17-Month STEM OPT Extension

The current 17-month STEM Extension regulations expire on May 9, 2016. The information on this page pertains to the expiring regulations, and should not be consulted after May 9, 2016. For information regarding the new STEM Extension regulations that begin on May 10, 2016, please see the OPT STEM Extension page.

General Information

Definition of STEM OPT

Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 29 months (12 months of “regular” OPT with a 17-month extension possible).

Eligibility Criteria for the 17-month OPT extension

- Students who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT; and
- Who have earned a degree in a field included on the U.S. Government’s list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields; and
- Who are employed in a job directly related to his/her field of study; and
- Who are working for an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government’s E-Verify program.

Please Note: All four of the above criteria must be met in order for a student to be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension.

List of degrees in STEM fields

If a student earned a degree in a field that appears on the U.S. government’s official list of STEM fields, he/she may be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension. In order to verify that your degree is on this list, look at the code listed under “Primary Major” on your Page 2 of your I-20 form, and then look for that code in the CIP code column of the Department of Homeland Security STEM Designated Degree Programs list.

E-Verify

E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment
eligibility of newly-hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify [3].

**Application time frame for the 17-month OPT extension**

Students must apply for the special 17-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of the first 12 months of “regular” OPT. The application must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration date of the first OPT period in order to be properly (timely) filed. USCIS will not accept I-765 applications for STEM extensions any earlier than 120 days before the current EAD expiration date. Accordingly, International Center will process a STEM recommendation I-20 no more than four months and one week in advance of your current OPT end date.

**While the application is pending**

If the application for the 17-month OPT extension is successfully received prior to the expiration of the first OPT period, students may continue employment until the application is processed or until 180 days have passed, whichever is sooner.

**Additional Information**

**Reporting requirements during the 17-month extension**

Students approved for the 17-month OPT extension have additional reporting requirements in order to maintain their status and work authorization. Students must report to the IC within 10 days if there is any change of:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name
- Employer address, and/or
- Loss of employment

Students must make a validation report to the IC every six months to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date. Use the [STEM Extension Reporting Requirement](#) web form to submit your validation report.

**Types of Employment Allowed During an OPT STEM extension**

A student authorized for a 17-month extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to his or her DHS-approved STEM CIP.

For students who are on a STEM extension, this employment may include:

- **Work for one or more employer.** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to each individual student's degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.
- **Multiple employers.** Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be
related to each individual student's degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

- **Work for hire.** This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. The company for whom the student is providing services must be registered with E-Verify. If requested by DHS, students must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.

- **Self-employed business owner.** Students on a STEM extension can start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must register his or her business with E-Verify and work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.

- **Employment through an agency or consulting firm.** Students on a STEM extension may be employed by an employment agency or consulting firm. The employment agency or consulting firm must be registered with E-Verify, but the third parties contracting with the agency or firm (for which the student is providing services) need not be.

### 17-Month Extension Available Once

The special 17-month extension of OPT is only available to each student one time. A student who is approved for a 17-month OPT extension can never apply for it again. Please note that this rule is different from the application rules for the “standard” 12-month OPT, under which students could be approved for multiple OPT periods for each higher degree earned in the U.S. (i.e. bachelor's, then master's, then doctoral).

### Starting and Ending Dates

The start date of the [17-month OPT extension](#) will be automatically set to the day after the expiration of the current 12-month OPT authorization. The end date will be 17 months later. (It is not possible to request smaller increments of time for the OPT extension.)

### Application Procedures for Students

1. Submit electronic [17-month OPT STEM Extension I-20 Request Form](#). Please make sure to fill out all the fields and attach all the documents listed in the form. Incomplete requests cannot be processed. **Note for applicants who are employed by U of M:** once your 17-month OPT STEM extension I-20 request is received and approved by an IC advisor, the advisor will send an e-mail to your U of M supervisor with the university E-Verify number information. You will need this number for your OPT extension application with USCIS. Please ask your supervisor for the E-Verify number after you receive your new I-20 from the IC.
2. IC will prepare a new I-20 for you. In most cases your I-20 will be ready in 1-2 weeks. We will notify you via email once it is ready. If you are located close to U-M, you may come to the office to pick up your new I-20. If you are located far away from U-M, you may authorize a friend to pick up your I-20 or we can send it to you either via regular mail at no charge or via express mail. Find more specific information and forms at [Shipping Options](#).
3. Checklist for mailing your application to USCIS//Once you’ve requested a STEM recommendation through the U-M International Center and received your new I-20, you will need to prepare and submit an application packet to USCIS. Gather the following items in this order (from top to bottom):
   - G-1145, E-Notification of Application [7]
   - [Base Fee for I-765](#), payable to [Department of Homeland Security](#). Personal check, cashiers
check or money order is acceptable. If you use a personal check, please be sure to wait for the check to be cashed before closing your bank account.

- Two full-face passport-style photos. The photos must be identical and in color with a plain background. They must be no more than 30 days old when the I-765 is filed at USCIS. Put photos in an envelope or small plastic sandwich bag. You should attach the fee and the photo envelope on top of the entire application (on the upper left-hand corner). Please do not staple the fee and the photos. Use a pencil to gently write your name and SEVIS ID on the back of your photo.
- Original USCIS Form I-765 [9] (completed, signed, and dated legibly by you). Please download and follow carefully these Instructions for Filling Out the I-765 for STEM Extensions [10].
- Photocopy of pages 1 and 3 of your new I-20 endorsed for the 17-month OPT extension. (Do not send the original.) Make sure to sign your new I-20 before you make the photocopy.
- Photocopy of the front and back of your current EAD card.
- Photocopy of your U-M diploma or official U-M transcript.
- Photocopy of the picture page/expiration date of your passport.
- USCIS will send you a notice for the receipt of your I-765 EAD (OPT) application (2-3 weeks). Once you have received your receipt notice, you can track the status of your individual case using the case status search feature of the USCIS web site [12]. You may elect to receive email alerts about your case status from this web site.

4. Sending your application: We recommend using a trackable mail service such as FedEx or UPS. There are four USCIS Service Centers in the United States that process I-765 (OPT) applications. The address you use on the I-765 determines where you should send your application (see I-765 instructions).

5. If you successfully file the application for your 17-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of your current 12-month OPT period, you may continue employment even if your previous EAD card is expired until your OPT extension is processed or until 180 days has passed, whichever is sooner.

6. If your OPT extension is approved, you must send a photocopy of your new EAD card to the IC at icenter@umich.edu [13].

7. Please read During the 17-month OPT Extension below for more details on how to meet the requirements for properly maintaining your F-1 visa status.

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**During the 17-month OPT Extension**

**How to maintain your F-1 status**

Information reporting requirements are more strict during the special 17-month OPT extension. Take special care to comply with these obligations. Failure to do so can jeopardize the validity of your OPT and your legal visa status in the U.S.

1. You must report any change of address Wolverine Access within 10 days of moving to your new residence. Your address must describe where you live. It cannot be a P.O. Box or an office address.
2. If the name or address of your employer changes, you must report this information to the IC within 10 days of the change.
3. If you experience an interruption in employment, you must report it to the IC.
4. **You are required to make a validation report to the IC every six months** starting from the date your 17-month OPT extension is approved. The report is due within 10 days of the required reporting date. The validation report must contain the following information:
   - Legal name
   - Residential/mailing address
Ending Your OPT

Your F-1 status remains valid until 60 days after the expiration of your EAD card. During this 60-day grace period, you are no longer authorized to work, however you may legally stay in the U.S. If you depart the U.S. during the 60-day grace period, you are no longer eligible to re-enter under your previous F-1 visa status.

- If you plan to return home after the end of your OPT, please make sure that you depart the U.S. before the end of your 60-day grace period.
- If you plan to change your visa status, we recommend you begin this process before your OPT is expired.
- If you plan to start a new degree program at another college or university, please make sure to contact the IC regarding the transfer of your SEVIS record. Transfers must be done before the end of the 60-day grace period.

Source URL: https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/stem-opt

Links
[1] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/stem-extend
[8] https://www.uscis.gov/i-765
[10] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/sites/default/files/l-765_Instructions_for_STEM.pdf
[13] mailto:icenter@umich.edu