International Studies Office
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Advising Hours: Monday-Thursday
9AM-12Noon & 1-4PM

F-1 OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING – 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

You will file one I-20 with the U.S. government, as instructed below, and use the second I-20 to document your continued eligibility for F-1 status. **Please sign and date both I-20 Forms.** The next step is for you to mail the completed application for employment authorization with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services via FedEx or UPS. You will **not** make a personal visit to the USCIS. Please follow the instructions below very carefully.

OPT STEM APPLICATION PACKET CHECKLIST FOR USCIS

- ☐ $410 non-refundable application fee paid by personal check or money order to "**U.S. Department of Homeland Security".**

    a. For credit card payment, complete Form G-1450. Make sure the card has enough money as USCIS will reject your application if card is declined.

- ☐ Two identical color passport-size photos taken within the past 30 days. Do not reuse old photos.

    a. Write name and SEVIS number on back of photos with pencil or felt pen.

- ☐ Completed and signed Form I-765. Visit USCIS for instructions on how to complete the I-765. Make sure to use the correct version.

- ☐ One original new Form OPT STEM I-20 endorsed for OPT provided to you by the ISO.
  Don't forget to sign your OPT STEM I-20 before mailing!

- ☐ Photocopy of current OPT EAD. If you still have the approval notice (Form I-797), attach a copy as well.

- ☐ Photocopy of your diploma and official transcript showing the major and degree level that matches your eligible STEM degree.

    a. If basing application on prior degree, include an official transcript and copy of degree from the prior degree program.

- ☐ Photocopy of identification page of passport and any validity pages.

- ☐ Photocopy of latest visa. If applicable, also include any change of status documents prior to F-1.

- ☐ Print out of your I-94 OR photocopy of both sides of I-94 card.

- ☐ Photocopies of all Forms I-20 you have been issued.

OPTIONAL: Form G-1145 - Use this form to request a text message and/or email when USCIS accepts your form.

Visit USCIS to view filing location based on your mailing address. If using a Virginia mailing address, send your complete application by courier (Federal Express, USPS Priority/Express, or UPS) to:

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

FILING TIPS

- ➢ **Your OPT application must be received by USCIS within 60 days of the advisor's signature date** in the "School Attestation" section of pg. 1 of your OPT I-20 request and before the expiration of your post-completion OPT.

- ➢ Do **not** send your original passport.

- ➢ Clear **color** photocopies of your immigration documents are highly recommended.

- ➢ If you are not filing using a Virginia mailing address, I-765 filing address are available on the USCIS website.

- ➢ Keep your tracking number when mailing your OPT application.

- ➢ Use your receipt number to check your case status online.

- ➢ **The EAD will be sent to the address indicated on Form I-765. Note that the USCIS will not forward your card to a different address.**

  - o If you move from the U.S. address you entered on your I-765 and are no longer receiving mail, and have not yet obtained your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card), you must update your address information in the USCIS Online Change of Address System. For USCIS inquiries and status requests, please use the USCIS online tools, or call the National Customer Service Number at 1-800-375-5283.

REMINDERS, RULES, & RESONSIBILITIES

- ➢ The 24-month STEM OPT extension period begins on the day following the expiration of your standard post-completion OPT. If the Form I-765 is still pending as of that date, you are authorized to continue employment for up to 180 days after the expiration of the post-completion OPT.

- ➢ *If you have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment on post-completion OPT,* approval of STEM OPT adds an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days of unemployment permitted throughout the 36 months of STEM extended OPT. **Unemployment for an aggregate period of greater than 150 days during the STEM-extended OPT will result in a loss of legal status.**

- ➢ For travel abroad during post-completion STEM OPT, be prepared to present:

  - o Your EAD card (if approved) or application receipt notice (if pending approval)

  - o Proof of employment

  - o OPT STEM I-20 (Check your I-20. Travel signatures are valid for **six months**)

  - o Valid passport (at least six months beyond date of return)

  - o Valid visa

- ➢ Make sure your F-1 visa will be valid upon re-entry from foreign travel. If not, please apply for a new F-1 visa before attempting readmission to the U.S. Remember to bring your employment letter, OPT STEM EAD Card, OPT STEM Receipt Notice, valid I-20 (signed within 6 months of travel) and your valid passport (valid for six months beyond your date of return) to your appointment.

- ➢ **You must continue medical insurance coverage throughout your F-1 status including the time that you have OPT and during any grace periods.**

- ➢ If you wish to begin a new degree program, consult the ISO office to begin a change of level or transfer procedure. OPT work authorization is terminated when your SEVIS record is transferred to a new school and/or you begin a new program of study at a new degree level.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- ➢ **You must report any changes in address, employment and contact information within 10 days through the SEVP Portal.**

  - o If you wish to obtain a new OPT I-20 with your employer information, please email issp@virginia.edu.

- ➢ **Any changes in your employment must be reflected in the Form I-983 Training Plan and reported to ISO. You are required to submit the Form I-983 Self-Evaluation attested by you and your employer to ISO at the 12-month and 24-month points of your STEM OPT Extension. This is a legal requirement.**

  - o *In addition, students must confirm employment every six months to ISO at issp@virginia.edu. Ensure your information is correct in the SEVP Portal.*

- ➢ **If you will no longer continue STEM OPT,** please email our office at issp@virginia.edu so we may properly complete your F-1 SEVIS record.