



24 Month Extension of Optional Practical Training

International Student Services

Office of Admissions and Records

Regulatory changes have provided a 24-month extension to the period of authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT) for certain students. This extension is in addition to the 12-month initial period of OPT authorization, allowing for a total of 36 months of OPT. The following information pertains to the application procedures and eligibility requirements for the 24-month OPT extension only. Students who are applying for their initial period of OPT should follow the application procedures for the 12-month initial OPT period.

Eligibility Requirements

- ✓ Student must be in valid F-1 status on Optional Practical Training.
- ✓ Student must have received a degree in a STEM field, as indicated on the I-20.
- ✓ OPT employment must be directly related to the field of study. No volunteer work is allowed.
- ✓ Student must be currently employed by an E-verify employer for 20 hours or more per week.
- ✓ OPT application must be properly filed and receipted by United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) before the completion of the initial 12-month OPT period.
- ✓ Each period of OPT requested requires a recommendation from a Designated School Official (DSO) made in SEVIS, a completed I-765, and a required fee to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.

Classification of STEM Degrees

USCIS has limited the OPT extension to graduates who have degrees in and are working in fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, as designated on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List. That list contains the selected STEM fields and identifies them by the field's CIP Code. The CIP code that corresponds to students' majors must be on that list for them to qualify for the extension. The list of HSC STEM CIP Codes is attached at the end of this document. More information on CIP codes can be found at www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm

Immigration Status While on OPT

Although students on OPT students will no longer be pursuing coursework, they are still considered by the U.S. government to be in F-1 student visa status under the authority of the OU Health Sciences Center. For this reason, students need to report the following events to OUHSC so their SEVIS record may be maintained properly:

- ✓ *Within 10 days of any address changes*
- ✓ *Within 10 days of any change in employment* (change in employer, change in employer's address, losing a job, finding a job, adding a second job, etc.)
- ✓ Upon change of immigration status
- ✓ Upon enrolling in a new educational program
- ✓ Periodically throughout the period of OPT (6 month and 1 year)
- ✓ Fill out form to update information

Immigration regulations specify that students are required to report to the DSOs at their institution every 6 months for the duration of their extensions; even if there has been no change to their record. In order to facilitate this process, OUHSC DSOs will contact all OPT recipients on a regular basis to request status verification. Students must respond to the DSOs every time to satisfy their reporting requirements. Regulations specify that **failure to report to DSOs in a timely manner is a violation of your immigration status and may result in the loss of your OPT!**

Students whose status has been extended to bridge the “cap-gap” between the end of their OPT and the beginning of their authorized H-1b period are still considered to be in F-1 status, and must therefore comply with all reporting requirements until the H-1b period begins.

Important Notes

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Upon approval of your OPT application, USCIS will issue you a new form I-766 Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

When to apply

Students may apply for the OPT extension as early as 90 days prior to the end of their initial period of OPT. OPT extension applications must be received and receipted by USCIS prior to the last day of the initial OPT period. Processing times can vary but typically range between 60 – 90 days.

Dates

The additional OPT period will start immediately after the end of the initial OPT period, regardless of the date of adjudication. Unlike the initial period of OPT, students who have timely filed an OPT extension application will have their employment authorization automatically extended while their OPT extension application is pending.

You may only work until the end date listed on your EAD card with one exception:

You have applied and received approval for a change of status to H-1b, which must start at the beginning of the next fiscal year (October 1). In this case, immigration regulations provide employment authorization during the time between the end of your authorized OPT and the beginning of your approved H-1b status. Students whose H-1b application is denied will have a 60 day grace period from the date of denial in which to depart the U.S. or otherwise maintain valid status.

Do not assume your employment authorization has been automatically extended! You must verify your status with a DSO at OUHSC to receive a new I-20 indicating the extension. Working beyond the period for which you are authorized is a violation of your immigration status!

OPT is automatically terminated when a student begins a new program of study or when there is a change in a level of study.

Upon the completion of the OPT period, students have a 60 day grace period in which to depart the U.S., transfer to another educational program, or change to a different immigration status.

Application Procedures

Step 1

Verify that your employer is an E-Verify employer, and complete the I-983 with them. Collect the following information for your application: employer’s name, address, and E-Verify number.

Step 2

Bring, scan, or mail copies of the following documents to International Student Services in the Office of Admissions and Records to have the OPT recommendation made in SEVIS:

- ✓ Form I-20 processed with STEM extension (DSO will provide)
- ✓ Passport (must be valid at least 6 months in the future)
- ✓ Visa
- ✓ Form I-94 (front and back)
- ✓ Employer Letter listing E-Verify number-I-983 Form
- ✓ Prior EAD cards
- ✓ Completed form I-765
 - Item 16 should indicate (c) (3) (C) as the eligibility code for the STEM extension
 - Item 17 must include your primary employer’s information
- ✓ Two passport sized photos
- ✓ Required application fee – a check or money order for \$380 (subject to change) made payable to "Department of Homeland Security"

Step 3

A DSO will recommend OPT in SEVIS and issue another I-20 noting the OPT extension. The DSO will assist the student with the assembly of all documentation, but it is the student's responsibility to mail this information. The EAD card will be mailed to OUHSC.

Step 4

Your EAD card will be mailed to the Office of Admissions and Records, who will forward it to you upon receipt. It is recommended that you include a prepaid FedEx envelope for mailing your EAD card.

HSC degrees eligible for the 17 Month Extension of OPT are:

Major	Degree Name	Major Code	CIP Code
Biochemistry	MS, PhD	0429D, 0429M, 0429R	26.0210
Biological Psychology	MS, PhD	0434M, 0434R	30.1001
Biostatistics	MS, PhD, MPH, DrPH	1226M, 1226R, 1226N, 1226S, 1226D	26.1102
Cell Biology	MS, PhD	0417D, 0417M, 0417R	26.0401
Epidemiology	MS, PhD, MPH, DrPH	1226P, 1226T, 1226Q, 1226U	26.1309
Microbiology & Immunology	MS, PhD	0430D, 0430M, 0430R	26.0503
Neuroscience	MS, PhD	0425D, 0425M, 0425R	26.1501
Nutritional Sciences	BSNS, BSCLD, MS	1228A, 1228B, 1228C, 1228D, 1228M, 1228N, 1228P, 1228Q	26.0609 30.1901
Pathology	MS, PhD	0431D, 0431M, 0431R	26.0910
Pharmaceutical Sciences	MS, PhD	1211DA, 1211M, 1211R	51.2003
Pharmacology	MS, PhD	0432M, 0432R	51.2003
Physiology	MS, PhD	0433D, 0433M, 0433R	26.0901
Radiological Sciences	MS, PhD	0435M, 0435R	26.0209

The complete list of STEM eligible degrees can be found at: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>



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Requirements during OPT Extension

Read the following information carefully and let a DSO know if you have any questions about the following requirements. This form must be signed and returned before a new I-20 recommending an OPT extension will be issued.

- ✓ OPT authorization is date-specific. Beginning employment prior to the authorization date or continuing employment after the end date of the authorization will be considered unauthorized off-campus employment and the student will be considered out-of-status.
- ✓ F-1 status while on OPT is employment-based. Regulations allow students to have gaps in employment of no more than 90 days during the initial 12 month OPT period or 150 aggregate days for students who have received the 24-month extension. Further periods of unemployment may result in the termination of your status. All periods of unemployment must be reported to a DSO at OUHSC.
- ✓ OPT employment must be in the area of study as listed in SEVIS and printed on the I-20. Students who have double majors may seek employment in either area of study. To qualify for the extension, the area of study must be in a STEM field. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the employment is in a field related to his/her area of study, as indicated on the I-20. If immigration officials determine that a student's employment is unrelated to the field of study, it may result in a loss of the student's status.
- ✓ Students who are still on their initial period of OPT and have filed an application for an extension with USCIS prior to the end of their authorized period of OPT will have their period of employment authorization automatically extended until their extension application is adjudicated. If the extension is approved, the period of employment will begin immediately after the initial period expires, regardless of the date of adjudication. If the extension is denied, the student will have a 60 day grace period to prepare for departure, beginning on the date of denial.
- ✓ OPT is not employer specific. You may change employers at will during your period of OPT; however, you must report all changes in employment to a DSO within 48 hours of the change. These changes include the name and address of your employer, addition of a second employer, loss of employment, change of employer, periods of unemployment, etc. Failure to do so may result in the loss of your status as an F-1 student pursuing OPT.
- ✓ If you choose to change employers, the new employer must be an E-Verify employer. If you change to an employer that does not participate in E-Verify, your OPT status will cease. This requirement expires only to the OPT extension period, not the initial OPT period.
- ✓ If you choose to hold two jobs, both employers must participate in E-Verify. Working for an employer that does not participate in E-Verify during the period of the STEM extension will result in loss of status.

- ✓ Students remain in F-1 status for the duration of their OPT and during the cap-gap period, and are required to report the changes or updates to the following to a DSO:
 - Address
 - Phone number
 - E-mail address
 - Legal name
 - Immigration status
 - Employer name
 - Employer address
 - Employment status
 - Addition or termination of secondary employment
 - Loss of employment
 - All dates of unemployment

- ✓ Regulations require students to report to DSOs every 6 months for the duration of the 24-month extension in order to verify their status, regardless of whether or not there has been any change. In order to facilitate this, the OUHSC ISS office will contact all students on OPT regularly to request verification of status. It is the student's responsibility to respond to these requests in addition to reporting other changes as outlined above. Failure to do so may result in loss of immigration status.

- ✓ F-1 visa holders on OPT must receive travel authorization from a DSO prior to travel for the duration of the OPT period. During the period of OPT, the DSO endorsement on page 3 of the I-20 is only valid for 6 months, unlike the one year period of validity during the course of study. Students should receive a travel endorsement prior to each period of travel outside the U.S. Travel while on OPT is somewhat riskier than travel during the field of study. Students are encouraged to discuss risk factors with a DSO prior to any travel abroad while on OPT.

For more information or to make required reports to the DSO, contact:

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 1105 N. Stonewall Avenue,
 Robert M. Bird Library, Room 121
 Oklahoma City, OK 73117
 Phone: (405) 271-2359
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Student Certification

I have read and understand the above requirements pertaining to my period of authorized OPT. I agree to comply with all reporting requirements associated with my period of authorized OPT and to ensure that the International Student Services office at OUHSC has current contact information for me at all times so they may keep me up-to-date with regulatory updates and reporting requirements. I understand that failure to comply with reporting requirements may result in the loss of my status as an F-1 non-immigrant visa holder and authorization for Optional Practical Training.

 Signature

 Print name

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