

OPT STEM allows F-1 students to work an additional 24-months after the completion of initial Post-Completion OPT. Employment should directly relate to field of study and correspond with education level. **A job offer is needed to apply.** ISSS offers an OPT STEM workshop online. Please visit https://iss.illinois.edu/students/employment/f1_optext.html.

Please note: This packet was updated on 5/6/2020 and is subject to change based on federal regulation updates.

Eligibility Check:

- ✓ Is your field of study STEM eligible? (Check STEM designated degree list online)
- ✓ Have you been approved for and are you currently on Post-Completion OPT?
- ✓ Is your employer a part of the E-Verify program?
- ✓ Are you in valid F-1 status and hold a valid passport? (Your passport **MUST** always be valid while you are in the U.S.)

IMPORTANT OPT STEM Application Deadlines and Status Information:

- Application **MUST** be received by USCIS **within 60 days** of your OPT STEM I-20 issue date or your application will be denied.
- Apply no sooner than **90 days before** the end date of your Post-Completion OPT. You cannot apply after you have passed your Post-Completion OPT end date.
- OPT STEM begins the day after the current Post-Completion OPT end date
- You must complete an I-983 with your employer and submit it with your STEM I-20 request in iSTART.
- Application processing time is **approx. 90-120 days**. There is no formal expedited service.
- **You may continue to work up to 180 days on OPT STEM while your application is being adjudicated as long as you have a timely filed application.**
- You will be given an additional 60 days of unemployment when you start OPT STEM. This can be added to the remaining unemployment time from Post-Completion OPT (90 days or less)
- You **MUST report all OPT employment** via the iSTART system. USCIS can automatically terminate your record for failure to report or exceeding unemployment time.
- **OPT STEM I-20s will not be issued until the ISSS SEVIS Management Fee is paid via iSTART OPT STEM e-form.**

Request OPT STEM I-20 via iSTART: (<https://sunapsis.illinois.edu>)

Under "F-1 Student Services" submit "**OPT STEM Extension 3.6.2**" e-form → Pay ISSS SEVIS Management Fee → ISSS processes I-20 in five business days → Pick up I-20 at ISSS Front Desk → Mail application within 60 days of the new I-20 issue date. Include all other application materials listed below.

Tips for Completing Form I-983

(Complete instructions and PDF available at <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview>):

- **Leave DSO (Designated School Official) section blank.** ISSS does not assign a DSO until after we have received your request.
- **CIP code:** 6 digit code listed beside your major on your I-20
- **SEVIS School Code:** Refer to the SCHOOL CODE section on your I-20.
- **University Recommending STEM:** You may put 'University of Illinois – UIUC'. If you earned the STEM eligible degree from a previous institution, list it under the 'Name of School Where STEM degree was earned'.
- **NAICS code:** The code can be found on the [Census website](https://www.census.gov/naics/). Please note the NAICS code for UIUC or any institute of higher education in the US is 611310.
- **Evaluation on Student Progress:** This section should **not** be completed at this time as the self-evaluations are completed AFTER the STEM extension has been granted.
- **Updated Form I-983 Training Plan.** A new [Form I-983 Training Plan](#) must be completed and submitted to the DSO through the iSTART system within 10 days of:
 - Beginning a new practical training opportunity with a new employer during the 24-month extension
 - Any time there is a "[material change](#)" in the terms and conditions of the original I-983.

***Please make sure all of the necessary signatures are present from both you and your employer**

Application materials to mail to USCIS:

1. Personal Check or money order for **\$410.00**, payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security”.
2. Two passport-sized photographs taken within the past **30 days**. Lightly write your name and SEVIS ID on the back. Place photos in a clear Ziploc-type bag.
3. Photocopy of pages 1&2 of your **new I-20 with OPT STEM recommendation**.
4. Form I-765 (See instructions on the back).
5. Photocopy of passport identity **AND** visa page (clearly displaying facial features), including the expiration date.
6. Print your I-94 electronic admission record from www.cbp.gov/i94. If you received an I-94 card on your last entry, photocopy the front and back of your I-94 card.
7. Photocopies of any previous employment authorization documents (EAD cards) if applicable.
8. STEM Extension applicants must provide a copy of the diploma or transcripts showing eligible degree level and program of study; graduate students who have completed all degree requirements except for thesis or dissertation can submit a letter from their program or graduate school stating they have completed all requirements except thesis/project to graduate.* **Optional G-1145 form if you want to receive e-mail or text message updates about your case (available on uscis.gov).**

NOTE: Your requested OPT STEM period will be reflected on page two of your OPT STEM I-20. Please check your I-20 for accuracy *BEFORE* mailing your OPT STEM application to USCIS. Make photocopies or take pictures of all documents you send to USCIS to keep for your records.

USCIS Mailing Address:

For U.S Postal Service (USPS):

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Chicago Lockbox
P.O. Box 805373
Chicago, IL 60680

For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Attn:
I-765 C03
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor (Box 805373)
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

- For USPS: use “**Certified Mail with a Return Receipt**” to confirm application has been delivered.
- **Note: Ensure you send your application to the correct lockbox by referring to the USCIS Direct Filing Addresses for form I-765 page before sending: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses>**
- Your Notice of Action (I-797) will be mailed to you by USCIS 2-4 weeks after your application is received. The receipt number listed can be used to check your case status on www.uscis.gov. **Keep your Notice of Action for your records.**

Maintaining F-1 status while on OPT STEM:

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS (through the iSTART system):

- Submit ‘**OPT: Employer Information Update**’ e-form **within 10 days** of employment (including reporting unemployment). This e-form will only be available after your OPT start date. You will receive a new I-20 with employer information listed.
 - Remember to upload a copy of I-983 training plan for each new employer
- Submit address updates whenever you move within the U.S. Update UI-Integrate with your non-UIUC e-mail address.
- Check with ISSS prior to international travel on OPT as travel endorsements need renewing every six months.
- Report STEM participation at 6/12/18/24 months
 - 12-month reporting will also require submission of Annual Evaluation
- Submit Final Evaluation when employment ends during STEM period and/or at 24-month reporting mark

NOTE: Beneficiaries of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1st will automatically have OPT work authorization extended to September 30th through the ‘**cap-gap**’ extension. You are responsible for reporting this information to ISSS so we can ensure your SEVIS record reflects the extension. Please send a copy of your approval notice to iss@illinois.edu with “F-1 OPT with COS” as the subject line. The extension will automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial or revocation of the H-1B petition.

If you have additional questions about maintaining your status while on OPT STEM, please contact ISSS.



Instructions provided are for reference only, since this is a personal application. These instructions are specific to the OPT STEM application (24 month extension).

Please follow the I-765 instructions provided on the USCIS website, particularly page 15 - 19. For your reference, please see below for general guidelines to assist you.

What you will need to complete Form I-765:

- Valid passport
- Most recent I-20 document
- Social Security number (if applicable)
- I-94 (retrieve online through CBP website OR use paper I-94 card in passport)
- Current OPT EAD

Part 1. Reason for Applying

For the STEM extension application, this is considered a ‘renewal of permission to accept employment’.

Part 2. Information About You

- Provide basic biographical information about yourself.
- Note: If using a friend or relative’s mailing address, complete Question #5.a (In Care of Name).
 - Question #26 – provide your CURRENT SEVIS number, listed at the top of your I-20 document.
 - Question #27 – (C)(3)(C) is the eligibility category for STEM extension. You MUST complete Question 28.

Part 3. Applicant’ Statement, Contact Information, Declaration, Certification, and Signature

- You must select the appropriate ‘Applicant’s Statement’ and provide your contact information.
- Read carefully the *Applicant’s Declaration and Certification* section BEFORE signing your Form I-765.
- **Don’t forget to sign within the ‘Applicant’s Signature’ box.** Signature should not touch or go beyond the lines of the space provided.

Part 4. Interpreter’s Contact Information, Certification, and Signature

In general, Part 4 does not apply to students applying for OPT as students do not generally have an interpreter assisting with the application.

Part 5. Contact Information, Declaration, and Signature of the Person Preparing this Application, If Other Than the Applicant

In general, **Part 5** does not apply to students applying for OPT as students do not generally have an interpreter assisting with the application.

Part 6. Additional Information

Complete if you have ever had a previous SEVIS number, previous OPT and/or previous CPT authorization.

- This section can be used to provide information on previously used SEVIS numbers and to indicate attached files such as previous EAD, approval notice and I-20s.
 - Example of how to indicate previous work authorization using Part 6:
 - **Page 3. Section 2. Number 27.**

List previously used SEVIS numbers (if applicable) and indicate “*previous CPT/OPT authorization documents attached.*”

Additional Tips:

- Put ‘N/A’ if a question does not apply to you.
- Read through each section carefully and double check your answers prior to mailing your OPT application.
- The [I-765 instructions](#) provided on the USCIS website, particularly page 15 – 19 can also be used to assist in completing your I-765 form.
- You must complete and submit ALL 7 pages of the I-765 with your OPT STEM application.
- Complete the entire form in BLACK ink. Sign your Form I-765 using black ink.
- You may also include the optional form **G-1145 e-Notification of Application** to receive a confirmation that your application has been received by USCIS. Note: this is NOT your official receipt notice.
- The I-765 must be properly and timely filed with USCIS. The student must file an OPT STEM application (I-765, signed I-20, and fee) within *60 days of the DSO’s OPT recommendation in SEVIS*, and within other OPT filing deadlines.

Acronyms You Should Know:

OPT - Optional Practical Training

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

USCIS – United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

NOA – Notice of Action

EAD – Employment Authorization Document

DSO – Designated School Official