Optional Practical Training (OPT) 17-Month STEM Extension Tutorial

F-1 International Students

Berkeley International Office (BIO)
2299 Piedmont Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 642-2818
http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu
Are you eligible for the 17-month OPT STEM Extension?

You must be:

• A recipient of a U.S. Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctoral degree in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) designated degree program. See this list of STEM Majors.
• Currently authorized for OPT and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment.
• Applying based on the same degree as OPT, not a previous degree.
• Employed or have an job offer related to your field of study from an employer who is registered in the USCIS E-Verify Program.
• Applying no more than 4 months before your 12-month OPT expires and apply no later than the expiration of your 12-month OPT.

* Only ONE 17-month STEM extension is granted per lifetime regardless of additional degrees awarded.
Application Process Overview

1. **Request OPT STEM I-20 from Berkeley International Office.**

   The I-20 will be ready for pick up 3 business days after submitting the OPT STEM request form to Berkeley International Office. Arrangements can be made to send you the new I-20 by mail. Please allow enough time for mailing.

2. **Prepare, collect & mail your application materials to USCIS.**

   Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize your materials for mailing. A complete application must be received by USCIS before the end date of your current OPT as noted on the EAD card. You must be in the United States to file the OPT STEM application with USCIS.


   Average processing time at the United States Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS) is 90 days. However, you may continue to work on OPT for up to 180 days while the STEM application is pending.

4. **Maintain your F-1 status while on OPT STEM Extension.**

   You must report your address and employer information to Berkeley International Office every six months through [http://ssu.berkeley.edu/](http://ssu.berkeley.edu/). Your I-20 travel endorsement is valid for only 6 months while on OPT STEM.
Step 1: Request OPT STEM I-20

Download the [OPT STEM Extension Request Form][doc]

- This is a fillable form. Save the form to your computer.
- Complete & submit to Berkeley International Office in person, through mail or by emailing internationaloffice@berkeley.edu
- Your new OPT STEM I-20 will be ready to be picked up or to be mailed within three business days. Please provide delivery instructions on the form.

OPT STEM Extension Authorization Dates

- The start date of your OPT STEM extension automatically occur on the day after the expiration of your current EAD.
- The end date of your extension will be 17 months later

Application Deadline

- USCIS must receive your application before the end date of your OPT.
- Due to any potential technical delays, we recommend that you submit this request form at least 2 weeks before your current OPT EAD expires.
- You may apply as early as 120 days before your OPT EAD end date.

* Your OPT will be automatically extended while your OPT STEM application is pending, however, you must have an unexpired EAD card to travel. We recommend that you apply early.
OPT STEM applications must be received by USCIS no later than 30 days after this date. Please see an advisor at BIO if there are concerns that the application will not arrive on time.

The new travel endorsement is valid 6 months. However, traveling while your OPT STEM Extension application is pending is NOT allowed if your 12 month OPT has expired. You must have a valid EAD card to re-enter the US along with supporting documents.
Step 2: Prepare, collect, & mail your application materials

2. Gather all required documentation and copies
3. Mail the complete application packet to USCIS. You are required to be physically present in the US to mail the application.
Form I-765

The I-765 is required to submit the OPT STEM Extension application to the USCIS. A sample I-765 form is shown here.

Form I-765 can be downloaded from the USCIS web site.

**Important:** Use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 before mailing the application since the USCIS updates forms frequently.

BIO does not recommend completing the e-file option of the I-765.

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Completing the I-765 is a simple task, but a few items can be confusing. The following slides will help you complete those “tricky” questions.
Completing Form I-765 for STEM OPT

**Top Portion**
Check the box for “Renewal of my permission to accept employment.”

**Item #1: Name**
Your entire family name should be in CAPITAL letters. Use upper & lower case for the first name.

**Item #3: Address in the United States**
This is where you would like the Receipt Notice and the EAD card to be mailed.

- The address needs to be valid for at least 3 months, the length of time it will take to process the application.
- If you have plans to move during this time, use a reliable friend or family member’s address to receive the EAD. If your name is not registered at the address, you must use the C/O notation to ensure delivery. If you fail to use this notation, the card will be returned to the Service Center as undeliverable.

*If the address listed is outside of California, talk to an advisor at Berkeley International Office.*
Completing Form I-765 for STEM OPT

**Item #10: I-94 Number**

Use your current I-94 number. This is an 11-digit number found on the top left corner of the paper Form I-94 card or on the electronic I-94 record (see example on slide 23). Alien Registration Numbers are not issued to F-1 students.

**Item #11: Previous Employment Authorization**

Check “yes.”

Complete the information based on your 12-month EAD. If you have been authorized for other employment through USCIS, be sure to include that information in this section as well. Use a separate piece of paper if necessary.

Include a photocopy of your EAD card with your application.
Completing Form I-765 for STEM OPT

Item #12: Date of Last Entry into the U.S.
Date of the most recent entry into the U.S. The entry date can be found stamped on the paper form I-94 card or passport admission stamp.

Item #13: Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
Name of the city where you last entered the U.S. The information is on the paper Form I-94 card or passport admission stamp (usually as a code, i.e. “SFR” for San Francisco). If you drove across the border, write the name and the city where you entered the U.S.

Item #14: Manner of Last Entry
Status you received when entering the U.S. If you entered the U.S. with an I-20 as a student write, “F-1 Student”. If you initially entered with an H-1B work visa, for example, and then changed status to F-1 in the U.S, you would write “H-1B.”

12. Date of Last Entry into the U.S., on or about (mm/dd/yyyy)
08/27/2015

13. Place of Last Entry into the U.S.
SFR

14. Status at Last Entry (B-2 Visitor, F-1 Student, No Lawful Status, etc.)
F-1 Student
### Completing Form I-765 for STEM OPT

**Item #15: Current Immigration Status**
Current status should be “F-1 student.” If not, talk to a BIO advisor.

**Item #16: Eligibility Category**
Use the following code for OPT STEM Extension: (c) (3) (C)

**Item #17: 17-Month Extension & E-Verify Information**

- **Degree**: Indicate here the SEVIS degree name as it appears on your I-20. Also include the CIP Code found next to your degree name.
  - If you qualify for the OPT STEM extension based on your 2nd major, you must also include the name of this major and its CIP code.
  - You cannot qualify based on a minor.

- **Employer’s Name as listed in E-Verify**: Your employer should be able to provide you with this information.

- **Employer’s E-Verify Company Identification Number**: Your employer should be able to provide you with this information.
  - For more information about the E-Verify program, see [http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify](http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify)

### 15. Current Immigration Status (Visitor, Student, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F-1 Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 16. Eligibility Category.
Go to the “Who May File Form I-765?” section of the Instructions. In the space below, place the letter and number of the eligibility category you selected from the instructions. For example, (a)(8), (c)(17)(iii), etc.

( C ) ( 3 ) ( C )

### 17. (c)(3)(C) Eligibility Category.
If you entered the eligibility category (c)(3)(C) in Question 16 above, list your degree, your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer’s E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in the space below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Major(s) as listed on I-20 &amp; CIP Code</th>
<th>Employer’s Name as listed in E-Verify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a Valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number</td>
<td>Employer’s E-verify Number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 18. (c)(26) Eligibility Category.
If you entered the eligibility category (c)(26) in Question 16 above, please provide the receipt number of your H-1B principal spouse's most recent Form I-797 Notice of Approval for Form I-129.

Leave this area blank
Completing Form I-765 for STEM OPT

- Sign your name
- Fill in the date of signature
- Fill in your telephone number

**Important!**

*Your signature must be above the line* and fit in the white area of the form. If the signature is too big or touches the text above, your application could be delayed.

Be conservative and use a signature smaller than normal. Please see the example.
Required Documents for USCIS

- 2 U.S. Passport Photos (with name and I-94 number written lightly in pencil on back of each) taken within the past 30 days.
- Check or Money Order for $380 made payable to: “U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”
- Photocopy of OPT STEM I-20 that was issued by BIO within the past 30 days (page 1-3). Don’t forget to sign it!
- Photocopy of your previous UC Berkeley I-20 showing the initial 12-month OPT.
- Photocopy of current EAD. If you still have the approval notice (Form I-797), attach a copy as well.
- Photocopy of passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp, if applicable.
- Photocopy of paper Form I-94 (both sides) or electronic I-94 record. (The electronic I-94 record is available ONLY to those with passport admission stamp.)
- Photocopy of your diploma showing the major and degree level that makes you eligible for the STEM Extension.

No documents need to be submitted for F-2 dependents.
Photo Requirements

The photos required to use for the OPT application must meet the specifications of U.S. style passport photos. To see a full description of these specifications, go to the U.S. Department of State web site.

Passport photos must be 2”x2” and taken within the past 30 days.

Write name and I-94 number lightly on the back of each photo.

USCIS has been examining passport photos more strictly. BIO recommends students have their photos taken professionally.
Check or Money Order

- Use a personal check or money order made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”.
- Money orders can be purchased at banks, post office and some local grocery stores.
- Make sure a name and address are printed on the check. If the address has changed, that is fine.
  - Do not use “temporary checks” often issued by the bank when opening a new account. These checks have no name or address in the upper left hand corner.
  - In the memo line, write your SEVIS ID number.

Money orders and cashier checks should include the same information as a personal check.
Form G-1145

- This form is free to use.
- Complete it in order to request a text message and/or email when USCIS receives your OPT STEM application and when there are any updates.
- Attach to the top of the OPT application packet.
Form I-765

The I-765 is required to submit the OPT STEM Extension application to the USCIS. A sample I-765 form is shown here.

Form I-765 can be downloaded from the USCIS web site.

Important: Use the most current version of the I-765. It is best to download the I-765 before mailing the application since the USCIS updates forms frequently.

BIO does not recommend completing the e-file option of the I-765.

Detailed instructions on completing this form are given in previous slides.
Photocopy of OPT STEM I-20

- Must be issued by BIO within the past 30 days.
- OPT STEM Recommendation with requested start and end dates will be on page 3.
- Make sure you sign the I-20 before copying it.
- Copy all 3 pages.
- You must keep the original & send a copy with your application.
- It must be received by USCIS within 30 days of issuance.
Photocopy of 12-month OPT I-20

- Include your current I-20 showing the initial 12-month OPT (older version or newer version of the I-20 will be accepted)
- Copy all three pages
- Keep the original for your records.
Photocopy of Current 12-month EAD

• Include a front and back copy of the EAD card.

• Also include Approval Notice that came with the 12-month EAD card if you still have it.
Photocopy of Diploma or Official Transcripts

- Your diploma or official transcripts must show the major and degree level that makes you eligible for the STEM extension
- For information about obtaining your diploma if you do not have it, see http://registrar.berkeley.edu/diplomas.html
Photocopy of Passport and Visa

- Passport biographic page (with photo and passport expiration date).
  - Needs to be valid into the future.

- F-1 visa, if applicable.
  - Can be expired.
Photocopy of I-94 Information

- Can be:
  
  OR

  - Small, white card stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides of the Form I-94, even though the back side may be blank.
**Application Deadline**

USCIS must receive the OPT STEM application:

- No later than **30 days after the OPT STEM I-20** has been issued by Berkeley International Office.
  - The issue date is located next to the advisor's signature on page 1 of the OPT STEM I-20.

- No later than the **end date** of your current 12-month as noted by your EAD.

  *Please account for mailing time.*

- You may apply up to 120 days before your current OPT end date.

  *It is recommend that you apply early.*
Mailing the OPT STEM Application

Mail Delivery Options

Express Mail (Federal Express, UPS, etc)  

OR

United States Postal Service (USPS)

• BIO recommends FedEx as a reliable option.

• BIO does NOT recommend E-Filing your application. In most cases, it will actually slow down the issuance of your EAD.

• If using USPS, BIO recommends requesting Certified Mail/Return Receipt service to obtain proof of USCIS receipt.

Where to Mail Your Application

• Use the address of USCIS Service Center that corresponds to the region where you will receive your EAD (the address you listed on Item #3 of your Form I-765).

• You will use a different address depending on whether you choose Express Mail or USPS.

• See the next slide for USCIS Service Center mailing addresses.
Mailing the OPT STEM Application

If using a mailing address in...

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

Mail your application to...

U.S.P.S.
USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Express Deliveries
USCIS
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy 121 Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

U.S.P.S.
USCIS
PO Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036

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

Step 3: Receiving the EAD

1. I-797 Notice of Action from USCIS
2. If there is a problem...
4. Maintaining Status while on OPT STEM Extension
5. Answers to your Frequently Asked Questions
I-797, Notice of Action

The Receipt Notice of Action (I-797)
You should receive the notice by mail within 2-4 weeks after mailing the OPT STEM application to USCIS. If you do not receive your I-797 within 6 weeks of mailing your application, contact an advisor at Berkeley International Office.

Important points:
- The I-797 Notice of Action is a very important document. If you lose the receipt, there is no way to replace it.
- The I-797 is necessary if you want to inquire about the status of your OPT STEM application.

Receipt Number
This is your application case number at the USCIS. Check the status of your case on the USCIS web site at https://www.uscis.gov

Received Date
This is the date when the USCIS begins processing the application. (It may not be the actual the application was received, but it is when the case was entered into the system.)

Address Information
Verify the name and address on the I-765 receipt notice. If it is incorrect, contact BIO immediately.

Contacting USCIS
If you have any problems or questions with the application, please contact a BIO advisor before calling the USCIS Customer Service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOTICE TYPE</th>
<th>CASE TYPE</th>
<th>RECEIPT NUMBER</th>
<th>RECEIVED DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receipt</td>
<td>I-765</td>
<td>WAC...</td>
<td>April 11, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your Name: [Name]
Mailing Address: [Address]

The above application/petition has been received by our office and is in process.
Please verify your personal information listed above and immediately notify the USCIS National Customer Service Center at the phone number listed below if there are any changes.

Please note that if a priority date is printed on this notice, the priority does not reflect earlier retained priority dates.

If you have questions about possible immigration benefits and services, filing information, or USCIS forms, please call the USCIS National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at 1-800-375-5283. If you are hearing impaired, please call the NCSC TDD at 1-800-767-1833. Please also refer to the USCIS website: www.uscis.gov.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this notice or the status of your case, please contact our customer service number.

You will be notified separately about any other case you may have filed.
If there is a problem with your application...

- If there is a problem with your application, the USCIS will send you a notice by mail called the “Request for Evidence (RFE).” An RFE does not mean that your application has been rejected. It simply means that you need to send in additional documents before your EAD can be issued.

- Getting an RFE will delay the processing of your application for OPT STEM usually by about one month.

- In some cases, if too many items are missing from your application, the USCIS will return the entire application to you. If this happens, you must make the corrections and send the application before the end date of your 12-month EAD.

To avoid delays, review your application materials for completeness and sign all the forms before mailing them to the USCIS.
The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

Average processing time at USCIS is 90 days/3 months. While waiting, keep these things in mind.

- Your F-1 status & employment authorization will be **automatically extended** for up to 180 days while your OPT STEM application is pending. You may work during this time.

- You must have a valid EAD for re-entry to the U.S. If your 12-month EAD has expired, you may not travel outside the U.S.

- You may change or add employers as long as the new employer also participates in E-Verify. For reporting information, see Frequently Asked Questions.

- You must work at least 20 hours per week in your field of study while on your OPT STEM Extension.

- You may accumulate up to 120 days of unemployment on OPT STEM inclusive of any time used during 12-month OPT.

- If you decide to return to school as a full-time student, you must request a transfer or a change of level from Berkeley International Office within 60 days of your EAD expiration date.
Step 4: Maintain your F-1 Status

1. Report your address and employer information
2. Frequently Asked Questions about Employment
3. Frequently Asked Questions about Travel & Re-entry
Reporting your Information

While on OPT STEM, you must **validate** your information **every six months** and update Berkeley International Office **within 10 days** of any changes to the following information:

- Your Name
- Your Residential Address
- Your Phone & Email Address
- Employer Information
- Start Date of Employment
- Date of departure from the U.S. if you leave prior to OPT STEM end date and want to end your OPT.

We recommend saving the website page showing your updated information.

In order to access the ssu.berkeley.edu website, you will need your UCB Student ID# and SEVIS # (found on your I-20 & starts with N00...).
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

About Employment

What is considered full-time employment on the 17-month OPT STEM Extension? Students must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to the STEM degree.

Does volunteer work count as employment? Yes, immigration has stated that paid and unpaid employment related to the student’s degree meets the requirement for maintaining status on OPT STE.

I have two part-time jobs. One of the employers is enrolled in E-Verify but the other is not. Is this allowed? The student may work multiple jobs, but all the employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

How many days of unemployment am I allowed while on the 17-month STEM Extension? Students who receive a 17-month OPT STEM extension are given an additional 30 days of unemployment for a total of 120 days over their entire post-completion OPT period.

What counts as unemployment? Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment.

Can I continue to work while my 17-month STEM Extension OPT application is pending? If a student’s EAD expires while the STEM Extension application is pending, the student is authorized to work until USCIS makes a decision about the application, but not more than 180 days from the date the student’s initial OPT EAD expires.

What documents should I present to my employer once my 12-month OPT expires and my OPT STEM is pending? The student should present the employer with the expired EAD card and the form I-20 recommending the student for STEM Extension.

Can I switch employers while my OPT STEM application is pending? Yes. However, if the 17-month extension period has started, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must report the change in employment to Berkeley International Office. 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 I travel outside the US during my approved OPT period?
Yes. However, if the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the US while unemployed, the time spent outside the United States will count as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits.

*If a student travels while employed either during a period of leave authorized by an employer or as part of their employment, the time spent outside the US will not count as unemployment.

Can I travel outside the US while my 17-month STEM Extension OPT is pending?
Travel is NOT allowed after the 12 month OPT has expired and while the STEM Extension EAD is pending.

Travel is permitted if you have a valid 12 month EAD card for re-entry along with the documents listed below. See Travel and OPT for a complete list of documents you will need for travel.

Can I renew my visa while on OPT STEM?
Yes, you are eligible to renew your visa while on OPT STEM. Remember, that you are still applying for an F-1 non-immigrant visa which means you must demonstrate ties to your home country. See Applying for a Visa for a complete list of documents and advice on renewing the visa during OPT STEM and feel free to discuss your concerns with an advisor.

What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S?
If you are eligible for travel, you will need:
- A valid passport with unexpired F-1 visa stamp (if applicable)
- Form I-20, signed on page 3 by an International Student Advisor at Berkeley International Office within the last 6 months
- Unexpired EAD Card
- Proof of employment (or employment offer)
Berkeley International Office (BIO)

http://InternationalOffice.berkeley.edu

internationaloffice@berkeley.edu

510-642-2818

Advising Hours: Monday-Friday
10am-12pm and 1:30pm-4pm