STEM OPT

An F-1 student who meets certain qualifications may qualify for a 24-month STEM OPT extension.[**[27]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-27) An F-1 student approved for STEM OPT may not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during a total OPT period. This includes the post-completion OPT period and subsequent 24-month STEM OPT extension period.[**[28]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-28)

F-1 students with a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, or doctorate degree in a field with a Department of Education’s Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code that appears on the DHS [STEM Designated Degree Program List (PDF)](https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf)[**[29]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-29) may apply to USCIS for authorization for a 24-month OPT extension (STEM OPT) by properly filing a [Form I-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765), after obtaining the DSO’s recommendation. This 24-month extension can only be granted once per qualifying degree. If the F-1 students do not fully use the extension, they are ineligible for any subsequent STEM extension.

F-1 students may submit a properly filed [Form I-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) up to 90 days before the expiration of the F-1 student’s current post-completion OPT EAD and no more than 60 days after their DSO enters the STEM OPT recommendation into SEVIS.

Students who have timely and properly filed a [Form I-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) for the 24-month OPT extension may continue working until the date of the USCIS written decision on the current Form I-765 or for up to 180 days after their current post-completion OPT expires, whichever is earlier.[**[30]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-30)

If USCIS approves the application, the F-1 student may continue working in accordance with the terms and conditions of the new EAD. If the extension is denied, employment authorization is immediately terminated and the F-1 student’s status ends in 60 days from the date of denial. However, if the application was denied because the student failed to maintain their F-1 status, they must immediately depart the United States.

Eligibility Requirements - Student

To be eligible for a STEM OPT extension, an F-1 student must:

* Have been granted OPT and currently be in a valid period of post-completion OPT;
* Have earned a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree from a school that is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency and is certified by ICE SEVP when the student submits the STEM OPT extension application;
* Not be in a multiple employer arrangement, or employed by a sole proprietorship, through a temp agency, through a consulting firm arrangement that provides labor for hire, or other similar relationships, if such arrangements are not bona-fide employer-employee relationships;
* Be employed for no less than 20 hours per week by each qualifying STEM OPT employer; and
* Complete an individualized Training Plan for STEM OPT Students ([Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983)) which identifies goals for the STEM practical training opportunity, including specific knowledge, skills, or techniques that will be imparted to the F-1 student; explains how those goals will be achieved through the work-based learning opportunity with the employer; describes a performance evaluation process; and describes methods of oversight and supervision. The Form I-983 must explain how the training is directly related to the student’s qualifying STEM degree.

Before the student’s DSO at the educational institution of the student’s most recent enrollment may recommend a 24-month OPT extension, the student must follow Form I-983 instructions, have an appropriate individual in the employer's organization sign the form, and submit Form I-983 to the DSO.

Previously Obtained STEM Degrees

To be eligible for a STEM OPT extension based on a previously earned degree, the following requirements at [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(3)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-8/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-214/subpart-A/section-214.2) and [(4)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-8/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-214/subpart-A/section-214.2) must be met:

* The prior degree must be from a U.S. educational institution that is accredited by a Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency and SEVP-certified at the time of the DSO recommendation;
* The prior degree must be on the DHS STEM Designated Degree List at the time of the DSO recommendation;
* The prior degree must have been conferred within the 10 years preceding the DSO recommendation;
* The prior degree must be directly related to the practical training opportunity; and
* The student may not have previously received a STEM OPT extension based on the prior degree.

For example, if the student is currently participating in OPT based on completion of a non-STEM master’s degree, but previously received a bachelor’s degree in a field that appears on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List at the time of the DSO recommendation, the student may be able to apply for a STEM OPT extension based on the bachelor’s degree as long as it is from an accredited U.S. college or university and the OPT employment opportunity is directly related to the bachelor’s STEM degree.

Future STEM Degrees

If, in the future, an F-1 student enrolls in a new academic program and earns another qualifying STEM degree at a higher educational level, the student may be eligible for one additional 24-month STEM OPT extension, for a total of two lifetime STEM OPT extensions.

For example, if the student receives a 24-month STEM OPT extension based on a qualifying bachelor’s degree and the student later earns a qualifying STEM master’s degree, the student may apply for an additional 24-month STEM OPT extension based on the qualifying master’s degree.

Eligibility Requirements-Employer

An employer who wants to provide a practical training opportunity to a STEM OPT F-1 student during the student’s extension must:

* Be enrolled in E-Verify, as evidenced by either a valid E-Verify company identification number or, if the employer is using an employer agent to create its E-Verify cases, a valid E-Verify client company identification number;[**[31]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-31)
* Remain a participant in good standing with E-Verify, as determined by USCIS;[**[32]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-32)
* Have a valid Employer Identification Number issued by the Internal Revenue Service for tax purposes;[**[33]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-33)
* Report material changes of the F-1 student’s employment by submitting a modified [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983) to the DSO at the earliest available opportunity;[**[34]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-34)
* Implement a formal training program to augment the F-1 student’s academic learning through practical experience;[**[35]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-35)
* Provide an OPT opportunity that is commensurate with those of similarly situated U.S. workers in duties, hours, and compensation;[**[36]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-36) and
* If applicable, report the F-1 student’s termination of employment or departure to the DSO within 5 business days.[**[37]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-37)

To ensure the integrity of the program and provide safeguards for U.S. workers, any employer wishing to employ a student participating in the STEM OPT extension program must ensure that:

* The employer will maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the F-1 student;[**[38]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-38)
* The employer has sufficient resources and personnel available to provide appropriate training in connection with the specified opportunity at the location or locations specified in the [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983);[**[39]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-39)
* The F-1 student will not replace a full or part-time, temporary, or permanent U.S. worker;[**[40]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-40) and
* The training opportunity will assist the F-1 student in attaining the student’s training goals.[**[41]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-41)

To employ a STEM OPT F-1 student, an employer must have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student.[**[42]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-42) The employer must attest to this fact by signing the [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983). The employer that signs the Form I-983 must be the same entity that provides the practical training experience to the student.[**[43]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-43)

To establish a bona fide relationship, the employer may not be the F-1 student’s employer in name only, nor may the F-1 student work for the employer on a volunteer basis.[**[44]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-44)

An employer must have sufficient resources and trained or supervisory personnel available to provide appropriate training in connection with the specified training opportunity. These personnel must be located where the F-1 student’s practical training experience will take place, as specified in the Form I-983.

The personnel who may provide and supervise the training experience may be either employees of the employer, or contractors whom the employer has directly retained to provide services to the employer. However, employees or contractors of the employer’s clients or customers may not provide and supervise the training experience of the STEM OPT F-1 student. An F-1 student with OPT or a STEM OPT extension (who is undergoing training in their own right) is never considered qualified to train another F-1 student with a STEM OPT extension.

Employers may rely on their existing training programs or policies to satisfy the performance evaluation, oversight, and supervision requirements, but the F-1 student’s Form I-983 must nevertheless be customized for the individual F-1 student. Every Form I-983 must describe the direct relationship between the STEM OPT opportunity and the F-1 student’s qualifying STEM degree, as well as the relationship between the STEM OPT opportunity and the F-1 student’s goals and objectives for work-based learning.

A STEM OPT employer may not assign, or otherwise delegate its training responsibilities to a non-employer third party (for example, a client or customer of the employer, employees of the client or customer, or contractors of the client or customer).

DHS, at its discretion, may conduct a site visit of any STEM OPT employer to ensure that the employer possesses and maintains the ability, personnel, and resources to provide structured and guided work-based learning experiences consistent with the information provided on Form I-983.[**[45]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-45)

During a site visit, DHS may verify that the employer that signed the Form I-983 is the same entity that is providing the practical training experience to the F-1 student and ensure compliance.

For DHS to effectively conduct these site visits as part of its oversight responsibilities, it is important that employers report any change in an F-1 student’s employment address. As indicated above and further explained below,[**[46]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-46) the employer and F-1 student must report such a material change by submitting a modified Form I-983 to the DSO at the earliest available opportunity.

Staffing and temporary agencies and consulting firms may employ F-1 students under the STEM OPT program if they will be the entity that provides the practical training experience to the F-1 student and have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the F-1 student.

F-1 students may engage in a training experience that takes place at a site other than the employer’s principal place of business as long as all of the training obligations are met, including that the employer has and maintains a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student.

Certain types of arrangements, including multiple employer arrangements, sole proprietorships, employment through temp agencies, employment through consulting firm arrangements that provide labor for hire, and other similar relationships may not be able to demonstrate a bona fide employer-employee relationship and, therefore, may not meet the requirements of the STEM OPT extension.

F-1 students seeking STEM OPT extensions may be employed by new start-up businesses so long as all regulatory requirements are met, including that the employer adheres to the training plan requirements, remains in good standing with E-Verify, will provide compensation to the STEM OPT student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers, and has the resources to comply with the proposed training plan.[**[47]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-47) For instance, alternative compensation may be allowed during a STEM OPT extension as long as the F-1 student can show that they are a bona fide employee and that their compensation, including any ownership interest in the employer entity (such as stock options), is commensurate with the compensation provided to other similarly situated U.S. workers.[**[48]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-48)

As part of the STEM OPT extension, employers must complete the appropriate parts of [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983). In this form, employers attest that:

* They have enough resources and trained personnel available to appropriately train the F-1 student;
* The F-1 student will not replace a full or part-time, temporary, or permanent U.S. worker; and
* Working for them will help the F-1 student attain their training objectives.

DHS reviews on a case-by-case basis whether the F-1 student will be a bona fide employee of the employer signing the training plan and verify that the employer that signs the training plan is the same entity that employs the F-1 student and provides the practical training experience.[**[49]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-49)

Validity Period

If the F-1 student establishes eligibility, DHS grants the STEM OPT 24-month extension for a fixed and uninterrupted period of 24 consecutive months.

The STEM OPT extension begins the day after the initial post-completion OPT expires, not on the date of adjudication, and ends 24 months thereafter, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.[**[50]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-50) Filing during the cap-gap extension does not change the STEM OPT extension start date. STEM OPT is not extended by periods of part-time employment or unemployment.

The 14-month limit on completing post-completion OPT does not apply to the STEM OPT extension.[**[51]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-51)

If the [Form I-765](https://www.uscis.gov/i-765) for the STEM OPT extension is denied and the student’s post-completion OPT EAD is expired, OPT employment authorization ends on the date of the decision and the student’s F-1 status ends 60 days after the date of denial. If the Form I-765 for the STEM OPT extension is denied and the student’s post-completion OPT EAD is unexpired, the student will remain employment authorized until the expiration date of the EAD.

If the F-1 student’s degree area is changed from a non-STEM degree to a STEM degree during the last semester, the adjudicating officer may, on a case-by-case basis, request evidence to support the basis of the change.

Evaluation Requirement

An F-1 student on a STEM OPT extension must submit a self-evaluation of the student’s progress toward the training goals described in the [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983).[**[52]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-52) All required evaluations must be completed prior to the conclusion of a STEM practical training opportunity, and the F-1 student and an appropriate individual in the employer’s organization must sign each evaluation to attest to its accuracy. All STEM practical training opportunities require an initial evaluation within 12 months of the approved starting date on the EAD granted pursuant to the F-1 student’s 24-month OPT extension application, and a concluding evaluation. The F-1 student is responsible for ensuring the DSO receives the F-1 student’s 12-month evaluation and final evaluation no later than 10 days following the conclusion of the reporting period or conclusion of the student’s practical training opportunity, respectively.

Training Plan Modifications

An F-1 student on a STEM OPT extension also must:

* Submit a [Form I-983](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/for-students/students-and-the-form-i-983) to the student's DSO within 10 days of beginning a new practical training opportunity with a new employer during the student's 24-month OPT extension and subsequently obtain a new DSO recommendation;
* Sign a modified Form I-983 reflecting any material changes or deviations from the training plan described in the Form I-983; and
* Ensure that that the modified Form I-983 is submitted to the F-1 student’s DSO at the earliest available opportunity.[**[53]**](https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5#footnote-53)

## **Students and the Form I-983**

Before applying to USCIS for a STEM OPT extension, a STEM OPT student must download, complete, sign and submit the [Form I-983](https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf) to their DSO. The STEM OPT student and their prospective employer must work together to complete this form. STEM OPT students and their employers are subject to the terms of the 24-month STEM OPT extension regulations and [Form I-983 instructions](https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983Instructions.pdf), effective as of the start date requested for STEM OPT, as indicated on the form.

Students are responsible for facilitating the completion of this form, submitting it with their STEM OPT application and returning it to their DSO, who will keep it in the student’s record. DHS maintains the discretion to request and review all documentation for eligibility concerns.

The STEM OPT student must complete Section 1 of the Form I-983 and work with their prospective employer to complete Sections 2-6. For more information about these sections, please visit the [Employers and the Form I-983 resource page](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-and-the-form-i-983). STEM OPT students are also responsible for completing annual self-evaluations, described below.

**Overview of Form I-983 Section 1**

The STEM OPT student is responsible for completing Section 1 of the Form I-983. Section 1 requires information about both STEM OPT students and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified schools they attend.

In Section 1, STEM OPT students must include their full name (surname/primary name/given name) exactly as it appears on their [Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,”](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/student-forms?form=Forms_I-20) and as it appears in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The student must also provide their current SEVIS ID number, even if the student earned the qualifying degree on a previously issued SEVIS ID number.

In addition to providing information about both their SEVP-certified school and qualifying STEM degree on the Form I-983, STEM OPT students must also document the time period for which they are applying to be authorized to work on STEM OPT, regardless if the authorized dates match the actual training dates.

It is important to note, the STEM OPT extension may not end more than 24 months after the scheduled termination of the student’s EAD for the current post-completion OPT. For students on regular OPT and applying for their STEM OPT extension, this start date should be the day after your current 12-month OPT ends. For more information about applying for STEM OPT, please visit the [USCIS website](https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-opt).

**SEVP-Certified School Information for Section 1**

Students need to work with their DSO to ensure they properly capture information about the SEVP-certified schools they attended on the Form I-983.

The following information must be captured on the form:

**Name of the school recommending STEM OPT.**

This is the name of the student’s most recently enrolled SEVP-certified school. This school should be the same one that employs the DSO responsible for managing the student’s record and [recommending STEM OPT](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/dsos-recommending-students-for-the-stem-opt-extension).

**Name of school where the student’s STEM degree was earned.**

This is the name of the SEVP-certified school from which the student earned their qualifying STEM degree. Please note, this may or may not be the same as the school recommending the STEM OPT if the student is using a prior STEM degree. Please visit our [student eligibility requirements page](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-determining-stem-opt-extension-eligibility) for information about this topic.

**SEVIS school code for the SEVP-certified school that is recommending the student’s STEM OPT (including the three-digit suffix).**

Students should work with their DSO to ensure they have the correct SEVIS school code. Remember, this code is for the SEVP-certified school where the student was most recently enrolled, and may not be the same as the school where the student earned their qualifying STEM degree.

**DSO’s contact information, including the school official’s full name, telephone number and email address.**

This information must be for the DSO who is submitting the STEM OPT recommendation and is responsible for maintaining the student’s record (including processing the completed and signed Form I-983).

**Qualifying STEM Degree Information for Section 1**

In addition, students need to properly capture information about their academic history in STEM on the Form I-983.

The following information must be captured on the form:

**Student’s major that qualifies him or her for the STEM OPT extension, as well as the degree’s CIP code.**

Visit the [Eligible CIP Codes for the STEM OPT Extension page](http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf) for a complete list and explanation of the STEM OPT extension qualifying degrees.

**Degree level for which the student is basing the STEM OPT extension, for example, if this application is using a bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate degree.**

Please note, only students who have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher in a STEM field are eligible for the STEM OPT extension. For more information about STEM OPT qualifiers and degrees, please visit the [STEM OPT Extension Overview resource page](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-extension-overview).

**Date the student earned the qualifying STEM degree.**

Please note, students are only eligible to apply for a STEM OPT extension on an existing period of post-completion practical training.

**Whether this STEM OPT extension is based on a prior degree.**

If it is, this means that the student’s STEM OPT extension application is not based on the same degree the student is currently using to complete post-completion OPT. If it is not, this means that the student is applying for the STEM OPT extension based on their most recently obtained degree and current post-completion OPT opportunity. For more information about the rules and regulations associated with using a prior degree to qualify for the STEM OPT extension, please visit our [student eligibility resource page](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-determining-stem-opt-extension-eligibility).

**Evaluation of Student Progress**

The student must complete the first “Evaluation of Student Progress” portion of the Form I-983, “Training Plan for STEM OPT Students” within 12 months of the listed STEM OPT start date. At the end of the STEM OPT extension, a student must conduct a second, final assessment.

The student must submit the 12-month and final evaluations no later than 10 days following the conclusion of the appropriate reporting period. If an opportunity ends early the student must submit the final evaluation within 10 days following the conclusion of the opportunity. When a student changes employers, they must submit their final Form I-983 self-evaluation within 10 days of ending employment with their current employer. Not submitting a final evaluation would be a violation of the terms of the Form I-983 and may jeopardize the student’s nonimmigrant status.

To complete these self-evaluations, the student needs to specify the evaluation date range (i.e., the timeline considered during the evaluation) and:

* Assess their overall performance using the measures identified in the agreed upon training plan.
* Evaluate their success in applying and acquiring the new knowledge, skills and competencies that were previously identified in the plan.
* Discuss accomplishments, successful projects, overall contributions, etc., that occurred during the specified review period.
* Address whether there are any modifications to the objectives and goals for projects or new areas for skill and competency development.

Once the evaluations are complete, the student must collect signatures from their employer and return the form to their DSO, who will keep it in the student’s student record. The student submits the first signed assessment to their DSO within 12 months of the start date listed on the form. The student needs 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.

For more information about the Form I-983 and the formal training plan requirement for STEM OPT extension, visit the [Form I-983 Overview](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview).

MORE INFO:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/additional-resources/stem-opt-extension-overview>

<https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-2-part-f-chapter-5>