

**17-Month OPT STEM Extension
FOR
STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS**

Application Procedures for Optional Practical Training for F-1 Students

This extension is only intended for students within fields of study in certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. In addition, the 17-month extension is only possible one time per lifetime; a student is NOT eligible to receive an extension more than once, regardless of degree level. **PLEASE NOTE:** Not all students in the STEM fields qualify. The list of qualified majors is very specific. Each extension must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

You may apply for the 17-month STEM OPT extension anytime during the regular period of post-completion OPT up to the expiration date of your current OPT employment authorization. You are encouraged to file early and in a timely manner so that you can receive your extended work card before the end of the regular period of your post-completion OPT.

Other requirements for 17-month extension include:

- Student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to the student's major area of study.
- Student must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List, from a SEVIS-certified college or university.
- Student must have a job offer from an employer registered with the *E-Verify* employment verification system.
- The student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- The DSO must recommend the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS, after verifying the student's eligibility, certifying that the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, and ensuring that the student is aware of his or her responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- Student will have to apply for the 17-month extension on Form I-765 with fee.
- Students who timely file an application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.
- The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the DSO or through "any other means or process identified by DHS." An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of five consecutive business days without the employer's consent.

APPLYING FOR 17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

To obtain the ISSS Administrator's recommendation for OPT you must submit the following documents for processing:

1. Completed I-765 form {for question #16 write in (c)(3)(C) for 17-month STEM extension}
2. Photocopy of your passport identification page including passport expiration date. Passport must be valid, not expired.
3. Photocopy of I-94 (front and back).
4. Photocopy of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
5. Two color photographs with a white background taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). They should be printed on thin, glossy paper, not mounted and not retouched. All photos should be identical. All photos must meet the specifications for full frontal/passport photos. For more information on photo standards visit the Department of State website at <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index/html> or contact the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283. Lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil. You may obtain the proper and acceptable photographs at Stewart's Photography 103 Thornhill Drive, Kinko's, Walgreen's, or any company that prepares passport type photographs. The cost of the photographs should not exceed \$10.00 depending on the company.
6. \$340.00 check payable to Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
7. Statement from your current employer stating that your employment is related to your field of study.

Bring or mail all of these items to the Administrator of ISSS. Please allow five working days for the ISSS Administrator to process your application after receipt of all documents.

ISSS must prepare a new I-20 with the OPT authorization noted on page 3. Next, your new SEVIS I-20 will be forwarded to you via regular mail for your signature. ISSS will not pay the cost for any courier service. You must sign and return this I-20 to ISSS so that your paperwork can be submitted to the appropriate USCIS Service Center for processing. The new regulation requires that your form I-765 and I-20 be filed with the USCIS Service Center having jurisdiction over your place of employment no more than 30 days following the Designated School Official's (DSO) recommendation in SEVIS. Therefore, it is imperative that you sign and return the I-20 to ISSS in a timely manner so that your OPT extension can be processed.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Students with an approved 17-month OPT extension must report to ISSS within 10 days of any change in the following information:

- legal name
- residential or mailing address
- employer name
- employer address, and/or
- loss of employment.

Students must make a validation report to the ISSS every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when the student's F-1 status ends, the student changes educational levels at the same school, the student transfers to another school, or the 17-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. The validation is a confirmation that the student's name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment is current and accurate. The report is due to the ISSS Office within 10 business days of each reporting date.

PLEASE NOTE: Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month OPT period.

This new directive will also help to alleviate the H-1B cap-gap that may occur for students whose OPT end date is before their H-1B beginning date. This provision applies to all students, not just students in the STEM areas. Duration of status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT, who is the beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

17-MONTH EXTENSION STUDENT CERTIFICATION

NAME: _____
Last Name First Name

EMPL ID _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT: _____

Certification:

This is to certify that I have read the 17-Month STEM OPT Extension instructions that have been given to me by The University of Southern Mississippi Office of International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). I agree to abide by the guidelines established by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I will adhere to the reporting requirements and report any changes to the ISSS Office as set forth by the DHS.

Signature

Date

17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION EMPLOYER VERIFICATION

EMPLOYEE'S NAME: _____

EMPLOYER'S NAME AS LISTED IN E-VERIFY:

EMPLOYER'S E-VERIFY IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: _____

EMPLOYER'S PHYSICAL ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

COMPANY CONTACT NAME: _____

CERTIFICATION:

This is to certify that I am aware of my obligations as set for by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding the 17-Month STEM Extension employment. If the above referenced employee should terminate employment with my company I must notify The University of Southern Mississippi of this termination.

Signature

Date

17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

INFORMATION PACKET

REVISED 04/30/2008