Current Students

General Questions

a. I will be graduating soon. How does this new rule affect me?
   i. You should apply for your 12 month post-completion OPT before you graduate and up to 90 days before your program end date.
   ii. Proceed with the regular post-completion OPT application process by reviewing OIE's website and following the instructions found here
   iii. STEM Eligible majors at Georgia Tech

Students on OPT

Application Questions

a. What is the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. A way that students currently participating in OPT can extend their OPT period beyond the original 12 months.
b. How do I apply for the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. Submit the STEM OPT Extension eform in iStart. Video Tutorial
c. What tools are available to help me apply for the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. 24-Month STEM OPT Extension video tutorial
   ii. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub
   iii. Mailing Instructions
   iv. Summary of new STEM OPT Extension rule (effective May 10th, 2016)
   v. Visual Graph that outlines your options
d. What are the eligible CIP Codes for the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. STEM Eligible Majors at Georgia Tech
   ii. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension
e. How early can I apply for the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. 90 days prior to the current original 12 month OPT expiration day.
f. How quickly must I submit the STEM OPT Extension application to USCIS after receiving my new I20?
   i. Students must properly file a Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, with USCIS within 60 days of the date the DSO enters the recommendation for the STEM OPT Extension into the SEVIS record.
g. What is an E-verify number?
   i. A number that helps employers and the federal government determine employment eligibility. This is something your employer has, and you will need to ask for in order to complete 24 month STEM OPT Extension applications. https://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/what-e-verify
      1. E-Verify Employers and Federal Contractors List
Employment Details Questions

a. Can I work after my original OPT period expires, if I have a pending application for STEM OPT Extension with USCIS?
   i. Yes. Students may continue to work for up to 180 days after the end date of the Post OPT EAD, as long as they have submitted a STEM OPT Extension request before the original OPT expiration date and it is pending review by USCIS.

b. What is the minimum number of hours I can work each week?
   i. Students must work at least 20 hours per week while on STEM OPT Extension.

c. Is it possible to work multiple jobs on STEM OPT Extension?
   i. The Department of Homeland Security anticipates that this will be very unusual, though not expressly prohibited, for students to work with more than two employers at the same time during the STEM OPT Extension period, given that each employer must fully comply with the requirements of this rule and employ the student for no less than 20 hours per week.

d. What types of work are NOT allowed on STEM Extension OPT?
   i. Volunteer/unpaid, employment through employment agencies and self-employment are NOT allowed.

e. What about start-ups?
   i. The official communication states that the employment "Must be a bonafide employer and employee relationship." If you have a start-up there must be someone in the company that can serve as a supervisor and train you in the STEM field you have studied as part of your work. The company must also fit all the government requirements to be a STEM OPT eligible employer (Employer adheres to training plan requirements, remains in good standing with E-Verify, will provide compensation to the STEM OPT student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers, and has the resources to comply with the proposed training plan).

f. How does applying for STEM OPT Extension affect my travel plans?
   i. STEM OPT Extension and Travel

Training Plan Questions

a. What is the form I-983 (Training Plan) and how do I complete it?
   i. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

ii. You can find an easy to use fillable version of this form here:

b. What if I need to make changes to my training plan?
   i. If you need to make material changes to your Training Plan, you and your employer must both sign the modified version of the Training Plan and file the updated version with your DSO as soon as possible. Material changes may include, for example, a significant decrease in hours per week that you will be engaging in the practical training or a reduction in compensation without a reduction in hours worked.

ii. You and your employer need to sign your self-evaluation on an annual basis. You will be required to do a mid-point evaluation during the first 12-month interval of your STEM OPT Extension and a final self-evaluation prior to the conclusion of your STEM OPT Extension.

c. Will my training be evaluated during my STEM OPT Extension opportunity?

Updated 3/20/2020
i. Yes. You and your employer need to sign your self-evaluation on an annual basis. You will be required to do a mid-point evaluation during the first 12-month interval of your STEM OPT Extension and a final self-evaluation prior to the conclusion of your STEM OPT Extension.

d. The evaluation sections (last 2 pages of the I-983) are to be completed based upon the time period for which you received STEM OPT Extension approval any time AFTER the new rule took affect (May 10 2016). Page 6 will need to be submitted to OIE at 12 months, and page 7 will need to be submitted at the end of your employment. This can be done in iStart in the STEM Extension e-form group. You MUST complete a new I983 for each employer.
   i. For example: A student who receives a STEM OPT Extension EAD card for May 15 2016-May 15 2018 will need to submit page 6 of the I-983 to OIE at 12 months based upon starting May 15 2016.
      a. A student who received the 7 month extension does not have to submit page 6 or 7 for employment that occurred PRIOR to May 10 2016. A new 12 month clock begins on the newly approved start date.

Unemployment Questions

a. How does the new STEM OPT Extension rule change the total number of unemployment days allowed?
   i. Students awarded the 24 month OR 7 month extension: Under the new STEM OPT Extension rule, students are permitted 60 days of unemployment in addition to the 90 days allowed on the initial 12 month period of OPT. Any unused unemployment days from the original 12 months of OPT can be added to the STEM period, allowing a maximum of 150 days of unemployment for STEM students.
   ii. Students remaining on the original 17 month extension: Your total number of unemployment days remains at 60 total days in addition to the 90 days allowed on the initial 12 month period of OPT.

b. What counts as time unemployed?
   i. Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment. Authorization begins on the employment start date shown on the student’s EAD card.
   ii. You can report unemployment in iStart in the "Employment Update Eform."

Reporting Requirements Questions

a. What are the reporting requirements for STEM OPT Extension students?
   Reporting Requirements (Follow Link for 17 month. 24 month summarized below)
   1. Students must submit a validation report every 6 months
   2. Students must complete a self-evaluation form describing the training progress. This form must be signed by the employer and submitted to OIE at the 12 and 24 month points in the STEM OPT Extension period. The self-evaluation will be subject to DHS review and will be a required part of the student’s immigration (SEVIS) record.
      a. Evaluations will be submitted to the OIE through iStart, in the eform group “STEM OPT Extension”
3. Students must report any change in legal name, residential, or mailing address, employer name, employer address, and/or loss of employment to OIE within 10 days of occurrence.
   a. Students working in a different location from their employer’s office should report the address of the location they are working.
4. Students must submit a new training plan (I-983) to OIE and request a new I-20 within 10 days of starting any new employment.

**Processing Questions**

a. I applied for the STEM OPT Extension and haven't received my I-797C (notice of receipt) from USCIS.
   i. These usually arrive in 3-4 weeks.
   ii. If 3-4 weeks have passed and you still have not received the I-797C, contact USCIS. It is a known problem that USCIS sometimes fails to deliver I-797C’s due to a range of possible errors.
b. My case status on the USCIS website hasn't updated in a long time. What do I do?
   i. USCIS does not frequently update the case status. There may be long periods of time between updates with no communication. If you are within the normal processing time, and have received no special communication from USCIS or OIE by email/mail, then you need to wait patiently for your document to be processed.

**Other Related Questions**

a. Why did DHS implement a new STEM OPT Extension rule effective May 10, 2016?
   i. [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions)
b. How do the changes to the STEM OPT rule benefit international students and schools?
   i. [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions)
c. As a STEM OPT Extension participant, am I required to pay Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes for Social Security and Medicare?
   i. STEM OPT participants generally are not subject to Social Security and Medicare contributions (FICA withholdings) until after the first five calendar years that they hold F-1 nonimmigrant status. As a participant in STEM OPT, you are not considered a resident for federal tax purposes as long as you comply with the requirements of your F-1 visa and have not already held F-1 status for parts of five calendar years.
d. I just completed a non-STEM eligible degree and am on OPT for that degree, but I previously earned a STEM eligible degree at a lower education level. Can I apply for the STEM OPT Extension based upon my previous degree?
   i. Yes! Students participating in a 12 month period of post-completion OPT based on a non-STEM degree may apply for a STEM extension based upon the prior eligible STEM degree (that has been earned in the past 10 years). However, the work performed under the 24 month STEM OPT Extension must be directly related to the earlier STEM degree.
e. What about the Cap-Gap extension?
   i. Students with a timely filed H-1B petition and a request for a change of status may apply to receive a "Cap-Gap" extension of their F-1 status and, if applicable, their post-completion allows such students to automatically extend the duration of their F-1 status and any current post-completion OPT employment authorization until the first
day of the new fiscal year (i.e., Oct. 1 of the fiscal year for which the H-1B status is being requested.)

ii. See the OIE website here for more information on H-1B and Cap-Gap

f. Did the STEM OPT Extension change H1-B visa policies?
   i. No. The STEM OPT final rule did not change H-1B visa policies.

g. Is a STEM OPT extension a way to avoid the requirements of an H-1B visa?
   i. No. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions

Students on STEM

Application Questions

a. I’m on 17-Month STEM OPT Extension and want to convert to 24-Month.
   i. Go to iStart and complete the STEM Extension Request eform. This will guide you through identifying your current OPT status and whether or not you are eligible for the additional 7 months. You can also see here for eligibility.
   ii. Follow the directions here: Video tutorial This video is addressed toward 24-Month STEM OPT Extension, however the information applies to the 7-Month extension as well.
   iii. Current STEM OPT students with 17 month extension must file an Application for Employment Authorization with USCIS, along with applicable fees and supporting documentation, on or before August 8 2016, and within 60 days of the date the DSO enters the recommendation for the 24 month STEM OPT Extension (makes the I20). Student must have at least 150 calendar days remaining prior to the expiration of the 17 month STEM OPT EAD at the time the Application for Employment Authorization is filed.

b. Are students required to pay the fee again if you apply for the 7 month extension?
   i. Yes, if you were already approved for STEM prior to May 10, 2016 and want to extend the extra 7 months.
   ii. No, if you received an RFE for a pending application.

c. Should I withdraw my application for 17-month STEM OPT Extension?
   i. This is possible, but you should understand that you don't want to lose F-1 status depending on filing deadlines
      1. If a student withdraws an application for a STEM OPT Extension after his or her period of post-completion OPT has ended, the student will no longer be eligible file for a STEM OPT extension
      2. If a student wants to withdraw their application PRIOR to sending it to USCIS, contact an International Student Advisor at OIE.
      3. Do NOT withdraw your application for a STEM OPT Extension without first talking to an International Student Advisor at OIE.

d. What tools are available to help me apply for the STEM OPT Extension?
   i. 24-Month STEM OPT Extension video tutorial
   ii. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub
   iii. Mailing Instructions
   iv. Summary of new STEM OPT Extension rule (effective May 10th, 2016)
   v. Visual Graph that outlines your options

e. I applied for the STEM OPT Extension and received an RFE (Request for Further Evidence).
i. See the second section here
ii. You will request a new I20 from OIE, and we will provide you with a letter of support that you will need to send to USCIS along with the other requested items in the RFE.

**Employment Details Questions**

a. Can I work after my original OPT period expires, if I have a pending application for STEM OPT Extension with USCIS?
   i. Yes. Students may continue to work for up to 180 days after the end date of the Post OPT EAD, as long as they have submitted a STEM OPT Extension request before the original OPT expiration date and it is pending review by USCIS.

b. What is the minimum number of hours I can work each week?
   i. Students must work at least 20 hours per week while on STEM OPT Extension.

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f. How does applying for STEM OPT Extension affect my travel plans?
   i. **STEM OPT Extension and Travel**

**Training Plan Questions**

a. What if I need to make changes to my training plan?
   i. You can find an easy to use fillable version of this form [here](#)
   ii. If you need to make material changes to your Training Plan, you and your employer must both sign the modified version of the Training Plan and file the updated version with your DSO as soon as possible. Material changes may include, for example, a significant decrease in hours per week that you will be engaging in the practical training or a reduction in compensation without a reduction in hours worked.

b. Will my training be evaluated during my STEM OPT Extension opportunity?
i. Yes. You and your employer need to sign your self-evaluation on an annual basis. You will be required to do a mid-point evaluation during the first 12-month interval of your STEM OPT Extension and a final self-evaluation prior to the conclusion of your STEM OPT Extension.

   c. The evaluation sections (last 2 pages of the I-983) are to be completed based upon the time period for which you received STEM OPT Extension approval any time AFTER the new rule took affect (May 10 2016). Page 6 will need to be submitted to OIE at 12 months, and page 7 will need to be submitted at the end of your employment. This can be done in iStart in the STEM Extension e-form group. You MUST complete a new I983 for each employer.

   i. For example: A student who receives a STEM OPT Extension EAD card for May 15 2016-May 15 2018 will need to submit page 6 of the I-983 to OIE at 12 months based upon starting May 15 2016.

   a. A student who received the 7 month extension does not have to submit page 6 or 7 for employment that occurred PRIOR to May 10 2016. A new 12 month clock begins on the newly approved start date.

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   ii. Students remaining on the original 17 month extension: Your total number of unemployment days remains at 60 total days in addition to the 90 days allowed on the initial 12 month period of OPT.

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   1. Students must submit a validation report every 6 months

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   a. Students working in a different location from their employer’s office should report the address of the location they are working.
4. Students must submit a new training plan (I-983) to OIE and request a new I-20 within 10 days of starting any new employment.

**Processing Questions**

a. I have already sent my application to USCIS for STEM Extension OPT, but have not yet received approval from them. What should I do?
   i. If your STEM OPT Extension application is approved PRIOR to May 10th 2016, it will be valid for 17 months and you may be eligible for an additional extension of 7 months. See the above section “Application Questions” for how to apply.
   ii. If your STEM OPT Extension application is approved AFTER May 10th 2016, USCIS will send you a request for further evidence (RFE) to provide updated documents before they can approve your case. Once the updated documents are received by USCIS, your STEM OPT Extension will be granted for 24 months. Visit our information page for students who have applied for a STEM OPT Extension.
   iii. Students who have I20's printed for the 24-Month STEM OPT Extension (I20's printed after May 10th) will receive the 24 month STEM OPT Extension. Further information in the Students on STEM section below.

b. I applied for the STEM OPT Extension and haven't received my I-797C (notice of receipt) from USCIS.
   i. These usually arrive in 3-4 weeks. If you designated OIE as your address on your extension request to USCIS, then we will open that document and email you a notification as soon as it arrives. Further directions on how to obtain that document will be given in the email.
   ii. If 3-4 weeks have passed and you still have not received the I-797C, then contact OIE to double check if we received it. After that, we suggest you contact USCIS. It is a known problem that USCIS sometimes fails to deliver I-797C's due to a range of possible errors.
   iii. My case status on the USCIS website hasn't updated in a long time. What do I do?
      1. USCIS does not frequently update the case status. There may be long periods of time between updates with no communication. If you are within the normal processing time, and have received no special communication from USCIS or OIE by email/mail, then you need to wait patiently for your document to be processed.

**Other Related Questions**

a. Why did DHS implement a new STEM OPT Extension rule effective May 10, 2016?
   i. [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/steam-opt-frequently-asked-questions](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/steam-opt-frequently-asked-questions)
b. How do the changes to the STEM OPT rule benefit international students and schools?
   i. [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/steam-opt-frequently-asked-questions](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/steam-opt-frequently-asked-questions)
c. As a STEM OPT Extension participant, am I required to pay Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes for Social Security and Medicare?
i. STEM OPT participants generally are not subject to Social Security and Medicare contributions (FICA withholdings) until after the first five calendar years that they hold F-1 nonimmigrant status. As a participant in STEM OPT, you are not considered a resident for federal tax purposes as long as you comply with the requirements of your F-1 visa and have not already held F-1 status for parts of five calendar years.

d. My employer has asked me to take a business trip outside the U.S. What do I report?
   i. You are not required to change employment information if you will take a business trip outside the U.S.

e. I have already completed one STEM Extension OPT, and am now studying for a degree at a higher level. Is it possible to receive STEM Extension OPT again?
   i. Yes. Students who complete a degree, go on 12 months OPT, then participate in a STEM OPT Extension, and return to university to complete a STEM eligible degree at a higher education level, will be eligible for another 12 month OPT period AND an additional STEM OPT Extension of 24 months.
      1. Please speak with an international student advisor at OIE by emailing info@oie.gatech.edu for special assistance in this case.
   ii. A maximum of 2 STEM OPT Extensions are allowed in a lifetime.

1. What about the Cap-Gap extension?
   i. Students with a timely filed H-1B petition and a request for a change of status may apply to receive a “Cap-Gap” extension of their F-1 status and, if applicable, their post-completion allows such students to automatically extend the duration of their F-1 status and any current post-completion OPT employment authorization until the first day of the new fiscal year (i.e., Oct. 1 of the fiscal year for which the H-1B status is being requested.)
   ii. See the OIE website here for more information on H-1B and Cap-Gap

2. Did the STEM OPT Extension change H1-B visa policies?
   i. No. The STEM OPT final rule did not change H-1B visa policies.

3. Is a STEM OPT extension a way to avoid the requirements of an H-1B visa?
   i. No. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-frequently-asked-questions

**Employers**

a. What do I need to know for hiring a STEM OPT approved student?
   1. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub

b. What are the STEM OPT Reporting Requirements for employers?
   1. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-stem-opt-reporting-requirements

c. Will there be site visits?
   1. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employer-site-visits

d. You can find an easy to use fillable version of this form here: