a Form I-20 with the extension recommendation after USCIS requests it.

WHERE SHOULD I MAIL MY OPT STEM EXTENSION APPLICATION?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the address on your I-765 is in:</th>
<th>Mail your application to:</th>
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</table>
| 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 sending an email to [iso-opt@gwu.edu](mailto:iso-opt@gwu.edu). Please be sure to include:
  - Your full legal name & GWID
  - Your current residential or mailing address
  - Employer name and address
    - **if you are currently unemployed report none**
  - Date you began working for current employer

- **12- and 24-Month 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.

- **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-opt@gwu.edu](mailto:iso-opt@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-opt@gwu.edu](mailto:iso-opt@gwu.edu) with your card attached to it). Remember to save a copy of your application and all mail tracking information when sending your application to USCIS.