17-MONTH STEM EXTENSION INFORMATION
STUDENT COMPLIANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

The 12-month limit on F-1 Post Completion Optional Practical Training (Post OPT) will be extended by 17 months, for a total of 29 months, for Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral students from a STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). Here is a list of CIP Codes for the acceptable STEM fields: Actuarial Science; Computer Science Applications (except, Data Entry/Microcomputer Applications); Engineering; Engineering Technologies; Biological and Biomedical Sciences; Mathematics and Statistics; Military Technologies; Physical Sciences; Science Technologies; Medical Scientist (MS, PhD). You may check this website for more detailed information on CIP Codes, http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm.

A list of E-Verify Employers as of March 31, 2013 can be found at this USCIS link.

If a student has a double-major, the 17-month extension can also be based on the second major. The second major CIP code should be listed on Form I-20. Students requesting an extension based on second major, need to include proof that the second major was successfully completed. A transcript will usually reflect how many degrees a student has completed. A STEM Extension cannot be approved based on a student’s minor.

An individual is eligible for only one 17-month STEM OPT extension. According to SEVP, this is a lifetime limit.

Key Points of 17-Month STEM Extension include:

- Student must be currently employed in the 12-month period of post completion optional practical training, 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 STEM field, from a SEVIS-certified college or university.

- Student must have a job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system. STEM employees must work a minimum of 20 hours per week. Please note that there is conflicting information as to whether job should be paid or unpaid while in STEM status. Currently our conservative advice is for the job to be paid, or at least 20 hours of STEM employment should be paid.

- ALL STEM employment must be with E-verify employers. USCIS will soon be verifying this at the H-1B petition process.

- Student and student’s employer are required to report termination of employment to UMass Lowell’s International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO). Termination of employment is considered to be when a student has not reported to work for a period of five consecutive business days without the employer’s consent.
- Students granted a 17-month STEM Extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month OPT period. (If student didn’t use any of the original 90 days of unemployment during their original 12 months of Post OPT time, then they could use the entire 120 days during STEM.)

- Student is also required to make a validation report to the UMass Lowell’s International Students & Scholars Office every six months. 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. Keep in mind that any of the above changes should have already been reported to our office within 10 business days of each change. This is critical as SEVIS may terminate the STEM extension if the six month report isn’t provided to them. We can only provide it if you update your status with our office every six months. SEVIS will be strictly enforcing this requirement.

**What is the deadline for student to file for the 17-month extension?**

The student must submit the STEM Extension Petition, within 90 – 120 days of the expiration date of their current Post OPT, Employment Authorization Document. The STEM Extension Petition must include a completed Form I-765 as well as an approved new Form I-20 issued by the International Students and Scholars Office. Other paperwork will also be included, as listed below. The International Students and Scholars Office will provide guidance in this area. The STEM Extension Petition must reach USCIS no later than the end date of the EAD card, and within thirty-dates of the STEM I-20 issuance from the ISSO.

*Can student submit STEM Extension Petition more than 120 days before the end date of the original 12-month OPT period? The USCIS Service Center will most likely reject a petition if filed prior to the 120 days before the current OPT period end date. It is best to apply no earlier than 120 days prior to the current OPT period end date.*

**Employment authorization while the STEM Extension Application is pending - When does the student’s period of STEM Extension OPT start?**

If the student has properly filed for a STEM Extension, (i.e. filed within 90 and 120 days prior to the expiration date of the current OPT, as listed on EAD card), the student’s period of STEM Extension starts the day after the expiration of the student’s original period of Optional Practical Training. If the STEM Extension was filed in a timely fashion, as above-mentioned, the student’s work authorization automatically extends for up to 180 days while the student’s STEM Extension application is pending.

*Can student apply for STEM Extension when he/she is within the Cap-Gap OPT Extension?*

Yes. A student can apply for the STEM Extension during the Cap-Gap Extension of OPT. The student will need to have his or her employer request withdrawal of the approved or pending H-1B petition in time for USCIS to effectively accept the withdrawal prior to the October 1 start date in order to avoid changing status to H-1B on that date. To avoid a denial based on the scheduled expiration of Post-Completion OPT, a student should include mention (and supporting evidence) of his/her Cap-Gap OPT Extension when filing during the Cap-Gap period.

**Cap Gap Extension of “D/S” (i.e. Duration of Status)/work authorization until October 1st.**

- Effective April 8, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security authorized an H-1B cap-gap extension of D/S (i.e. Duration of Status) and in some cases it also includes extension of work authorization until October 1.
Cap Gap Extension applies only to H-1B Change of Status Petitions (not Consular Processing). You must be in valid F-1 status at the time you apply for the Cap Gap Extension. You must also remain in the U.S. during your Cap Gap period and cannot travel until you are in H-1B status. The Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) strongly recommends that students do not travel outside the United States during the Cap-Gap Extension, as USCIS will consider a change-of-status application to be abandoned if the applicant leaves the country while the application remains pending. Thus, a change-of-status petition from F-1 to H-1B filed on behalf of a student with a Cap-Gap Extension who departs the U.S. before the application is adjudicated could be denied.

In order for a student to have employment authorization during the Cap-Gap Extension, the student must be in an approved period of Post Completion Optional Practical Training (i.e., your card must be valid at the time your H-1B is filed.) If your Post OPT Employment Authorization Card is still valid at the time the H-1B Petition is filed, your Cap Gap Extension will not only extend your F-1/Duration of Status, but it will ALSO extend your work authorization until September 30th.

If, however, you are in the 60-day grace period beyond the expiration date of your Post OPT Employment Authorization Card, you are legally permitted to remain in the U.S. until September 30th, but are not authorized to work until the effective date of your H-1B Petition Approval.

The application for the Cap-Gap Extension is processed through our office and SEVIS.

A student can apply for the 17-month STEM Extension during the Cap-Gap Extension of OPT. The student will need to have his or her employer request withdrawal of the approved or pending H-1B petition in time for USCIS to effectively accept the withdrawal prior to October 1st.

The 90-day limitation on unemployment continues during the Cap-Gap Extension.

Can a student change employers while STEM Extension application is pending with USCIS?

Yes. However, if the STEM Extension period has started, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must report the change in employment to his or her International Student Advisor. The Advisor must update the student’s employer information in SEVIS and the student should submit an amended Form I-765 to the appropriate USCIS Service Center, providing the new employer’s E-Verify number and a copy of the USCIS receipt notice for the first Form I-765. A brief letter explaining the submission should also be included. There is no fee associated with submitting the amended Form I-765.

Can a student travel outside U.S. if EAD card expires while STEM Extension Request is Pending?

No. The student must wait to receive the new Employment Authorization Document.

How do employers report to an International Student Advisor that a STEM Extension student is no longer employed? The student is responsible for informing the International Student Advisor of ALL employment changes, within 10 days of the change.

Student’s legal requirements while on STEM Extension - A student pursuing a period of STEM Extension must:

• Work either paid or unpaid for an E-Verify employer at least 20 hours per week, although our recommendation is that student work for pay or at least 20 hours of paid work during STEM
• Work in a position related to the STEM degree and in student’s field of study
• Cannot Accrue more than 120 days of unemployment time during the entire period of Post-Completion OPT (regular post-completion OPT time and STEM Extension period)
Report to the International Student Advisor within 10 days of the following change(s):

- Legal name change
- Change in Marital Status
- Change in Country of Citizenship
- Change in U.S. Residential or Mailing address
- ALL employment changes, providing the employer(s) name and address – Can only work with E-Verify Employers
- Report loss of employment
- Report/Verify employment information to International Student Advisor every six months

(YOU MUST REMEMBER TO NOTIFY OUR OFFICE EVERY SIX MONTHS OF WHERE YOU ARE EMPLOYED AS WE WILL NEED TO VERIFY THIS AND CONFIRM IT ON YOUR SEVIS EMPLOYMENT RECORD)

Print Name:_________________________  Sign:_________________________________ *Read Below

*Student is responsible for informing the UMass Lowell International Students & Scholars Office within 10 days of ANY and ALL employment changes (begin new employment, end employment, concurrent employment, etc.) Most importantly ALL STEM employment must be with E-verify employers. Be sure to send the International Students & Scholars Office the Employment Validation/Status Report, previously mentioned above, every six months from the start of STEM Extension period. This is critical as SEVIS may terminate the STEM Extension if the six-month report isn’t provided to them. We can only provide it if you update your status with our office every six months. SEVIS will be strictly enforcing this.

I have read above informational material provided to me by the International Students & Scholars Office and I understand my legal obligations to comply with the STEM Extension requirements.  Yes ☐  No ☐

Student’s Signature_____________________  Date_________________

Provide personal email:_________________________
17-Month STEM Extension of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

APPLICATION MATERIALS

We are happy to review your application for completeness. However, please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that you mail a complete application to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We strongly urge you to copy the entire application for your own records. The International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) will be unable to provide you with a copy of your final petition. It is advisable that you always keep copies of all your immigration paperwork. You will need it if you apply for H-1B status, permanent residency, or U.S. citizenship.

STEP 1: As part of the STEM OPT application process, you will be issued a NEW OPT I-20 Form by the International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) upon receipt of the following:

- Completed and signed copy of this STEM Extension of Optional Practical Training Handout
- Copy of I-94 record printout, or both sides (even if blank) of your current I-94 card from passport
- Copy of your school transcript printed from ISIS (no need to be “official” copy from Registrar)
- Copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Card(s) (EAC), including your current EAC
- A letter confirming your current employment. The letter MUST contain the following information:
  - Your job title
  - The name and title of your supervisor
  - Your supervisor’s contact information
  - The start date of your employment with the company
- Completed and signed (in blue ink) Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
  [http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf) - Be sure to complete the form in its entirety, including Question #17

Return the above to: The ISSO Front Desk, Room 203, Dugan Hall, South Campus or in our drop-off box outside of the office door. If you are unable to deliver these documents to the ISSO, please email all application materials to [ISSO@uml.edu](mailto:ISSO@uml.edu). Please note, your application will not be accepted nor reviewed until you’ve submitted a COMPLETED application package as described above.

An ISSO Advisor will review your documents and process your OPT I-20 Form. We will contact you once your OPT I-20 has been processed (within seven to 10 business days). You will then be asked to pick up your OPT I-20 form. During Drop-In Hours, you may bring in the following items to be reviewed for completeness. (Please make any necessary copies at the library or your department.) If you are unable to physically pick up the STEM I-20, please contact the ISSO who will send you instructions on how to prepare and purchase a shipping label.

STEP 2: AFTER you have received your new OPT I-20 Form, you must mail the following to USCIS:

*USCIS must receive your complete application PRIOR to the end of your grace period and within 30 days of the issuance date listed on #10 of your OPT I-20 Form.*

- Completed Form G-1145 (should be clipped to the top of first page of your forms)
  [http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/g-1145.pdf) This form will allow you to track your application’s receipt and approval status online. Please note that your application status online will remain in “initial review” for the full 6+ weeks of processing time.
- $380 fee (personal check or money order), made payable to “US Department of Homeland Security”
  Be sure to date and sign the check (we also attach a sample of the correct way to complete a check)
- Two color “passport” photos, taken within 30 days of the date application is filed. Write your full name, date of birth and SEVIS # in pencil or pen on the back of the photos and place in a labeled envelope. Photos must have a white background. Photos must show the entire face of the person in full frontal view. Specific photo details:
- Completed and signed (in blue ink) Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
- A COPY of the OPT I-20 Form which will be provided to you by ISSO (pgs 1&3 may be double-sided). Please keep the original OPT I-20 Form for yourself. You will need it the next time you have to leave the U.S. Remember to keep all previous I-20s for your historical records.
- A copy of I-94 record printout, or both sides (even if blank) of your current I-94 card
- A copy of all of your previous I-20 forms (pgs 1&3, may be double-sided)
- A copy of the Passport Identification and expiration date Page(s)
- A copy of the F-1 Visa Stamp Page (or copy of approval notice of change of status to F-1) (note that Canadian citizens will not have this stamp)
- A letter confirming your current employment. The letter MUST contain the following information:
  - Your job title
  - The name and title of your supervisor
  - Your supervisor’s contact information
  - The start date of your employment with the company
- A copy of your degree certificate reflecting the conferred degree as well as your major field of study. The student may provide one of the following documents in order to meet these requirements of the degree: Official transcripts; unofficial transcripts; copy of the diploma showing the level and program of study (this is the best and most guaranteed form)
- A copy of any previously issued Employment Authorization Card(s) (EAC)
  - A copy of your degree certificate reflecting the conferred degree as well as your major field of study. The student may provide one of the following documents in order to meet these requirements of the degree: Official transcripts; unofficial transcripts; Copy of the diploma showing the level and program of study (this is the best and most guaranteed form)

ALL of the materials on the checklist should be mailed to a lockbox address according to the manner of shipment as per below. We advise you to send your documents to the USCIS via overnight courier service.

Please remember that USCIS must receive your complete application PRIOR to the end of your current EAC and within 30 days of the issuance date listed on #10 of your OPT I-20 Form.

Where to Mail Your Pre or Post OPT Petition or STEM Extension

<table>
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<tr>
<th>If you live in:</th>
<th>Mail your application to:</th>
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| Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia | **USCIS Dallas Lockbox**  
For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: (such as via U.S. Post Office Priority, Express, Certified or Registered mail, etc.)  
USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266  
(RECOMMENDED) For Express mail and private courier deliveries, such as FedEx or DHL, etc.:  
USCIS  
Attn: AOS  
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067 |
| Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, | **USCIS Phoenix Lockbox**  
For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: (such as via U.S. Post Office Priority, |
North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.

Express, Certified or Registered mail, etc.)

USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

(Recommended) For Express mail and courier deliveries such as FedEx, DHL, etc.:

USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

**STEP 3: USCIS PROCESSING**

Within one to two weeks of the date that you submit the application to USCIS, you should receive a receipt notice. Six to eight weeks after you receive your receipt notice, you should receive your Employment Authorization Card. *(Please note that these are estimated processing times and that on occasion it can take up to eight to twelve weeks.)* If you do not receive your EAC card by the 75th day of mailing, please contact our office for assistance. We will need to have your USCIS receipt number in order to follow up on your application. We are legally unable to follow up before the 75th day.

When you meet with an ISSO Advisor to pick up your completed OPT I-20 form, we will alert you to any corrections that need to be made or missing paperwork. *It will be your responsibility to complete any missing requirements before submitting your OPT Petition to USCIS. Failure to do so will result in your petition being returned to you by USCIS for additional information and will cause a delay to your processing.* *(Our new Drop-In Advising and OPT policies will allow us to process your paperwork in a more timely fashion of five to seven business days.)*