OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING  
FOR F-1 STUDENTS APPLYING FOR THE  
17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

Who is eligible for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?

F-1 students with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees in fields listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List are eligible for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension. The complete list of STEM approved majors can be found at www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm

What requirements must I meet to be eligible for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?

- You must be currently authorized for Post-Completion OPT and working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to your field of study.
- You must have successfully completed a bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree in a field on the STEM Designated Degree Program list. A SEVIS-certified U.S. college or university must have conferred your degree.
- At the time of application for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension, you must have a job or a job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify system.
- You must not have previously received a 17-month OPT STEM Extension. You are permitted only one 17-month OPT STEM Extension regardless of how many STEM degrees you complete.

What Is E-Verify?

E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA). It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. Contact your employer to determine if they are in E-Verify. ISSS does not maintain this information.

For more information on E-Verify, visit: www.uscis.gov/e-verify

What must the employer do so that F-1 students can receive the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?

- The employer must be registered in E-Verify and give its E-Verify number to the student or ISSS.
• The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the International Student Office within 48 hours. **Note:** If the student has not reported to work for five consecutive business days without the employer’s consent, the employer is to consider the student to have left the job.

**When should I apply for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?**

We recommend that you apply for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension 90 days prior to the expiration of your EAD card to allow sufficient time for USCIS processing and background checks. Your application must be received by the USCIS before your current OPT expires. The earliest you may apply for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension is 120 days before your EAD expires.

**How do I apply for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?**

**STEP 1:** Prepare your application and submit it online to ISSS following the directions below:

1. Pay the UB OPT fee. The fee is $55 and must be paid online at the following link: [https://epay.buffalo.edu/public/scripts/epay_form.cgi?payment_type=355](https://epay.buffalo.edu/public/scripts/epay_form.cgi?payment_type=355). It cannot be added to your student account. After paying the fee, **remember to print the receipt**.
2. Login to the myISSS Student Portal at: [http://ubisss.buffalo.edu](http://ubisss.buffalo.edu). Click on “F-1 Practical Training Applications” and then “Application for 17-Month OPT STEM Extension”.
3. You must complete the entire “Application for 17-Month OPT STEM Extension” E-form and upload all required documents before you can submit an application. **Only documents saved as a PDF or JPEG are acceptable.** Be sure to submit the following documents:
   - Form I-765 *(fillable on ISSS website)*.
     - **Before completing Form I-765, be sure to select the correct form on the ISSS website.** Choose the one which contains the appropriate code for your OPT application.
     - 17-Month STEM Extension = (C)(3)(C)
     - **Before uploading your Form I-765 to myISSS, remember to print the form, sign it and then scan it. Save the completed form as a PDF or JPEG.**
     - **Be sure the address you use on the Form I-765 is an address where you will receive mail in 3-4 months.** We do not recommend changing your address with USCIS while your OPT application is pending.
   - Form G-1145 (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance) *(fillable on ISSS website)*
   - UB OPT Fee receipt *(See the #1 above for information on how to pay the fee)*
   - **Photocopy of your diploma.** **Note:** It must specify your field of study. If not, you must include a photocopy of your official transcript, which must confirm that your degree was conferred.
   - **Photocopy of your employment letter.** **Note:** This letter must be on the employer’s letterhead and include your employment start date.
   - **Choose your preferred mailing or pick-up option and provide us with the requested information.**
4. After providing all required information and uploading all of the required documents, **remember to click the “Submit” button.** ISSS will review your application and notify you if any additional information is needed.
5. When your application is complete, ISSS will enter your OPT STEM recommendation into the SEVIS system, which will produce a new I-20 with the OPT STEM recommendation. **ISSS processing time is 5-7 business days.**

6. You will receive an email confirming that your OPT STEM I-20 is ready. We will mail your I-20 if you indicated on the E-form that you would like it mailed.

**STEP 2: Submit your complete paper 17-month OPT STEM Extension application for an Employment Authorization Document (“EAD Card”) to the USCIS Service Center.**

The USCIS must receive the following documents **before your current EAD expires AND within 30 days of: 1) the issuance of your I-20 with the OPT STEM recommendation, and 2) the signature on your Form I-765:**

- Original Form I-765. **Note:** Be sure to submit the original document with your signature in **BLUE ink.**
- Form G-1145 (E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance) (**fillable on ISSS website**)  
- Photocopy of your diploma. **Note:** It must specify your field of study. If not, you must include a photocopy of your official transcript, which must confirm that your degree was conferred.
- Photocopy of EAD card(s)
- Photocopy of your employment letter
- Application fee of $380
  - This should be a check (from a U.S. bank) or a money order payable to the “Department of Homeland Security”.
  - Write the 11-digit number from your newest I-94 (card or electronic print-out) on your check or money order.
  - Don’t forget to sign and date the check. *(Please see attached example of a properly written check)*
- **Photocopy of your current I-20 – page 1 and page 3 with OPT STEM recommendation**
- **Photocopies of pages 1 and 3 of all previous I-20’s**
- Photocopies of your current, valid passport (biographic and photo pages) and U.S. visa stamp in your passport. **Note:** If your passport has expired, please go to ISSS, Talbert Hall 210 for advice.
- Photocopy of the front and back of your most recent I-94 Card OR print-out of electronic I-94 (available at www.cbp.gov/i94)
- Two (2) identical natural color photographs of yourself, taken within 30 days of this application. **Note:** If your photos do not meet USCIS requirements exactly, your EAD card will not be issued.
  - Please see attached specifications for the photo
  - In pencil, please write your name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo

**Be sure to photocopy your entire OPT application for your personal records.**
**Where do I send my OPT application?**

Send your application to: **Via express courier (e.g. FedEx, UPS):**
USCIS  
Attn: AOS  
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067  

**Via U.S. Postal Service (regular mail):**  
USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266  

**NOTE:** If your mailing address in item #3 on your Form I-765 is not in New York State, please refer to the last page of this handout for instructions.

**NOTE:** Since it isn’t clear which address should be used for USPS Priority Mail, we recommend that you use UPS or Fedex when you mail your application to the USCIS.

**How should I mail my OPT application?**

You should mail your OPT application by a **reliable, overnight mail delivery service** (e.g. UPS, FedEx) to the USCIS Lockbox that has jurisdiction over the address you listed in item #3 on Form I-765. Utilizing an overnight mail service will enable you to track your mailed application and its delivery. Please save your receipt.

**How long is the OPT application process?**

Processing time at the USCIS is estimated to be 6-12 weeks. However, processing times vary widely depending on the time of year and the workload at the USCIS Lockbox to which you send your application. You can check the USCIS website for current processing times: [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/processTimesDisplayInit.do](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/processTimesDisplayInit.do)

**After I receive my EAD card, what must I do?**

- Keep the “Help USCIS Serve You Better” EAD card cover sheet. (If you ever need to request another card, you should submit this sheet.)
- Upload a photocopy of your EAD card and copy of your employment offer letter by logging onto [https://ubiss.buffalo.edu/](https://ubiss.buffalo.edu/) using your UBIT Name and Password. Once you have logged on, enter your current residential address on the “Update OPT Student Contact Information” E-form. Then, update your employment information on the “Update OPT Employer Information” E-form. Last, upload a copy of your EAD card (front-side only) and your employment letter. **Note:** This letter must be on the employer’s letterhead and include your employment start date.
- Notify ISSS about the following information:
  - Any change in your name
  - Any change in your residential address (within ten days)
  - Any change of employer or employer’s address
  - Any interruption of employment lasting longer than 10 days
Any change in your immigration status (e.g. change to H-1B)  
- **Every six months, mail your I-20 to ISSS for a new travel signature.** Update your OPT E-Forms (see above) and include a pre-paid shipping label so we can mail your I-20 back to you.

### Do I have to maintain employment?

The Interim Final OPT Rule published on April 8, 2008 permits F-1 students who are authorized for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension to be unemployed for 30 days in addition to the 90 days allotted for Post-Completion OPT. The maximum period of unemployment allowed is 120 days during the entire OPT period. The rule also requires students to report their employer’s name and address to their school within 10 business days of obtaining employment or a change in employment.

Students on the 17-month OPT STEM Extension must also submit a report to the school every six months. When the school receives the report, it will notify SEVIS that the student has complied with this reporting requirement. **Note:** If students do not submit the required six-month report, their SEVIS record is supposed to automatically terminate. Therefore, it is imperative that you not only maintain employment, but that you report it to ISSS and submit the required six-month report in a timely fashion.

### What types of employment are acceptable while on OPT?

There are various types of employment which you may accept while on OPT. Any employment you choose must be directly related to your program of study.

- **Regular paid employment** - for at least 20 hours per week. **Note:** Employer must be registered in E-Verify.
- **Multiple employers.** All work must be related to your field of study. **Note:** Employers must be registered in E-Verify.
- **Payment by multiple, short-term employers.** Ex. Musicians and other performing artists may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). You should maintain a list of all gigs, including dates and duration. **Note:** Employers must be registered in E-Verify.
- **Work for hire.** This is commonly referred to as “1099 employment”, which refers to an individual performing a service based on a contract. You should keep a record of the length of each contract as well as the name and contact information for each contracting company. **Note:** Employer must be registered in E-Verify.
- **Self-employed business owner.** You may start a business and be self-employed. You must also have proper business licenses. **Note:** Employer must be registered in E-Verify.
- **Employment by an agency.** You must keep proof that you worked at least an average of 20 hours per week while employed by an agency. **Note:** Employer must be registered in E-Verify.

### Can I work while my 17-month OPT STEM Extension application is pending?

Yes. Your application to the USCIS automatically extends your work authorization for up to 180 days while the application is pending.
Can I change employers while my 17-month OPT STEM Extension application is pending?

Yes. However, you are required to report any change of employment to ISSS and the USCIS. ISSS must issue you a new I-20 reflecting your new employment information. Note: Your new employer must be registered in E-verify.

To report your new employment to the USCIS, you must submit the updated OPT STEM I-20 along with a new Form I-765, copy of your 17-month OPT STEM Extension application I-797 Receipt Notice and a letter explaining that your employment changed. Submitting new documentation to amend a pending application could delay the processing of your application. Therefore, please think carefully before switching employers while your 17-month OPT STEM Extension application is pending.

Can I travel outside the U.S. while my 17-month OPT STEM Extension application is pending and after my Post-Completion OPT EAD Card has expired?

NO, you cannot!!!

After I receive my new EAD card, what should I carry when I re-enter the U.S. while on OPT?

- Employment letter on employer’s letterhead verifying your OPT employment
- Both EAD cards
- I-20 with OPT recommendations and a valid signature (not more than 6 months old) from ISSS on page 3.
- Originals of all previous I-20’s
- Valid F-1 visa
- Valid passport

PLEASE REMEMBER:

- While your 17-month OPT STEM Extension application is pending, we strongly advise against changing the address listed on Form I-765. The USCIS does not always process change of address notifications in a timely manner. Changing your address while your application is still pending may result in your being required to file a new application with a new fee because you did not receive your EAD Card. Note: EAD cards may not be forwarded by the U.S. Post Office to your new address. Therefore, you must be certain that the address you list in item #3 of your Form I-765 is (and will be) your address when your application is processed, which could be 3-4 months after you submit it to USCIS.
- If you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level at UB, then your OPT authorization will automatically be terminated.
- If you are accepted to begin another degree program at UB and your OPT has not yet expired, your OPT will terminate on the first day of classes for your new degree program.
- If you later decide not to mail your 17-month OPT STEM Extension application to USCIS for any reason, you must notify ISSS immediately so that we can cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS.
- While on OPT, you are still in F-1 status.