STEM OPT Workshop

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- STEM OPT Application Process
- STEM OPT Reporting Requirements

Fall 2021 (updated 11/1/2021)
24-Month STEM OPT Extension Eligibility

- You have been approved for the initial 12 months of POST-COMPLETION OPT.
- You have had fewer than 90 days of unemployment while on POST-COMPLETION OPT.
- Your primary major/field as indicated on your I-20 form is a STEM field on this list.
  - UMass eligible STEM majors listed here.
- Your employer is enrolled in the E-verify program and has an EIN (Employer Identification Number). (E-verify and EIN are not the same thing so you will need two different numbers).
- You have a job or a job offer of at least 20 hours per week that is PAID.
- Eligible for two STEM extensions in a lifetime, i.e. Bachelors and Masters, Masters and PhD, Bachelors and PhD.
- A previous STEM degree obtained from a U.S. institution can be the basis of a STEM OPT extension if current employment is in a STEM field.
When to Apply?

- USCIS recommends that you file for the STEM OPT extension as early as 90 days PRIOR TO YOUR CURRENT OPT END DATE. All applications must be received by USCIS before the ending date of your current EAD work card.
- Likewise, USCIS must receive your STEM OPT application no later than 60 days from the issuance of your most recent STEM OPT I-20 form.
Application Process

• See [IPO website](#) for more information on STEM OPT
  • STEM OPT I-20 Request E-Form and application process
  • I-983 Training Plan and common errors that lead to IPO processing delays
  • Reporting Requirements
  • I-20 Reprints while on STEM OPT
  • Changing your status

• IPO issues I-20 with new STEM OPT endorsement

• You submit complete packet to USCIS (do not submit the STEM OPT application without the STEM OPT I-20 from the IPO)
  • Approx. 3 to 4 months processing time
  • MAY CONTINUE EMPLOYMENT WITH NO STEM EAD FOR 180 DAYS
No STEM OPT Receipt yet? No Problem!

• If your OPT is expiring soon and you have applied to STEM OPT, please note that current F-1 regulations state that STEM OPT only has to be **timely filed** in order to continue working. F-1 regulations *do not require* a USCIS receipt or that the case be in pending status.

• USCIS states that the expired OPT EAD *plus* your updated I-20 with STEM OPT endorsement from the IPO should be sufficient in order to update your employer’s I-9 work authorization paperwork.

• The IPO recommends that you discuss this with your employer’s Human Resources office or other hiring authority if your initial 12-month OPT is expiring soon.
Two Submission Options

• Mail (Recommended Method at this time)

• Online (Not recommended at this time since it is a new and unknown process with USCIS) but this is your choice.
  • Basic information about applying online can be found here. The IPO cannot provide assistance with the online application. Technical issues should be resolved with USCIS.
  • Differences with online submission: I-765 done online, payment online, documents uploaded, mailing time eliminated

• How you choose to submit online, this results in a slightly different application process with USCIS.

• Remember—DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR STEM OPT APPLICATION TO USCIS UNTIL YOU HAVE THE STEM OPT I-20 FROM THE IPO
Documents to send to USCIS

- You do NOT need to mail in the I-983 to USCIS. You should retain a copy of your I-983 for your records.
- I-765 Form (if mailing: signed with a real (not digital) signature & dated by you). If applying online, the I-765 is completed within the USCIS portal.
- Two (2) passport-style photos
- Filing Fee: Personal check/money order to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” for the correct fee (see next slide) (if mailing). Payment will be by credit/debit card if applying online.
- Copy of your passport photo ID page (it’s ok if the passport is expired)
- Copies of your current F-1 visa stamp in your passport (it’s ok if the visa is expired)
- New STEM OPT I-20 provided by the IPO and signed by you on page 1
- Copy of the front and back of your OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- A copy of your STEM degree: send official transcript that lists your degree level, major, and date of completion to USCIS
- Most recent I-94 record
- Form G-1145 is optional (but highly recommended if mailing): USCIS will e-mail and/or text you with updates regarding your STEM OPT application if you include this form. Put this form on the top of your application.
**Important Note about Changing Fees and I-765s**

Wrong fee or wrong I-765 = rejected application = delays in processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Postmark* Date</th>
<th>Form Edition Used**</th>
<th>Base I-765 Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On or after August 25, 2020</td>
<td>Must use 8/25/2020 edition</td>
<td>$410</td>
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*postmarked means the day the mail carrier stamps your package

**form edition can be found in lower left-hand corner of the I-765
Mailing to USCIS

There is now one central location to mail STEM OPT applications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USCIS Chicago Lockbox</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. Postal Service (USPS):</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| USCIS  
PO Box 805373  
Chicago, IL 60680 |
| **FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:** |
| USCIS  
Attn: I-765 C03  
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603-5517 |

*If you mail your application to the wrong lockbox, USCIS will transfer your application to the correct location. There will likely be a delay in your receipt processing.*
USCIS PROCESSING TIMES

Approximately 3 to 4 months (90-120 days)

Monitor your pending case here:

https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do
STEM OPT Reporting Requirements

- Any residential address, email address, or phone number changes, please update SPIRE.
- From the start date of your STEM OPT you will need to verify your employer and residential information every 6 months. i.e. 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months with the IPO.
- You will also need to update the IPO with material employment changes on the I-983

- Review the STEM OPT Reporting Requirements online for more detailed information

The Department of Homeland Security has indicated that failure to provide any of the reporting requirements mentioned above can result in the automatic termination of your SEVIS immigration record and corresponding F-1 immigration status. The IPO will not take responsibility for a student’s failure to update information accordingly and to adhere to these considerable STEM OPT reporting requirements.
Cap Gap Provision (STEM OPT and H-1B)

- STEM OPT work authorization will be automatically extended until September 30 for an F-1 student who has a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1.
- Student must have employment authorization through STEM OPT beyond April 1.
- The “Cap-Gap” extension automatically terminates upon rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student’s behalf.
- Request a Cap-Gap I-20 using the [OPT/STEM OPT Reprint E-Form](#).

CONTACT THE IPO TO VERIFY THIS ELIGIBILITY
QUESTIONS? Please contact your IPO advisor listed here: [https://www.umass.edu/ipo/iss/staff](https://www.umass.edu/ipo/iss/staff)