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

You are required to receive an updated Form I-20 with OPT STEM issued on the 2nd page before submitting your application online at USCIS. You can obtain your OPT STEM I-20 by submitting an OPT Request on ISSP Connect.

OPT STEM APPLICATION PACKET CHECKLIST FOR USCIS

- Non-refundable application fee paid on USCIS online application.
- A color passport-sized photo taken within the last 6 months to reflect your current appearance. Do not use old photos that you previously used for your passport or visa application as they will get rejected.
  - Use the Department of State’s photo composition tool.
- Completed Form I-765 submitted through the USCIS portal. Double check you have uploaded all required documents before submitting your I-765 through USCIS.
- One original new Form I-20 endorsed for OPT STEM provided to you by the ISO. Don’t forget to sign your OPT STEM I-20 in wet blue ink before uploading to your USCIS application.
- Copy of current OPT EAD, front and back.
- Copy of your diploma and official transcript showing the major and degree level that matches your eligible STEM degree.
  - If basing application on prior degree, include an official transcript and copy of degree from the prior degree program.
- Copy of your I-94.

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.

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

➢ 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.
  - It is strongly suggested that you place an address that will be accessible at least 5 months from your date of OPT submission. If the mailing address you entered on your I-765 is no longer valid, and have not yet obtained your Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card), you must update your address information in the USCIS Online Change of Address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.

REMINDEIRS, RULES, & RESPONSIBILITIES

➢ 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 re-admission 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.

➢ 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, complete an “I-20 Reprint Request” on ISSP Connect.

➢ 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 by completing the “Report STEM OPT Participation” request on ISSP Connect.
  o At the 12 and 24-month mark of your OPT STEM employment, you are required to complete a self-evaluation located on the last page of the I-983.
  o If you change employment, a final evaluation has to be submitted from your former employer and a new I-983 training plan must be submitted for your new employer.

➢ 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.