

F-1 STEM Optional Practical Training (STEM OPT) Application Process

F-1 students with U.S. degrees in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) may be eligible for a 24 month extension of their post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) work permission described at 8 CFR 214.2 (f). Under 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(2), a STEM field of study is a field of study “included in the Department of Education’s Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomy within the two-digit series containing engineering, biological sciences, mathematics, and physical sciences, or a related field. In general, related fields will include fields involving research, innovation, or development of new technologies using engineering, mathematics, computer science, or natural sciences (including physical, biological, and agricultural sciences).”

All F-1 STEM OPT extension applications may not be received by U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) any earlier than 90 days before the current post completion F-1 OPT expires but must be received by USCIS before the current post completion OPT expires. For this reason, before making any plans to apply for F-1 STEM OPT, OIA recommends F-1 students speak with their International Visitor Advisor regarding the best time to file.

Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for the 24-month extension, the F-1 student must:

- 1) Be in valid F-1 OPT status;
- 2) Have earned a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a STEM field approved by the DHS Designated Program List
- 3) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer for a paid job directly related to the F-1 STEM OPT major field of study
- 4) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer who participates in the E-Verify program;
- 5) Provide completed [Form I-983 Training Plan](#);
- 6) Have been recommended for F-1 STEM OPT by the Designated School Official; and,
- 7) Submit the Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization and required documents to USCIS before the expiration of current F-1 OPT status.

NOTE: Some F-1 students may be eligible for F-1 STEM OPT based on a previous degree. Please consult with your International Visitor Advisor to determine if you may be eligible for this benefit.

CAUTION: Not all employers will sign the Form I-983 Training Plan for every position (ie UTHealth and MDACC will only sign Form I-983 for postdoctoral fellows).

How to Apply

Online Application

Please note that the review process requires a minimum of 15 business days. You should plan accordingly. Your STEM OPT request will not be recommended on the day you submit your application to OIA.

Step 1: Submit Complete STEM OPT Request form to OIA

The following documents may be submitted via email to utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu, dropped off at the front desk, or in the drop box of the Office of International Affairs (OIA) in order to determine eligibility for STEM OPT. Once submitted OIA has 15 business days to process your request.

- Completed and signed STEM OPT Request Form;
- Signed and Completed Pages 1-4 of [Form I-983 Training Plan](#)
- Check or money order in the amount of \$200 made payable to The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. **Original payment must be mailed, hand delivered to the front desk, or placed in OIA drop box prior to issuance of STEM OPT I-20. Payments may not be scanned.**
- Legible copy of all valid passport I.D. page(s) to include expiration date and renewal page, if applicable;

- Legible copy of electronic I-94 which can be obtained at www.cbp.gov/i94. If you have an I-94 card, please submit a legible copy of the front and back of the card;
- Legible copy of all previously issued Employment Authorization Document(s) (EAD) (front and back), if applicable.

Step 2: International Visitor Advisor (IVA) Reviews STEM OPT Documentation

- 1) Upon receipt of the complete requested application, your IVA will review all information to determine eligibility;
- o If the application is not complete, your IVA will contact you by email or phone so that you can provide the missing documentation.
- 2) If your IVA has determined that you are eligible for the STEM OPT recommendation, IVA will contact student to schedule an appointment to recommend STEM OPT;
- 3) During the appointment, the student's program end date will be shortened in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to reflect a new expected completion of studies;
- 4) IVA will issue a new Form I-20 to the student with the STEM OPT recommendation.

Step 3: Student files I-765 Online

- 1) Using form I-20, student will file USCIS form online, which can all be found on the [Forms Available to File Online](#) page. To file this form online, students must first create a USCIS online account at myaccount.uscis.gov.

Paper Based Application

Step 1: Prepare & complete application for 24-month F-1 STEM OPT recommendation:

- Complete and sign [STEM OPT Extension Request Form](#);
- Signed [F-1 STEM OPT Reporting Obligations](#) form
- Complete and sign [Form I-983 Training Plan](#)
- Complete and sign [Form G-1145](#) E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance;
- Complete and sign [Form I-765](#) Application for Employment Authorization;
 - Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper code of (c)(3)(C) on Question 20;
 - Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper degree on Question 21;
 - o Example "Biomedical Sciences" where indicated.
 - o Student must also indicate employer name as listed in E-Verify as well as the E-Verify Client Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number for the employer with whom the student is seeking the 24-month STEM OPT extension;
- Make 2 legible copies of **all** previously issued Forms I-20's;
- Make 2 legible copy of valid passport biographic data page to include expiration date and renewal page (if applicable);
- Make 2 legible copy of electronic Form I-94 (www.cbp.gov/i94) or if you received a paper I-94 card, make copies of the front and back of the paper I-94;
- Make 2 legible copies of all U.S. visa stamps (except for Canadian citizens);
- Make 2 legible front & back copies of all previously issued Employment Authorization Documents (EAD);
- Make 2 legible copies of your diploma or transcripts that confirm degree awarded and the field of study;
- 2 passport style photos meeting specifications listed below:
 - Both photos must be identical color photographs of yourself;
 - Both photos must be taken within 30 days of filing your application;
 - Both photos must have a white to off-white background, be printed on thin paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and unretouched;
 - Both passport-style photos must be 2 inches by 2 inches;
 - Both photos must be in color with full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background;
 - Head height should measure 1 in. to 1 3/8 of an inch from top to bottom of chin, and eye height is between 1 1/8 of an in. to 1 3/8 of an in. from bottom of photo. Your head must be bare unless you are wearing headwear as required by a religious order of which you are a member;
 - Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name, I-94 number and if applicable, Alien Receipt Number on the back of the photos;
- \$200** Administrative filing fee in the form of a personal check, money order, or cashier's check payable in U.S. dollars to **UTHealth**;
- Filing fee** in the form of a personal check, money order, or cashier's check made payable in U.S. dollars to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

Please submit one-sided copies and do not include staples in any documents. Any staples and double-sided copies submitted, could result in your application being denied by USCIS.

Step 2: Submit Completed F-1 STEM OPT Application

- 1) Mail, hand deliver to the front desk, or place in OIA drop box, the completed F-1 STEM OPT application, fees, and, all required documents to the following address:

Office of International Affairs

7000 Fannin, Suite 130
Houston, TX 77030
713/500-3176

**Please note that the review process requires a minimum of 15 business days. You should plan accordingly.
Your STEM OPT request will not be recommended on the day you submit your application to OIA.**

Step 3: International Visitor Advisor's (IVA) Processing of F-1 STEM OPT Application

- 1) Upon receipt of the F-1 STEM OPT application, fees, and all required documents, IVA will review complete application to determine eligibility to recommend F-1 STEM OPT;
 - a. Should there be any outstanding fees or documents, IVA will contact student by email or telephone advising of required documentation outstanding;
 - b. Should no documents be outstanding, IVA will move forward with reviewing packet and if it meets criterion for recommendation, IVA will recommend F-1 STEM OPT
- 2) If the student is in the Houston Metropolitan area and is able to meet with IVA, the IVA will send the student an electronic appointment invitation and instructions for providing fed ex shipping label.
 - a. At the time of appointment, IVA will request student to review the new Form I-20 for accuracy and if accurate will have student sign new Form I-20;
 - b. IVA will mail F-1 STEM OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS by fed ex and will email student once application is mailed.
- 3) If student is **not** in the Houston Metropolitan area **or is not** available to meet in person, IVA will
 - a. Send student a scan copy of new Form I-20 and will send the student instructions for providing fed ex shipping label.
 - b. Upon receipt of scanned Form I-20, student should print, sign, date, and return signed copy of Form I-20 by email attachment to IVA along with a fed ex shipping label;
 - c. Once IVA receives scanned copy of signed Form I-20 and fed ex shipping label, IVA will mail F-1 STEM OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS by fed ex and will email student once application is mailed.

NOTE:

- 1) F-1 STEM OPT extension application may not be filed with USCIS any earlier than 90 days before the current post completion F-1 OPT expires
 - 2) F-1 STEM OPT extension application must be received at USCIS within 30 days of the date IVA submitted the recommendation in SEVIS
 - 3) F-1 STEM OPT extension application must be received by USCIS before the current post completion OPT expires
 - 4) F-1 STEM OPT student is eligible to work up to 180 days after the expiration of the current OPT while the extension application is pending with USCIS.
- Students whose OPT has expired but have a request for the 24-month F-1 STEM OPT extension pending with USCIS are strongly **discouraged from traveling outside the U.S.** until the extension application is approved and the student receives a new EAD Card. Please discuss the ramifications of traveling abroad while your extension is pending with your IVA.

F-1 STEM OPT Extension Request Form

Section I: Student Information		
LAST/FAMILY NAME:		First/Given Name:
U.S. Residential Address:		
City:	State:	Zip Code:
Telephone Number:	Alternate Number:	
Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY):	E-mail Address:	
Current Job Title:		
Current OPT State Date (MM/DD/YYYY):		Current OPT End Date (MM/DD/YYYY):
Are you applying for STEM OPT based on your most recently earned degree at UTHealth?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you applying for STEM OPT based on a previous degree?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Completed by Student – STEM OPT Filing Type		
<input type="checkbox"/> Online via USCIS <input type="checkbox"/> Paper Based (Package sent to USCIS via USPS Mail or Courier)		
Section II: Current Employer Information		
Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Employer Identification Number (EIN):		
Please contact your Supervisor or the Human Resources office for this information. Also, please note that the EIN is different from the E-Verify number.		
Employer's Name as listed in E-Verify:		
Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number and/or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number:		
Address:		
City:	State:	Zip Code:
Supervisors Name:	Supervisors Title:	
Phone Number:	Email Address:	
I have been/will be employed at the location above effective (Employment Begin Date (MM/DD/YYYY):		

I certify under penalty of perjury that the information provided above is true and correct.

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____