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F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING
<u>STEM EXTENSION</u>

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/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf or on your I-20 under "Major I."
- Proof of the degree awarded or transcripts 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 all but dissertation or thesis. 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.
- You must have a current 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 on the I-765 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 the12 month period of OPT 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**. below to iadvisor@unm.edu
- ❑ Set up a phone appointment with an international advisor by calling 505-277-4032 **after all your documents have been scanned and emailed to iadvisor@unm.edu**

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 a social security number if you do not already have one. If you do not have a social security number, or if you have a social security card which is marked "not valid for employment," take your passport, I-94 Departure Record, I-20, employer letter, and your EAD card to the office of Social Security Administration and apply for a new Social Security card. Note that your number will remain the same if you already had one, but the notation on the card should change to indicate that employment is valid **with** authorization.

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. If you have additional questions, contact GEO.

STEP 2: Scan and email all information listed below to iadvisor@unm.edu **before** making an appointment with a GEO advisor
    a) 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 one-year reporting date.)
    b) Your most current I-94 (you can usually print this at www.cbp.gov/i94)
    c) A completed STEM OPT Student Responsibilities Contract (included in this handout; read carefully before signing it).
    d) A completed I-765 Form, Application for Employment Authorization, which can be found at: https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765.pdf (see SAMPLE I-765 included below).
        • *If you have ever worked on CPT during your program, a SEVIS screen shot (from GEO) with all previous CPT work authorization listed. (On the I-765, on page 7 in item 3.d. enter "See attached SEVIS CPT employment screen shot for proof of prior work authorization(s)." (You will receive this screen shot with your I-20 from GEO after your OPT appointment if you did CPT.)
    e) A completed G-1145 Form, E Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance, which can be found at: http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf
    (*Note: Items a and c are submitted to GEO, but are not included in your application for USCIS.)

STEP 3: **Make an Appointment with an International Advisor within 90 days before your current OPT expiration date.**
After you have gathered all of your documents and scanned and emailed them to GEO, call the GEO front office at 277-4032 or come in person to make an appointment.

STEP 4: **Attend the Appointment by telephone or in person with an International Advisor at GEO and provide them with a mailing address to have your STEM OPT I-20 sent to you** after your appointment **or** request to pick up the new STEM OPT I-20 at our front office.

STEP 5: **Complete the USCIS Application Materials.** Once you have received the new STEM OPT I-20 with the recommendation, you will need to put the rest of the application together. Application contents are the following:

WHAT TO SEND TO USCIS (exactly in this order):
- A $410 check payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. USCIS will reject applications with an incorrect fee.
- Two passport photos secured in an envelope and attached to the application. Print your name (lightly) and your admission number (I-94 number) on the back of each photo.
- A cover letter listing the contents of your application and the request you are making (sample is included in this handout).
- An original G-1145 form (in order to be notified by USCIS of the status of your application via email or text message).
- An original I-765 form with the employer's name, as listed in E-Verify, and the employer's E-Verify client identification number.
- Copy of the new I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation (**remember to sign the original I-20 before making a copy**).
- Copy of the degree awarded to you in the qualifying academic STEM field or a copy of your unofficial transcripts confirming your STEM academic field.
- Copy of your I-94 (front and back if you have a note card version).
- Copy of your US visa page (located in your passport).
- Copy of the most recent I.D. page(s) of your passport (those which contain the picture, number, and expiration date).

- ❑ Copies of **both sides** of previously issued EAD card(s).
- ❑ If you have ever worked on CPT during your program, a SEVIS screen shot (from GEO) with all previous CPT work authorization listed. (On the I-765, on page 7 in item 3.d. enter "See attached SEVIS CPT employment screen shot for proof of prior work authorization(s)." (You will receive this screen shot with your I-20 from GEO after your OPT appointment if you did CPT.)

STEP 6:   **Copy the entire application packet and mail to USCIS.**
After you have compiled the entire application, make a copy for your files. Organize the materials as neatly as possible and put them in a large mailing envelope. The address you mail your application to depends on which state you are residing in. Please check: https://www.uscis.gov/forms/forms-information/uscis-phoenix-and-dallas-lockbox-facilities for the address you should mail your application to. Send all of the above items to the correct address **within 20 days** of receiving the GEO advisor's recommendation on your STEM OPT I-20.

If sending your application via USPS, we recommend that you send the application via **US certified mail "return-receipt requested"** so that you have proof of delivery. If you are using the GEO address for the STEM OPT application, please write your name on the green certified mail receipt (PS Form 3811), which you place on the back of the envelope so that we can contact you when it is returned by USCIS.

STEP 7:   **Wait for the EAD card.**
Within 4–6 weeks of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard "notice of action" stating that USCIS has received the application. If you do not get this letter within 6 weeks of mailing your application, contact an advisor for more information. The international advisor at GEO can assess your situation and advise you thereafter. The case number in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to view the USCIS website at http://uscis.gov to check on your case status. You may continue working using your standard OPT card 180 days beyond the expiration date until you receive your STEM OPT card.

STEP 8:   **Provide GEO a copy of your EAD card and report your employment.**
Once you have received your EAD card, your must provide our office a copy. You can do so via email at iadvisor@unm.edu, or you can drop off a copy in person.

REMEMBER:
- **STEM OPT 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. Students should not consider their changes received unless they receive a confirmation e-mail.**
- **You must report changes of address to GEO during your entire STEM OPT period.**
- **You must report employer name and address (including changes in employment and unemployment) to GEO for the entire duration of OPT.**
- **Students who receive a 24-month OPT STEM extension are allowed a total of 150 days of unemployment over their entire STEM OPT period.**
- **Students with approved OPT STEM 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 date of extension in order to maintain their legal F-1 status.**
- **Students with approved 24 month OPT STEM extensions must submit a new completed form I-983 to GEO at the one-year point (12 months) of the OPT STEM authorization. Failure to do so will result in termination of the STEM OPT authorization!**
- **STEM OPT permission is automatically terminated if you transfer to another school or you start studying at another educational level.**
- **Students must inform GEO of a change of visa status or permanent departure from the U.S.**
- **You may continue to work if you have received a notice of receipt of your STEM OPT application but it has not been approved yet.**
- **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 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 will have the STEM OPT and F1 status automatically terminated by DHS.

Because failure to comply with these requirements will mean loss of legal status in the US, it is essential that you understand these reporting responsibilities. This form lists the specific information you must report to an international advisor at the Global Education Office (GEO) while on STEM OPT in order to maintain legal student status. To report this information, you must email iadvisor@unm.edu and 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 will "check in" with GEO (via iadvisor@unm.edu with an e-mail titled "STEM OPT validation") every six months during the STEM OPT extension from the start date listed on your new STEM OPT card. You must report this information directly to iadvisor@unm.edu and GEO must report it to SEVIS:

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. All updated OPT I-20's will be mailed to this address if you do not indicate specific instructions on what to do with your updated I-20. If this address is the same as above, just state "Same as above".
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 #. 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 the 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 150 days of unemployment (counted from the start of your total OPT period), or if you transfer to another school.
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 extension.**

Updated I-20's will be automatically mailed to your mailing address within 5 business days, unless you indicate other instructions to receive your updated I-20.

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 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 EAD card.)
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 would be listed on pg. 3 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 card).
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 you have reported to GEO and that we have entered in SEVIS. This employer would be listed on pg. 3 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 to participate in STEM OPT. Traveling outside the US 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**

Personal Information:

Current Residential Address: _____

_____

Permanent (non-UNM) email address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Revised 6/27/2019

Mo/day, 201X

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
P.O. Box 660867 (this address will be different if applicant is not in New Mexico)
Dallas TX 75266

RE: **Application for STEM Employment Authorization Document (Form I-765)**
    Applicant Name: XXXX, Xxxxxx
    SEVIS ID #: N00XXXXXXXX
    I-94 Number: XXXXXXXXX

Dear CIS Officer:

I am applying for a 24 month STEM OPT extension beginning on XXXX and ending on XXXX. I am seeking your authorization to continue practical training related to my STEM degree and field of study.

I've included the following documents in support of this application:

- ❑ A $410 check payable to "U.S Department of Homeland Security"
- ❑ Two passport photos
- ❑ This cover letter
- ❑ An original G-1145 form
- ❑ An I-765 form
- ❑ (If you ever worked on CPT, include) SEVIS screen shot with all previous CPT work authorization listed
- ❑ Copy of the new I-20 with 24 month STEM OPT recommendation
- ❑ Copy of the degree or transcripts awarded in STEM field
- ❑ Copy of I-94
- ❑ Copy of US visa stamp
- ❑ Copy of the most recent I.D. page(s) of passport
- ❑ Copies of both sides of previously issued EAD cards

I have completed the I-765 application form to the best of my ability. As you review my request, I humbly ask for your cooperation in making the following assumptions:

- Any field left blank on the I-765 form is a field that does not apply to me. I am certifying by my signature below and by my signature on the I-765 application that I have completed every field that is applicable to me and my history.
- If I have participated in practical training, or studied in the US in the past, that I have done my best to accurately recall all pertinent details and have completed part 6 to the best of this recollection. Any omission of information is therefore accidental, and I ask that USCIS consider issuing an RFE to clear up any questions you may have.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my application. I look forward to receiving approval for OPT in the near future.

Sincerely,
First and last name

STEM EXTENSION CHECKLIST

<u>For GEO</u>

❑   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 (Keep a copy of this as you will have to submit one for each employer again on your one-year reporting date.)

❑   A completed <u>STEM OPT Student Responsibilities Contract</u> (included in this handout; read before signing it)

<u>For application to USCIS</u>

❑ A $410 check payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security." (USCIS will reject applications with an incorrect application fee.)

❑ Two passport photos secured in an envelope and attached to the application. Print your name (lightly in pen) and your admission number (I-94 number) on the back of each photo.

❑ A cover letter listing the contents of your application and the request you are making (sample included in this handout).

❑ An original G-1145 form in order to be notified by USCIS of the status of your application via email or text message.

❑ An original I-765 form with the employer's name, as listed in E-Verify, and the employer's E-Verify client identification number.

     ❑ If you have ever worked on CPT during your program, a SEVIS screen shot (from GEO) with all previous CPT work authorization listed. (On the I-765, on page 7 in item **3.d.** enter "*See attached SEVIS CPT employment screen shot for proof of prior work authorization(s).*" (You will receive this screen shot with your I-20 from GEO after your OPT appointment if you did CPT.)

❑ Copy of the new I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation (issued by your international advisor after your STEM OPT session; **remember to sign the original I-20 before making a copy**).

❑ Copy of the degree awarded to you in the qualifying academic STEM field **or** a copy of your unofficial transcripts confirming your STEM academic field.

❑ Copy of your I-94 (front and back if you have a note card version).

❑ Copy of your US visa page (located in your passport).

❑ Copy of the most recent I.D. page(s) of your passport (those which contain the picture, number, and expiration date).

❑ Copies of **both sides** of previously issued EAD card(s).