Office of Immigration
Meisler Hall 2200 • 390 Alumni Circle
Mobile, AL 36688-0002
Phone: 251.460.6050
immigration@southalabama.edu

Optional Practical Training - STEM Extension

F-1 students in post-completion Optional Practical Training who earned a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) field as listed on the I-20 and the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program list and who work for an E-Verify employer are able to apply for a 24-month extension of the post-completion OPT.

Eligibility

- Be in a period of approved post-completion OPT status and properly maintaining F-1 status
- Current OPT must be based on a degree in one of the STEM designated fields (see link above)
- STEM Extension may be based on a previously obtained degree. Previous degree must be from an accredited, U.S. - based institution, and the degree must have been earned within the past 10 years.
- Possess a valid passport
- Work at least 20 hours per week for an employer who is registered in the E-Verify program and in a job directly related to the student's major field of study
- Employer must agree to reporting requirements
- Student must complete a Form I-983 Training with their employer and submit with STEM OPT Extension application

When to Apply

STEM OPT petitions may be submitted **up to 90 days prior** to the end date on the current EAD card and **must be received by the USCIS Service Center prior to the current EAD end date and no later than 60 days after DSO recommendation in SEVIS**.

Employment Dates

Authorization begins the day after the first period of initial OPT and ends 24 months later. A student who submits the petition on time to USCIS may continue to work for 180 days beyond the expiration of the current OPT while the STEM extension is pending (**274a.12(b)(6)(iv)**). The work must be for an employer enrolled in E-Verify.

Unemployment Limit

Post-completion OPT is limited to 90 days of unemployment beginning with the start date of the OPT card. Students with a STEM OPT Extension are granted an additional 60 days allowance for time spent unemployed. Students granted a 24-month extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during the total 36-month OPT period (this includes any unemployment time accrued during the initial 12-month OPT). Unemployment is considered to be every day (including weekends and time spent out of the country).

Cancellation of Optional Practical Training

If one decides to cancel OPT, it is sometimes possible to do so. Once the EAD has been processed by USCIS, OPT **cannot** be cancelled if the start date on the EAD Card has already passed. To cancel OPT please contact the Immigration Coordinator who assisted in filing your application.

Student Reporting Responsibilities while on STEM OPT Extension

Students with STEM OPT have two timelines for reporting responsibilities. Information should be sent to immigration@southalabama.edu.

1. Changes to the following must be reported within **10 days** of the occurrence:
   - Any change in legal name (to be accompanied by new passport)
   - Residential address
   - Name and address of their employer
   - Any change to the name and address of the employer
   - Any interruption, loss, addition, or change of such employment
2. **Every 6 months** (counted from the start date of the STEM OPT), the student must re-verify the name and address of their employer as well as residential address information and telephone number. This **must** happen even if there hasn't been any change to the data from the last report.

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3. **12-Month and 24-Month Evaluations:** The student must also complete and submit a self-evaluation using the I-983, signed by the employer and submitted to the Office of Immigration at months 12 and 24 of the STEM Employment Period.

*Students in STEM OPT Extension may use the SEVP Portal to update their personal information. Employer and Form I-983 must still be submitted to the Office of Immigration for SEVIS and I-20 update.

Employer Responsibilities

1. Employer must be enrolled in the E-Verify program.
2. Employer must complete a Form I-983 Training Plan with the student.
   - Explain how training is related to the field of study
   - State training goals and means of supervision/evaluation
   - State duties, hours, compensation, and verify that the compensation is commensurate with similarly employed U.S. workers
   - Sign off on a self-evaluation by the student at two times (12th month and 24th month/end of program)
   - Any substantial change in employment duties will require and updated I-983
3. Employer must provide practical training experience to the student at its own place of business and have a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student. Employers may not assign or delegate training responsibilities to a third party client or customer.
4. Employers must agree to notify the Designated School Official using immigration@southalabama.edu if the employee is terminated or departs from employment prior to the end date on the STEM OPT Extension EAD within 48 hours of the occurrence.

Change of Employer While on STEM OPT Extension

A student may change/add employers at any given time as long as:

- The new employer is enrolled in the E-Verify program
- Employer must complete a new I-983 Training Plan with the student.

*Any change or addition of employer/employment must be reported to the Office of Immigration at USA. USCIS and SEVP advise against changing employers while the I-765 for STEM Extension is pending, since the I-765 petition names a specific employer as your sponsor.

The Office of Immigration advises students to not change employers while the STEM OPT petition is pending. Changing employers while your petition is pending is likely to result in a denial of your petition from USCIS.

Travel during STEM Optional Practical Training

Re-entry to the U.S. requires that F-1 students present the following documents:

- SEVIS Form I-20 endorsed for travel by DSO within the last six months
- OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- Valid F-1 visa
- Confirmation of employment from employer

Departure from the U.S. after Optional Practical Training

An F-1 student in OPT is allowed 60-day grace period after the authorization of employment ceases to change status, acquire an I-20 for a new academic program, transfer to another institution, or depart the United States.

Premium Processing

USCIS also now allows OPT and STEM OPT petitions to be premium processed. This service guarantees a response regarding your petition within 30 days. Premium Processing of an OPT/STEM OPT petition is an additional fee of $1,780

Additional STEM OPT information from the Department of Homeland Security can be found at: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub.

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STEM OPT Extension Student Application Form

Family Name: _____ First Name: _____

Jag ID #: _____ Degree Level: _____

Major: _____ Graduation Date: _____

SEVIS ID: **N**_____

Is your STEM OPT Extension based on: ☐ Current Degree ***or*** ☐ Previous Degree?

Previous STEM OPT Authorization: ☐ Yes - Level _____ ☐ No

Current EAD start date: _____ End date: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

When correspondence arrives concerning my OPT please contact me at:

- **Phone _____**
- **Permanent Email _____**
  (Check this email often for updates!)

Required Documents to Accompany Application:

- Completed STEM Student Application Form and STEM OPT Agreement form
- Completed Form I-765 **use black ink** (attached or found at www.uscis.gov under Forms). For U.S. Mailing Address, it is strongly encouraged you use the Immigration Office as the mailing address. On question 27, use code (c)(3)(C) for a STEM extension and complete question 28. List current OPT dates and level on Part 6. If you have previous SEVIS IDs, CPT Authorization, or OPT authorization at previous levels use Part 6 on page 7 to list this information.
- Completed Form I-983
- Employer Information
- Job offer letter with company's E-Verify number listed
- Copy of diploma and/or transcripts
- Copy of current EAD card (front and back)
- Photocopies of all I-20s (pages 1 & 2 only), passport, visa, and latest I-94 arrival page or card
- Two passport-style photos no older than 30 days

The Office of Immigration will review the materials for completion and produce an I-20 with the OPT recommendation. You will be sent an email requesting that you come to sign the new I-20. You will then submit your petition online to USCIS using your myuscis online portal. The petition must be received by the USCIS Processing Center within 30 days of the date the I-20 was produced and no later than 11:59pm on the last day of your OPT authorized employment end date.

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STEM OPT Agreement

I understand that I am responsible for the following should USCIS approve my STEM OPT Extension petition:

- Report to the Office of Immigration within 10 days of a change in:
  - My residential address
  - Name and address of my employer
  - Change to my employment status
- Report to the Office of Immigration the name and address of my employer every 6 months, even if there is no change to this information
- Pursue work opportunities with employers enrolled in E-Verify on the Form I-983 on file at Office of Immigration that are directly related to the program listed on my I-20
- Be aware of and not exceeding the unemployment limits (150 days, to include initial post-completion OPT)
- Keep my passport valid six months into the future
- Submit the required annual self-evaluation on Form I-983 to the Office of Immigration
- Request a signature on I-20 from Office of Immigration for out of country travel
- Comply with U.S. tax and Department of Labor laws

I understand that:

- The Office of Immigration advises students to not change employers while the STEM OPT petition is pending. Changing employers while your petition is pending is likely to result in a denial of your petition from USCIS.
- On-campus student employment positions are not appropriate while in post-completion OPT/STEM OPT Extension status
- The issuance of a new I-20 for transfer to a new school or matriculation to a new program of study will invalidate the OPT authorization when the SEVIS record for the new I-20 is changed to active status
- I have 60 days beyond the expiration of my OPT to either depart the U.S., transfer to a new school, have an I-20 issued for a new program, or apply for a change to another immigration classification
- I am responsible for compiling and mailing my petition to USCIS. The addition or exclusion of documents may negatively impact the adjudication of my petition.
- I authorize the Office of Immigration to open mail addressed to me that is delivered to the office.

Release: By signature hereto, I, for myself, my heirs, and my personal representatives, do hereby release and forever discharge the University, its trustees, officers, agents, and employees, including, but not limited to, the Office of Immigration, from any and all claims, demands, and actions or causes of action on account of or resulting from the University's assistance or guidance regarding my post-completion OPT petition.

Disclaimer: The Office of Immigration is able to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this packet, does not constitute legal advice. We make absolutely no guarantees or assurances with respect to the final outcome of your petition. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, the USCIS may change its interpretation of the above-mentioned immigration policies, procedures, regulations, and eligibility requirements for benefits at any time. This office will do its best to provide you with the most current guidance, but please be mindful that each case is fact-specific. It is advised that you contact an experienced immigration attorney if you have questions regarding your situation.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print name: _____

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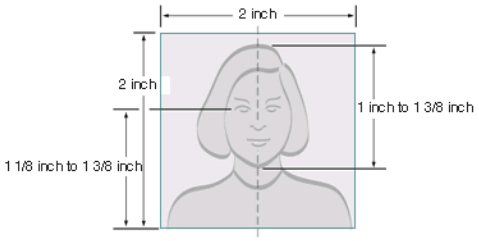
Employer Data (Required for all STEM OPT Extensions)

Employer Name:	
Employer Address:	
Your Job Title:	Full-time or Part-time:
Employer EIN:	Company E-Verify #:
Supervisor's Name:	
Supervisor Telephone:	Supervisor Email:
Employment Start Date:	
Explain how work is related to field of study:	

Photo Composition Template

- Make sure the photo presents the full head from the top of the hair to the bottom of the chin
- Center the head with the frame
- The person in the photo should have a neutral expression and be facing the camera

Paper Photo Head Size Template



- Photo must be 2 inches by 2 inches
- The height of the head (top of hair to bottom of chin) should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches (25 mm - 35 mm)
- Make sure the eye height is between 1 1/8 inches to 1 3/8 inches (28 mm – 35 mm) from the bottom of the photo

Well Composed Photo Composition Examples




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ACTION	WHEN	STUDENT	EMPLOYER	DSO
Recommend STEM OPT for eligible students	No more than 60 days before student applies to USCIS for authorization			✓
Apply for STEM OPT	Before regular OPT ends	✓		
Complete and certify the Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students"	Before recommendation of extension for student	✓	✓	
Determine completeness and proper execution by student and employer of student's Form I-983, including confirmation that the form: • Explains how training is directly related to the qualifying STEM degree • Identifies goals for student, including knowledge, skills, techniques, and explains how the goals will be achieved • Describes the evaluation process for student • Describes methods of oversight and supervision generally applicable to students	Before recommendation of extension for student			✓
Certify student's degree, as shown in SEVIS or on official transcripts, is of a proper educational level and has a degree code included on the current STEM list	Before recommendation of extension for student			✓
Update student's SEVIS record with DSO recommendation	No more than 60 days before student applies to USCIS for employment authorization			✓
Keep and store the Form I-983 and self-evaluations in the student's record	Within 30 days of submission			✓
Validate information in student's SEVIS record, and report information to DSO within 10 days of the reporting date	Every 6 months	✓		
Complete and sign student's self-evaluation	Annually	✓	✓	
Report to student's DSO any material changes to or deviations from an existing Form I-983	As soon as possible	✓	✓	
Notify DSO and submit new Form I-983 upon change of employer or start of a new practical training opportunity	Within 10 days	✓		
Report a change of student's legal name, residential or mailing address, employer name or address, and/or loss of employment to DSO	Within 10 days	✓		
Update student's record to reflect a change of name or address, or an interruption of employment	Immediately after student reports a change			✓
Report the termination of student's practical training to DSO	Within 5 business days		✓	
Report student's departure (i.e., having the knowledge of student leaving the training opportunity or when student fails to report for the training for five consecutive business days)	Within 5 business days of knowing		✓	
Report noncompliance to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security	As soon as possible	✓	✓	✓

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AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE SEVP PORTAL

The SEVP Portal is a tool that allows F-1 and M-1 international students participating in post-completion practical training to report certain information to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP).

By allowing students to share this information directly with SEVP, the portal enhances data integrity, holds students accountable for meeting regulatory reporting requirements and lessens the burden for some designated school officials (DSOs).

Who Can Use the SEVP Portal?

The SEVP Portal can be used by the following groups of F-1 and M-1 international students:

- F-1 international students participating in post-completion optional practical training (OPT).
- F-1 international students participating in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) OPT extension.
- M-1 international students participating in practical training.

These students share certain information directly with SEVP through the portal rather than relying on their DSO to make updates. However, the portal does not eliminate the need for students to actively communicate with their DSO.

How Does the SEVP Portal Work?

To gain access to the SEVP Portal, students must have a valid email address in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Students should confirm with their DSO that their email address is up to date in SEVIS. SEVP will email this address with information about creating a portal account.

Although the portal shares information with SEVIS, it does not give students direct access to the system. Only DSOs have direct access to SEVIS.

What Information Can Students Report?

Using the SEVP Portal, F-1 and M-1 students completing practical training can update their:

- Physical home address.
- Mailing address.
- Telephone numbers.
- Employment information (with some exceptions).*

The portal also allows students to monitor their employment authorization.

**Note: F-1 students participating in STEM OPT are unable to add a new employer or to change the start date with their employer in the SEVP Portal due to the Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students," requirement.*

Getting Started

Create Your SEVP Portal Account

Students should complete the following steps to create an SEVP Portal account:

STEP 1: Students receive an account creation email from the SEVP Portal and click the link included in the email to open the registration page.

STEP 2: Students enter their SEVIS identification (ID) number, found in the upper left-hand corner of their Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," on the initial registration page.

STEP 3: Students create and submit a password for their SEVP Portal account.

Students can only use the link from their account creation email one time. If they are unable to start the registration process using the link provided, they should ask their DSO to have the account creation email sent again.

For more information about the SEVP Portal and how to use it, visit the SEVP Portal Help section on Study in the States.

SEVP