F-1 students in certain designated majors may apply during their initial period of 12 months of OPT for an additional 24-month STEM extension for a total of 36 months of OPT. F-1 students are limited to two STEM OPT extensions during their lifetime.

**TC programs eligible for the STEM OPT extensions are:**

- Applied Statistics, MS (STAT)
- Applied Physiology and Nutrition, MS, (APPN)
- Cognitive Science in Education, MA, EdD, PhD (COGS)
- Developmental Psychology, PhD (DEVD)
- Design and Development of Digital Games, MA (TEDG)
- Educational Psychology: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Developmental Analysis, ME (COGF)
- Learning Analytics, MS (LRAN)
- Instructional Tech. & Media, MA, ME, EdD (TEIT)
- Measurement and Evaluation, ME, EdD, PhD (MEAS)
- Neuroscience and Education, MS (NEUR)
- Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, MS (NUTE)
- Psychology-Developmental, MA (DEVM)
- Social-Organizational Psychology, PhD (ORGD)
- Technology Specialist, MA (TETS-INIT)
- Technology Specialist for Teachers, MA (TETT-INIT)

**Eligibility Requirements for the 24-month STEM extension:**

1. Your program is listed above as a TC STEM program OR you have obtained your degree from a SEVP certified school of higher education within the last 10 years.
2. You are currently on OPT and working for at least 20 hours at a U.S. employer in a job directly related to your major area of study.
3. You currently have a paid position or an offer for at least 20 hours per week from an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system (E-Verify information at [http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify](http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify)) and have an EIN (Employer Identification Number).
4. You and your employer have completed the Form I-983

**If you meet all above (1-4) eligibility requirements:**

You may apply up to 90 days before the end date of your initial period of OPT, and your application must reach USCIS before your EAD card expires. As long as your application is received within the application deadlines, you will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision is made or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

**PART I: INFORMATION REGARDING 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION**

While you are in the United States on F-1 Post-Completion Optional Practical Training, you still have F-1 status under U.S. immigration regulations. Please be aware that you are required to know and abide by the following guidelines:
RESTRICTIONS ON ACCEPTABLE EMPLOYMENT  STEM OPT permits you to accept professional training and employment in your field of study. Here are some additional guidelines on what types of employment you can engage in:

a. Your job responsibilities must be related to your field of study. Work not related to your field of study is not permitted while on OPT.

b. The employment must be paid and you must be a bona fide employee to qualify for STEM OPT. The terms and conditions of the practical training opportunity must be commensurate to similarly situated US workers in the area of employment.

c. A minimum of 20 hours per week of paid employment is required on STEM OPT.

d. **During the STEM extension, you can only work for an employer that is enrolled in E-Verify and have an Employer Identification Number (EIN).** The company must already be E-verified at the time of your application. E-Verify information can be found at [http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify](http://www.uscis.gov/E-Verify)

ONLY 150 DAYS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ALLOWED WHILE ON POST-COMPLETION OPT. Under new OPT regulations, F-1 status is considered to be dependent on employment. Students may not be unemployed for more than an aggregate (i.e., total) of 150 days out of the total 36 months of OPT authorization. Any period of unemployment counts toward the 150 days allowed. You must be working at least 20 hours per week to be considered employed.

TWO LIFE-TIME STEM OPT EXTENSIONS Under new regulations, F-1 students are eligible to apply for two STEM extensions IF:

a. Student has obtained a second STEM qualifying degree from a US higher institution at a higher degree level

AND

b. the student is currently approved for an initial 12 months of OPT for the higher degree level

TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT Although you may continue to work while the OPT extension application is pending, you may encounter complication returning to the US after a trip abroad after the first EAD has expired and before you receive the EAD for the 24-month extension.

**To avoid any complications, you should have the following with you when you re-enter the U.S.:**

1. Your STEM- Extension OPT I-20 (with a travel signature from the OIS no more than 6 months old at re-entry)
2. A passport valid for 6 months into the future
3. A valid F-1 visa (unless you are a Canadian citizen)
4. A valid EAD card (12-month EAD and/or the 24-month OPT EAD)
5. Employment letter

If you are traveling to apply for a new F-1 visa, be sure to allow enough time for the visa process. For additional travel information, please go to the OIS website travel section.

HEALTH INSURANCE While not required under F-1 regulations, it is important that you maintain health insurance coverage while on OPT. Employers may provide health insurance coverage but are not obligated to do so. Please check with your prospective employer about medical insurance benefits or contact OIS for a list of insurance companies.
TAXES In general, F-1 students on OPT should not be subject to Social Security or Medicare taxes, categorized as “FICA” taxes. Please refer your employer to the Social Security provisions as described in Internal Revenue Service Publication 519 (download a copy at http://www.irs.gov). Additional tax exemption may be available depending upon tax treaty provisions between the U.S. and your home country. Refer to the tax treaty provisions for students from your country (if applicable), as described in IRS Publication 901.

PART II: 24 MONTH STEM EXTENSION APPLICATION PROCEDURE

**STEP 1**

If you are eligible to apply for the 24 month STEM Extension, you must do the following to apply for the extension prior to your current EAD expiration date:

Submit the following documents to the OIS:

a. Completed STEM extension application (see attached Form)
c. Copy of the completed I-765 form (Download the form from http://www.uscis.gov/I-765)

Helpful tips on filling out I-765:

Question 27: Write code as (c)(3)(C)

Question 28: List your degree CIP code and major exactly as it appears on page 2 of your I-20 (for example: 16.0102 Linguistics), and your employer name and number as listed in the government’s E-verify program

Within 7-14 business days, the OIS will issue a new I-20 recommending you for a STEM OPT extension starting on the day following the expiration of your current EAD and ending 24 months later.

**STEP 2**

After collecting your new I-20 with OPT extension recommendation, submit the following documents to the USCIS:

a. Original Form I-765 and Original Form G-1145 (both forms can be downloaded from USCIS website)
b. Required I-765 fee (see http://www.uscis.gov for current fee), payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security by bank check, money order or personal check. Write "USCIS I-765" in the memo line of the check or money order. Please note that a money order is more difficult to track than a check.
c. Photocopies of all previous I-20s including I-20 recommending the STEM extension, endorsed by the OIS.
d. Photocopies of passport identification page and expiration pages, F-1 visa, and I-94 printout/card
e. Photocopy of your current EAD card (both sides) and any previous EAD cards (if applicable)
f. Official or unofficial transcript as evidence of your program of study
g. Photocopy of your most recent diploma that shows the degree name and the date awarded
h. Two passport-style photos taken within 30 days of filing the application
i. Recommended: Letter from employer explaining how employment is related to major
**Please note that USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the I-20 issue date and before your current OPT expires.**

**Mail your application to the USCIS Service Center**

If you live in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, or Pennsylvania:

- **U.S. Postal Service (USPS)**
  - USCIS
  - PO Box 660867
  - Dallas, TX 75266
- **Courier service (FedEx, UPS)**
  - USCIS Attn: AOS
  - 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400
  - Lewisville, TX 75067

If you live outside of the states listed above, please see the I-765 Instructions for filing location.

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**PART III: VALIDATION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS DURING OPT STEM EXTENSION**

Once you receive the new EAD card, you are responsible for making the following timely updates during the 24-month OPT extension:

A. **Submit a copy of EAD card:** You must submit to the OIS a copy of your EAD card along with a STEM OPT Extension Reporting Form (downloadable from FORMS section on OIS website) to update any changes.

B. **Submit 6 Month Validation Report:** Submit STEM OPT Extensions Reporting Form once every 6 months starting from the date the extension begins. **You are required to submit the STEM OPT Reporting Form every 6 months even if there are no changes to your information.**

   The validation report must include:
   - a. Your full name as it appears in your passport
   - b. Your current residential address (and mailing address if different from residential address)
   - c. The name and address of your current employer
   - d. The date you began working for the current employer

You are required to report any of the following when:

- Your F-1 status ends
- You change to another degree level at TC
- You transfer to another school
- Your 24-month OPT extension ends

C. **Submit Form I-983 Evaluation and Final Evaluation on Student Progress:**

   1. You must submit the first signed assessment to OIS within 12 months of the start date listed on the form.
   2. You need to submit a second and final evaluation that recaps all the training and knowledge acquired during the complete training period to their DSO at the end of the STEM OPT extension.

   **In addition to the above requirements, you must submit an updated Form I-983 to the Office of International Services within 10 days if there are any changes on Form I-983 (report any changes in sections 1-6.)**

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**DON’T FORGET: IF YOU HAVE A NEW PASSPORT AND/OR NEW VISA, PLEASE SUBMIT A COPY TO OIS.**