

Global Education Office (GEO)

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F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING STEM EXTENSION FOR ONLINE APPLICATION

I. EXPLANATION

F-1 students who are currently authorized for Post-completion OPT employment based on completion of a Bachelor's, Master's or Ph.D. degree in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) field, as defined by DHS, may be eligible for a 24-month extension of OPT. Qualifying STEM fields are designated through the Classification of Instructional Programs codes published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES CIP codes). CIP codes for each major at UNM are determined by the UNM department and are reported to the US government by the Records Office at UNM. GEO does not have the authority to change the CIP code of your program and cannot recommend a STEM extension unless your CIP code as defined by the university qualifies you for the extension request. There is a lifetime limit of two periods of 24-month STEM OPT; each occurring after a *higher* degree level has been obtained. A STEM degree obtained at a U.S. university prior to your current degree may be the basis for a STEM extension under certain circumstances. Students are eligible for the STEM extension only if they meet all of the following regulatory criteria:

II. SUMMARY OF CONDITIONS & LIMITATIONS

- The degree program on which the STEM OPT application is based must have a qualifying CIP code to be eligible for the extension. Codes may be found at: <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf> and your specific code is listed on your I-20 under "Major I."
- Proof of the degree awarded confirming the academic field to be a STEM field must be submitted with the extension application. If the STEM OPT application is based on the degree currently being used for post-completion OPT, you must show that you have completed the STEM degree. If the application is based on a completion of a *prior* STEM degree, you must have proof that the degree was awarded within the last 10 years from an accredited U.S. institution and that your employment is related to it.
- You must currently be on OPT and working for an employer who participates in the E-Verify system. You must include the employer's name (as listed in E-Verify) and the employer's E-Verify client identification number in your application. Search *E-Verify* on the USCIS webpage for more information (temp agencies, volunteer positions or self-employment are *not* considered eligible employment for STEM OPT extensions).
- The application must be received by USCIS before your current OPT period expires to be eligible for a STEM extension, but you cannot apply earlier than 90 days before your current EAD expires.
- You must have had fewer than 90 days of unemployment while on Post-completion OPT.

III. STUDENTS SUBMITTING A 24 MONTH STEM EXTENSION REQUEST MUST:

- Read these full instructions on how to apply for a STEM extension.
- Scan and email all information listed in **Section VI, STEP 2** below to iadvisor@unm.edu.
- Schedule an appointment with an international advisor at <https://calendly.com/unm-geo> or by calling 505-277-4032. *Your documents should be scanned and emailed to GEO before your appointment.*

IV. Employment Eligibility Verification

When you begin to work, you and your employer must complete an "Employment Eligibility Verification" form (I-9 form), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission from USCIS. You will also need your Social Security number for the I-9.

V. Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the US less than five years are “non-residents for tax purposes” and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, “US Tax Guide for Aliens”). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year. If your employer is taking Social Security and Medicare taxes from your paycheck and you are a non-resident for tax purposes, contact GEO to get information to present to your employer demonstrating that this tax should not be withheld.

VI. APPLICATION PROCESS

- STEP 1: Be Informed.** Read this entire handout thoroughly and carefully.
- STEP 2: Scan and email all documents listed below to iadvisor@unm.edu before your STEM extension appointment with a GEO advisor:**
- Completed Training Plan I-983 form signed by you and your employer, which can be found at: <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf> (This is an extensive document so please allow plenty of time for you and your employer to complete it. Also, keep a copy of this as you will have to submit one for each employer again on your STEM extension one-year reporting date.)
 - A completed STEM OPT Student Responsibilities Contract, including your **employer’s E-verify number** (included on pages 4-5 of this handout; read carefully before signing).
- STEP 3: Make an appointment with an International Advisor within 90 days before your current OPT expiration date.** After you have scanned and emailed *a* and *b* in STEP 2 to iadvisor@unm.edu, schedule a STEM OPT Extension appointment with an international advisor at <https://calendly.com/unm-geo> or by calling 505-277-4032.
- STEP 4: Attend the appointment (may be remote) with an International Advisor at GEO.** After your appointment, if everything is in order, your advisor will provide the necessary I-20 with STEM extension recommendation.
- STEP 5: Receive your new I-20 and complete the USCIS online application.** Once you have received the new I-20 with the STEM OPT extension recommendation from your GEO advisor, you will need to prepare your documents for the online application. You will first have to create a USCIS account using a NON-UNM email address at: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up

These are the items that you will need to have **scanned** to upload with your online application:

- official passport photo, JPG, JPEG or PNG (there are free apps you can use to take one)
- I-94 (both sides if paper card)
- I-20 (you will receive from GEO after your STEM extension appointment)
- front and back of current and all previous EAD’s
- copy of your STEM diploma

This is **information** you will need to have to enter when you complete the online application:

- country of citizenship/nationality
- I-94 record number
- last arrival date in the U.S., port of entry (can be found by clicking on “Get Travel History” on I-94 screen), & status at entry
- current passport number, expiration date, issuing country
- current immigration status (F-1 STUDENT)
- SEVIS number (found on I-20)
- Social Security number

Other information for online application:

- Photos must be JPG, JPEG or PNG
- Documents must be PDF, JPEG, TIF/TIFF

- The maximum size for document upload is 6MB
- Document names can only contain letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscore and parentheses. No special characters.
- When filling out the online application, select “**File a form online**”
- When filling out the online application, select “**Application for Employment Authorization (I-765)**”
- When filling out the online application, select “**(c)(3)(C) STEM Extension**” eligibility category
- When filling out the online application, select “**Renewal of my permission to accept employment**”
- On the “**Institution Accreditation**” page, do *not* upload any file if your STEM degree is from UNM.
- A draft that can be edited is saved for 30 days (editing resets the 30-day clock).
- Once you submit payment you cannot make corrections to your application.
- For the \$410 filing fee, you can use debit card, credit card or direct withdrawal from your account.
Premium processing is available for an additional \$1685, which will expedite your application processing time to one month.
- It is recommended to apply online, but those who want to apply with a paper application still can. A GEO advisor can provide information about preparing a paper application.

STEP 6: Wait for the EAD card.

Your EAD card should arrive within 4-5 months of USCIS receiving your application. Premium processing is available for an additional \$1685, which will expedite your application processing time to one month. You will receive a case number immediately after submitting your application, and you should also get a paper “notice of action” in the mail stating that USCIS has received the application. You may continue working using your standard OPT EAD card 180 days beyond the expiration date until you receive your STEM OPT EAD card.

STEP 7: Provide GEO a copy of your EAD card and report your employment every 6 months.

Once you have received your STEM OPT extension EAD card, please provide a copy to GEO by emailing it to iadvisor@unm.edu. Every 6 months of your STEM extension period you will receive messages from GEO requesting your 6-month STEM OPT reporting requirements. *Failure to submit these reports may result in termination of the authorization.*

REMEMBER:

- **STEM OPT extension is still F-1 student status. You MUST follow all the rules to maintain legal F-1 status.**
- **You may continue working 180 days after your standard OPT card has expired until you receive your STEM OPT card.**
- **Address changes and changes in employment MUST be submitted via e-mail to iadvisor@unm.edu; you will no longer report them to your SEVP portal account during your STEM extension period.**
- **You must report all employer names and addresses (including changes in employment and unemployment) to GEO for your entire STEM OPT extension period. All STEM OPT extension employers must provide an I-983 Training Plan and E-verify number to be authorized, and your I-20 should have all authorized employers listed on page 2.**
- **Students who receive a 24-month OPT STEM extension are allowed a total of 150 days of unemployment over their entire STEM OPT and OPT periods combined.**
- **Students with approved STEM OPT extensions must also submit a copy of the new 24-month EAD card to GEO and must verify their current local contact information, employer name and employer contact information every 6 months from the start date of the STEM extension in order to maintain their legal F-1 status.**
- **Students with approved 24-month STEM OPT extensions must submit a completed form I-983 “Self Evaluation” on page 5 to GEO at the one-year point (12 months), and the “Final Evaluation” on page 5 at the two-year point (24 months) of the STEM OPT extension authorization period or when the employment is terminated.**
- **STEM OPT permission is automatically terminated if you transfer to another school or you start studying in a new degree program.**
- **Students must inform GEO of a change of visa status or permanent departure from the U.S.**
- **For travel outside of the U.S., you will need a valid EAD card in hand. You may travel on your current OPT EAD card until it expires. After it expires, it is not recommended to travel outside of the U.S. until you have received your new STEM extension EAD card.**



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STEM OPT EXTENSION STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES CONTRACT RULES F-1 STUDENTS MUST FOLLOW WHILE ON STEM OPT TO REMAIN LEGALLY IN THE US

International students are required to abide by US immigration laws and regulations throughout their stay in the US, including the time that they are on authorized in STEM Optional Practical Training (OPT). Current Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations require F1 students on STEM OPT to continue to report specific information to the Designated School Official (DSO) at the school who issued their I-20 immediately upon making a change in this information, even after they have completed studies at the school. The DSO is required by DHS regulations to input this information into the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). **THIS REQUIRED REPORTING MUST HAPPEN EVERY 6 MONTHS DURING YOUR STEM OPT AUTHORIZATION.** Students who fail to comply with these requirements may have their STEM OPT and F1 status automatically terminated by DHS.

Because failure to comply with these requirements could mean loss of legal status in the US, it is essential that you understand your reporting responsibilities. This form lists the specific information you must report to the Global Education Office (GEO) while on STEM OPT. You must reply to STEM reporting requests from iadvisor@unm.edu with supporting documentation every six months during the STEM OPT extension from the start date listed on your new STEM OPT card, and GEO must report it to SEVIS. You should not consider the information received until you receive a confirmation email. *It is YOUR responsibility to abide by all immigration rules for maintaining legal student status.* GEO must report updates in your information to the federal government via the SEVIS electronic tracking system within 21 days of making a change and at regular 6-month intervals during your STEM OPT, so it is vital that you understand and comply with the following rules:

INFORMATION THAT ALL STUDENTS ON STEM OPT MUST REPORT EVERY 6 MONTHS TO GEO TO MAINTAIN LEGAL STATUS:

You must report this information directly to iadvisor@unm.edu by replying with relevant documentation when it is requested:

1. Scanned copy of your STEM OPT/EAD card.
2. Current, physical US address. This must be the place where you currently live and you must update GEO within 10 days of making any change. Make sure you provide us a current email and phone number.
Current, Mailing US address. This must be the address you use to receive mail if different from your physical address.
3. Any changes or interrupted employment such as “unemployment” (other than vacation while employed) or loss of your job during your STEM OPT authorization.
4. Your employer E-Verify Identification number. Your employer must also notify GEO within 5 days in the event of the termination of your employment or your departure from the job.
5. You and your employer submit an I-983 form to update your employment information as soon as a material change occurs and within 10 days of each 12-month evaluation. Student and employer must report changes in the training plan to an international advisor (including changes in EIN, hours, duties, pay, employer name/address OR any correction to the training plan) within 10 days.
6. Period/s of unemployment. Your STEM OPT will end if you accrue a total of more than **150 days** of unemployment (counted from the start of your total OPT period), or if you transfer to another school or start a new degree program.
7. Any change of non-immigrant status or permanent departure from the US.
8. Verify your current local contact information, employer name and employer contact information every 6 months from date of STEM OPT extension start date.

An updated I-20 will automatically be sent to you within 5 business days of an employment update in SEVIS.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR REENTRY WHILE ON AUTHORIZED STEM OPT:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by the International Advisor at UNM within the last six months.
2. Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). Note that the EAD card says “not valid for travel” on the face of the card. This means that you cannot use the EAD alone to reenter the US, but must also have the signed I-20 and an employer letter. (You may travel on your current OPT EAD until it expires. After it expires, it is not recommended to travel outside of the U.S. until you have received your new STEM EAD.)
3. Valid passport.
4. Valid F-1 visa page (if you are traveling to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days and not applying for a visa while there, you may be able to travel with an expired visa - ask an advisor for details).
5. Documentation or letter from your STEM OPT employer on official letterhead confirming that you are working for them on OPT. Note that this MUST be the same employer that you have reported to GEO and that we have entered in SEVIS. This employer should be listed on pg. 2 of your I-20.

Below is a list of documents F-2 dependents must have to reenter the US if they are traveling without the student:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by the International Advisor at UNM within the last six months.
2. Copy of the F-1 student (spouse/parent) SEVIS Form I-20 showing authorized STEM OPT.
3. Copy of the F-1 student’s Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
4. Valid passport.
5. Valid F-2 visa page (if you are traveling to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days and not applying for a visa while there, you may be able to travel with an expired visa - ask an advisor for details).
6. Documentation or letter from the F-1 student’s OPT employer, showing that the F-1 student is working on OPT. Note that this MUST be the same employer that they have reported to GEO and that we have entered in SEVIS. This employer should be listed on pg. 2 of your I-20.

Remember: If you do not have all of these documents you should not travel internationally or you risk not being able to reenter the U.S. to participate in STEM OPT. Traveling outside the U.S. is not recommended if your F-1 visa has expired and a new one is required to reenter the US. Consult with an International Advisor when contemplating travel outside the US and reentering to continue OPT.

I have read and understand my responsibilities as outlined above.

NAME (Print)	SIGNATURE	DATE
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Personal Information:

Current Residential Address: _____

Permanent (non-UNM) email address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Employment Information:

Employer name as listed in E-verify: _____

Employer E-verify number: _____