



General Information

A background image of the SJSU campus, showing various buildings, trees, and a clear sky. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

Optional Practical Training 24-Month STEM Extension Tutorial

International Student and Scholar Services

- Eligibility and Allowable Employment
- Application Process Overview
- Form I-983
- ISSS Request Process
- Preparing and Mailing Form I-765 STEM OPT Application
- Receiving USCIS Filing Receipt and EAD
- Application Issues (Delays or Denials)
- Travel Guidance and Grace Period Information
- Helpful Resources

Eligibility

- Have been granted and **currently be in valid period of OPT.**
- **Earned a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) from a SEVP-certified school.** See the list of eligible [STEM majors](#).
- May be eligible for a prior, qualifying STEM degree within 10 years of applying for STEM OPT extension.
- Work for an employer that is enrolled in **USCIS' E-Verify** employment verification program:
 - Employer must guarantee a minimum of 20 hours per week
 - Complete Form I-983, provide student with formal training and learning objectives
- **Submit Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization:**
 - Up to 90 days before current OPT employment authorization expires
 - Within 60 days of DSO recommendation for STEM OPT

Types of Allowable Employment

- Volunteer, unpaid positions, self-employment are NOT allowed.
- STEM-eligible employers must be listed in E-Verify and have E-Verify Company Identification Number or valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number.
- Student must be bona fide employee of the employer; have a bona fide “employer-employee relationship.” The employer may not be the students’ employer in name only.
- Employer that signs Form I-983 must be same entity the employs the student, provides the practical training experience.
- Student may participate in entrepreneurial ventures, as an employee. Cannot act as his/her own employer or be the signatory as the employer on Form I-983.

Temporary or Staffing Agencies, Third-Party Worksites

- Staffing and temporary agencies may employ students under STEM OPT program but only if agency provides the practical training experience to the student; maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with student.
- Training experience may take place at another site other than the employer's principal place of business as long as all training obligations are met.
- STEM OPT employer may not assign or delegate its training responsibilities to a non-employer third party (e.g. client/customer, employees of the client/customer, or contractors of the client/customer).
- Temporary or staffing agency cannot complete and sign Form I-983. Only E-Verify employer providing the actual training relevant to the student STEM degree filed is authorized to complete and sign Form I-983.

Form I-983

Completed and signed by student and E-Verify employer

Obtain STEM OPT recommendation from ISSS

Student submits STEM OPT I-20 request, completed Form I-983 to ISSS

Assemble, file Form I-765 STEM OPT extension with USCIS

Student responsible for mailing completed application to USCIS by deadline

STEM OPT extension is granted, new EAD is issued

Student responsible for providing copy of EAD to employer and ISSS

STEM OPT reporting requirement

Student must timely report throughout authorized STEM OPT period to maintain F-1 status

Form I-983 Training Plan

Form I-983 is a formal training plan for STEM OPT students to articulate learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to help you achieve the objectives.

- **Student** and their **employer** must **complete and sign Form I-983**. Then submit pages 1-4 to ISSS.
- **Review DHS' Study in the States [Form I-983 instructions](#)** for assistance to **complete the form**.
- Pages 3-4 contain details for the required training plan determined by the employer. Employer may use an existing training program for evaluation as long as the existing training plan meets DHS' requirements as outlined on Form I-983.
- Provide **handwritten signatures** on Form I-983; we do not accept electronic signatures.
- Make sure all responses are visible when printing Form I-983 or converting to e-file (pdf). You may submit additional attachments.

Before submitting your STEM OPT extension request to ISSS

- Update your personal and employment information prior to submitting your request:
 1. Report current address/email, telephone number. Via SEVP portal or ISSS employment update report (EUR)
 2. Report all current and previous OPT employment. Via SEVP portal or EUR
 3. Provide ISSS a copy of OPT EAD, if not already done.
- Submit a complete and signed [24-Month STEM OPT](#) request form to obtain a STEM OPT I-20.
- Submit a complete and signed Form I-983 Training Plan.
- Submit all paperwork in person, by mail, or email to international-office@sjsu.edu (single pdf is preferred). Allow 10-20 business days processing time.

Receive your STEM OPT I-20

- Indicate your **delivery method** for your I-20: pick-up from ISSS, U.S. postal service, or by Express Mail
- **Check your I-20**, notify ISSS if there are any errors:
 - Make sure there is ISSS advisor signature on page 1 of the I-20
 - You should sign and date the I-20.
- Check the 24-month STEM OPT requested start and end dates. Verify employer name for accuracy.
- Travel Endorsement, if needed. Travel signature is valid for 6-month period.
- **USCIS must receive your I-765 STEM OPT extension application within 60 days of the ISSUED date on page 1, not the travel signature date.**

Gather and Mail the I-765 STEM OPT application. Submit the required documents below. For more information refer to [USCIS Instructions for Form I-765](#) and **ISSS form instructions**.

- Two U.S. **passport photos**, taken within past 30 days. Write name and I-94 number on back of each photo, lightly in pencil.
- Form I-765 application fee of \$410**. Personal check, money order, cashier's check, or by credit card, payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security."
- [Form G-1145](#) (optional) for a text or email when USCIS accepts your application.
- Original [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#). Refer to USCIS form instructions for guidance. Also see ISSS' [Form I-765 Completion Guide](#).
- Copy of passport biographical page, F-1 visa stamp; printout of electronic I-94 record (or photocopy of both sides of paper Form I-94)
- Photocopy of **STEM OPT recommendation I-20** issued by ISSS within past 60 days.
- Copy of previous OPT and or previous STEM OPT I-20s.
- Copy of previous OPT EAD/STEM OPT EAD. Include copy of the approval notice (Form I-797A) if you have it.
- Proof of degree completion** that makes you eligible for STEM OPT extension: final academic transcript and/or copy of your diploma showing major and degree level

Application Deadline

Submit your Form I-765 STEM OPT application to USCIS:

- **Within 60 days** of the STEM OPT I-20 issue date, listed on page 1. The issue date is next to the advisor's signature.
- Before the **end date** of your current OPT work authorization expiration date listed on your EAD. Please account for mail or delivery time.
- To avoid processing delays or receiving a RFE (Request for Evidence), **review your application materials for completeness** before mailing your packet to USCIS.
- **Make a copy of your entire STEM OPT application for your records.**
- Request **tracking and/or delivery confirmation** of your I-765 STEM OPT application to the appropriate USCIS lockbox. For the mailing address, see [here](#).

While Form I-765 STEM OPT application is pending

- You will receive **Form I-797C Notice of Action or filing receipt** within 2 to 4 weeks after mailing your application to USCIS.
- Retain the filing receipt should you need to inquire about the status of your STEM OPT application. The receipt or case number is located in the upper left corner of the document, next to the receipt date.
- Verify the spelling of your name, date of birth, and address on I-765 receipt.
- If there is an error on the receipt contact USCIS Contact Center.
- If you lose the receipt it may be difficult to replace. If you did not receive the receipt notice in the mail, contact USCIS Contact Center to request a duplicate copy if possible.

Case Status Updates. ISSS recommends you sign up for an account at [USCIS Case Status Online](#), click on “Sign Up” button. This allows you to receive automatic updates to monitor your case.

Case Inquiries. You can submit an inquiry using [Case Inquiry](#) tool, e.g. if you do not receive your receipt or your application is pending for more than 90 days.

Address Changes. Update your address [online](#).

Request for Evidence (RFE)

- If information is missing from your application USCIS may send you a RFE notice by mail. Receiving an RFE does not mean your application has been rejected. Carefully read the RFE notice as to the additional documents you will be required to submit.
- Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application. Be sure to reply to the RFE with the required documentation by the given deadline.
- USCIS may return the entire application to you if, for example, you forget to sign your I-765, or check amount is incorrect, etc.
- Should your application be denied USCIS will inform you by mail. Please read the notice for the denial reason.
- Contact an ISSS advisor if you need assistance with interpreting an RFE or rejection notice. Be prepared to provide ISSS a copy of the RFE.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

- Average processing time at USCIS is 3 to 4 months. **Employment authorization is automatically extended for up to 180 days while STEM OPT application is pending.**
- After you received your EAD card, **review the card information:** check spelling of your name, DOB, authorization dates, etc.
- If an error is made by USCIS you may need to send back the EAD to be corrected.
- If error is made by you, depending on severity, you may need to re-file for a corrected EAD. Contact ISSS advisor if you need assistance.
- **Present your STEM OPT EAD to your employer as proof of legal work authorization.**
- Provide ISSS a photocopy of the STEM OPT EAD.
- If you receive an approval notice (Form I-797A) but not the EAD card (sent separately) please first check with your local post office for delivery confirmation/returned mail/undeliverable mail. Check with family members, housemates if he/she received your EAD card in the mail before contacting ISSS for assistance.

Travel while STEM OPT application is pending

- There is a higher risk associated with travel and return while STEM OPT application is pending, especially after the current OPT has expired. If there is a problem with your application you may not be able to respond to USCIS in a timely manner, delaying the processing of the STEM OPT EAD.
- If your STEM OPT application is denied while outside the U.S., your original OPT EAD has expired, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S.
- Avoid long absences from the U.S. during STEM OPT period. Time spent outside the U.S. may be counted as unemployment.
- Attempting to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your regular OPT/STEM OPT can be risky.
- If your F-1 visa has expired, obtaining a new F-1 visa at U.S. consulate or embassy can be risky.
- You must not enter in U.S. in another status; doing so may result in the loss of your STEM OPT eligibility.

Grace Period

- You have a 60-day grace period following end of STEM OPT work authorization. Those that have entered the 60-day grace period are not authorized to work.
- Those that are beneficiary of a filed and receipted cap-subject H-1B application may receive a cap-gap extension. For more information, see [USCIS cap-gap regulations](#).
 - The automatic gap-gap extension starts when F-1 status and work authorization expires and, unless terminated, ends on September 30, on October 1 the approved H-1B employment begins.
 - Extension of status will automatically terminate if student's H-1B petition is denied, withdrawn, revoked, rejected, not selected, or if change of status is denied or withdrawn even if H-1B petition is approved for consular processing. Student will have 60-day grace period from date the extension of status terminated or from the program end date, whichever later, to depart the U.S.

Helpful Links

Government

- [Study in the States STEM OPT Hub](#)
- [USCIS OPT for STEM Students](#)
- [STEM Designated Degree Program List](#)
- [Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT students](#)
- [Form I-983 instructions](#)
- [Employers and Form I-983](#)
- [Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#)
- [Instructions for Form I-765](#)
- [Direct Filing Addresses for Form I-765](#)

SJSU ISSS

- [ISSS Sample I-983](#)
- [ISSS Sample I-765 Completion Guide](#)
- [ISSS 24-month STEM OPT Request Form](#)

Contact Information

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