



## **24-month OPT STEM Extension (OPT STEM Extension) Frequently Asked Questions**

**Is my major eligible for the extension?** The Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) issues a list of eligible majors based on an academic major's Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code. For a current list go to [SEVP CIP Codes](#). For a list of the CIP code for A&M-Commerce majors go to [CIP Code A&M-Commerce](#). A student's eligibility is based on their academic major's CIP code and a minor or program focus cannot be taken into consideration.

**Can I file for the OPT STEM Extension based on a previously received degree that is on the [SEVP CIP Code](#) list?** Students may apply for the OPT STEM Extension based on a previously received STEM eligible degree that was received from a currently accredited SEVP certified school, received within 10 years of applying for the OPT STEM Extension with USCIS, and the qualifying STEM degree is listed on the current [SEVP CIP Code](#) list. For more information, go to [Study in the States](#).

**Am I eligible for the OPT STEM Extension at each academic level (associates, bachelors, masters, and doctorate)?** Students are eligible for the OPT STEM Extension twice over the course of their academic career. For more information, go to [Study in the States](#).

**When do I apply for the OPT STEM Extension?** Students may apply for the OPT STEM Extension up to 120 days prior to the EAD card end date for their 12-month OPT. For a list of documents required go to [OPT STEM Extension Application Checklist](#). All documents must be emailed to [optextension@tamuc.edu](mailto:optextension@tamuc.edu) and the processing time is up to 15 business days. A business day is Monday through Friday. Documents must be submitted to the ISSS at least 30 days prior to the EAD card end date for their 12-month OPT. Requests to expedite will not be recognized.

**Can I file for the OPT STEM Extension after the EAD card end date for the 12-month OPT?** The OPT STEM Extension application must be *received* by USCIS by the EAD card end date for the 12-month OPT. The only exception is for students who are eligible for the Cap Gap Extension. Please see Cap Gap Extension questions below.

**Does the OPT STEM Extension have to be approved prior to the EAD card end date for the 12-month OPT?** As long as a student has filed within the timeframe stated above then their OPT authorization is extended up to 180 days after their EAD card end date while they await a decision. The OPT STEM Extension I-20 will be the student's work authorization "proof" until the OPT STEM Extension application is approved by USCIS.

**How long does it take U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to process my OPT application?** It takes U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) an average of 2-3 months to process the OPT application. After 75 days from the receipt notice date the student may contact USCIS at -800-375-5283 to discuss their application. After 90 days from the receipt notice date the ISSS can email the USCIS service center to inquire about the application.

**Can I request that USCIS expedite my application?** Generally speaking the OPT application is not eligible to be expedited. For more information on USCIS's policy regarding expediting an application go to [USCIS Expedite Criteria](#).

**Can I track my application with USCIS once it has been submitted?** USCIS provides very limited tracking information for OPT applications and the website is unreliable at times. You may review your application status with your receipt notice once it is received at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>. Please note that the ISSS cannot assist with USCIS website related questions.

**How will I receive my receipt notice and EAD card?** Once your receipt notice arrives at the ISSS we will email you a scanned copy of the receipt notice. Students may pick up the receipt notice in person at the ISSS (no friends or family may pick up) or we will hold the receipt notice until we receive your EAD card. Once you are approved for the OPT STEM Extension your EAD card will arrive at the ISSS within 30 days of approval. We will email you once your EAD card has arrived at the ISSS and you will need to either pick up your card in person or set-up mailing through the ISSS website at [www.tamuc.edu/isso](http://www.tamuc.edu/isso) and select Mailing Documents. We will also send your receipt notice with your EAD card.

**My receipt notice name (or other information is incorrect). How do I correct the information?** If your name and any other information on your receipt notice are incorrect you will need to contact USCIS immediately at 1-800-375-5283 to request a correction.

**I have received my EAD card but my name or other information is not correct. How do I correct the information on my EAD card?** It is very important that students fill out the Form I-765 with their correct information. If the student failed to provide the correct information on the I-765 then USCIS will usually require the student to refile for a new card and pay the \$410 application fee. If USCIS was in error then the student will need to call USCIS to discuss at 1-800-375-5283. Please note that USCIS will occasionally shorten a student's name due to limited spacing on the EAD card and this will not impact their work authorization. If your OPT dates are not correct then you will need to contact USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 immediately.

**What are the employment requirements for the OPT STEM Extension?** Students must be employed in a field directly related to their STEM eligible major. Students must be employed at least 20 hours a week and students may work for multiple employers. The Student Exchange Visitor Program guidance has been contradictory related to the position being paid or unpaid and the ISSS strongly recommends the employment be paid. All employers must be registered with the Department of Homeland Security [E-Verify](#) system. A [Form I-983](#) must be on file for every employer a student works for during the OPT STEM Extension.

**What is the [Form I-983](#) and when must a student submit this form?** The Student Exchange Visitor Program final rule for the OPT STEM Extension increases the educational benefits that F-1 students receive during their OPT STEM Extension and also requires the submission of a formal training

plan through the [Form I-983](#). The Form I-983 must be submitted when a student files for the OPT STEM Extension and also during the OPT STEM Extension period if a student changes employers or there is “material change or deviations” to the terms and conditions of the original Form I-983. The Form I-983 is only submitted to the ISSS and is not submitted to USCIS. DO NOT submit the Form I-983 to USCIS.

**Who completes the [Form I-983](#) and are their instructions for completing this form?** The student will work with their OPT STEM Extension employer to complete the Form I-983. Please note that the information requested on the Form I-983 must be clearly articulated. The student’s learning objectives and the employer’s commitment to helping the student achieve these objectives must be clearly stated. The Form I-983 must be typed and not hand written to avoid issues with legibility. For more information and assistance with completing the form, go to [I-983 Overview](#).

**What are my reporting requirements during the OPT STEM Extension?** Below are the reporting requirements for students on approved OPT STEM Extension. Go to [Study in the States](#) for more information. Failure to report as required may result in the student being considered in violation of their status by the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP):

- Report any change in current physical address where you reside within 10 days of the change
- Report any change in employment to the ISSS within 10 days of the change
- Report current physical address where you reside and current employer’s information every 6 months after the EAD card start date for the OPT STEM Extension

*All the above information must be reported through the OPT Reporting Form at [www.tamuc.edu/opt](http://www.tamuc.edu/opt). No employment letters are required with these reporting requirements by the ISSS.*

In addition students are also required to:

- Submit a new [Form I-983](#) to the ISSS (not USCIS) at [optextension@tamuc.edu](mailto:optextension@tamuc.edu) if a student changes employers or there is “material change or deviations” to the terms and conditions of the original Form I-983
- Submit a [Self-Evaluation Report](#) to the ISSS (not USCIS) at [optextension@tamuc.edu](mailto:optextension@tamuc.edu) no later than 12 months after the EAD start date for the OPT STEM Extension
- Submit a final [Self-Evaluation Report](#) the ISSS (not USCIS) at [optextension@tamuc.edu](mailto:optextension@tamuc.edu) no later than 24 months after the EAD start date for the OPT STEM Extension

**Are there unemployment limits during the OPT STEM Extension?** Students on approved OPT STEM Extension are allowed an additional aggregate of 60 days of unemployment beyond the initial 12-month OPT limit. This means that students on approved OPT STEM Extension are allowed 150 days of allowable unemployment, an aggregate of 90 days during the 12-month OPT and an additional aggregate of 60 days during the OPT STEM Extension. Students who exceed this unemployment limit will be considered in violation of their visa status by the Student Exchange Visitor Program and may be denied future immigration related benefits.

**Can I travel outside the U.S. during the OPT STEM Extension?** The ISSS does not recommend students travel outside the U.S. on approved OPT STEM Extension unless absolutely necessary. For more guidance and the required documents for traveling outside the U.S. while on OPT go to [www.tamuc.edu/opt](http://www.tamuc.edu/opt).

**What is the validity timeframe for the travel signature on the I-20 for students on OPT?**

The travel signature on the OPT I-20 is valid for 6 months beyond the date of the signature (on the second page of the I-20) for re-entry to the U.S. For more guidance related to traveling outside the U.S. or to request a travel signature, go to [www.tamuc.edu/opt](http://www.tamuc.edu/opt). Please note a current employment letter is required when a student requests a travel signature during OPT.

**What if an H1-B petition is filed on my behalf during my OPT work authorization period?**

If a student has an H-B petition filed on their behalf during OPT the student will need to provide this information to the ISSS. Students who have an H1-B filed for them may be eligible for the Cap Gap Extension but it is very important that students communicate with the ISSS. Students will need to submit their receipt notice, approval notice, and email notice to [optextension@tamuc.edu](mailto:optextension@tamuc.edu). For guidance related to the Cap Gap Extension go to [www.tamuc.edu/opt](http://www.tamuc.edu/opt) and select Cap Gap Extension.

**What is Cap Gap Extension?** Students who meet the following criteria may be eligible for the extension of their F-1 status and OPT Authorization through Cap Gap Extension. For more information go to [USCIS Cap Gap Extension](#):

- Beneficiary of a timely filed H1-B visa
- Subject to H1-B cap count
- H1-B is filed as a change of status
- Employment start date is October 1
- Student has not violated their F-1 visa status

**Can a student file for the OPT STEM Extension while on approved Cap Gap Extension?**

Students on approved Cap Gap Extension may file for the OPT STEM Extension during their Cap Gap Extension period. However, such application may not be filed once a student's Cap Gap Extension is terminated (if H1-B petition is rejected, denied, revoked, or withdrawn). The ISSS recommends students eligible for the OPT STEM Extension file as soon as eligible regardless if they have an H1-B petition filed on their behalf to avoid the possibility of losing their eligibility. For more information, go to [USCIS Cap Gap Extension](#).