Optional Practical Training (OPT) 24-Month STEM Extension Tutorial

Please note that this tutorial is for instructional purposes only. An OPT I-765 application to USCIS is your own personal application. You alone are responsible for timely filing with full documentation, understanding F-1 rules regarding OPT, and properly maintaining F-1 status. Please review the entire tutorial and ask a BIO adviser if you have questions.

Last updated January 12, 2024. Updates are made frequently; DO NOT download tutorial. Always access the latest version on BIO's website.
STEM OPT Tutorial Outline

- STEM Eligibility & Allowable Employment
- Important Alerts
- When Should I Apply?
- Application Process Overview
- Step 1: Form I-983 & Requesting OPT STEM I-20
  - Completing the I-983 Form
  - Updating BIO SSU Hu (STEM I-20 Request, I-983 Upload, and Services fee)
  - Receive your OPT STEM I-20
- Step 2: Prepare & Submit Your Application to USCIS
  - E-filing the I-765
  - Online Filing vs Filing by Mail
  - OPT STEM Document Checklist (e-filing)
  - Your Photos
  - Paying the USCIS Fee
  - Your OPT STEM I-20 copy
  - Passport & Visa Copies
  - Your I-94 record
  - OPT EAD copy & Previous EADs
  - Proof of Degree
  - SPECIAL CASE: Previous STEM Degree
  - SPECIAL CASE: CIP Code/Major Name mis-match
  - SPECIAL CASE: Concurrent STEM OPT & H1-B Filing
  - Submitting Your USCIS Application & Application Deadline
  - Completing your Online I-765 Application
  - Top 4 USCIS STEM OPT Denial Reasons
- Step 3: After Filing & OPT STEM Application Issues
  - I-797C receipt Notice
  - USCIS Issues & Case Tracking
  - Premium Processing & Expedites
  - Case Inquiries
  - Application Problems: RFEs & Denials
  - Your EAD card
  - Driver License renewal
  - Immigration Scams
- Step 4: Maintaining Your F-1 Status & STEM Reporting Requirements
  - BIO SSU Hub & Reporting
  - Changes in Employer
  - Material Changes to the I-983
  - 6 Month Updates and Annual Evaluations
  - Travel during STEM OPT
  - Completing OPT and Grace Period
  - H1-B and STEM Extension
  - Frequently Asked Question: Employment
  - Frequently Asked Questions: Travel
  - Want an OPT STEM Application review?
OPT STEM Extension Eligibility

Requirements:

• 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 the current STEM Designated Degree list linked here. (You can check the CIP code listed on your I-20.)
• To check if a specific UCB major is STEM eligible, review the Berkeley International Office UCB Major/CIP Code List
• You are currently authorized for 12-month OPT and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment.
• You can apply based on any previous STEM degree from an SEVP, accredited U.S. institution within the last 10 years
• You must be employed or have a future job offer directly related to your STEM field of study from an employer who is registered in the USCIS E-Verify Program.
• Your employer must have an EIN number.
• Your employer is able to fully complete the Form I-983 and abide by all employer obligations, including Dept. of Homeland Security Site visits.
• You are applying no more than 90 days before your 12-month OPT expires and no later than the expiration of your 12-month OPT*

Two 24-month STEM extensions may be granted per lifetime.

* For E-filed applications, USCIS uses UTC or Coordinated Universal Time to determine the time/date filed. If you are filing CLOSE to your deadline check the UTC time/date of filing!
Types of Allowable Employment

- Volunteer/Unpaid positions and self employment are NOT allowed by the 24-Month STEM OPT Extension.
- STEM-eligible employers must have e-Verify & EIN numbers and the student must have a “bona fide employer-employee relationship”. To establish a bona fide relationship, the employer may not be the student’s “employer” in name only.
- Cannabis Industry- be aware that use and sale of cannabis is illegal at the federal level, although it may be legal in some U.S. states. To avoid possible deportation or inadmissibility from the US, students should avoid positions related to federally illegal substances.

According to USCIS Guidance:
- Under no circumstances would another F-1 student on OPT or a STEM OPT Extension be qualified to train another F-1 student on a STEM OPT Extension.
- The employer that signs the Form I-983 must be the same entity that provides the practical training experience to the student.
- The employer has sufficient resources and personnel available to provide appropriate training in connection with the STEM opportunity at the location(s) specified in the Form I-983.
- The “personnel” who provide/supervise the training experience may be either employees of the employer, or contractors who the employer has directly retained to provide services to the employer; they may not be employees or contractors of the employer’s clients or customers.
- DHS will review on a case-by-case basis whether the student will be a bona fide employee of the employer signing the Training Plan, and verify that the employer that signs the Training Plan is the same entity that employs the student and provides the practical training experience.
Temp/Staffing Agencies, 3rd Party Worksites

- Staffing and temporary agencies may employ students under the STEM OPT program, but only if they will be the entity that provides the practical training experience to the student and they have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student.

- STEM OPT participants may engage in a training experience that takes place at a site other than the employer’s principal place of business as long as all of the training obligations are met, including that the employer has and maintains a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student.

- A STEM OPT employer may not assign, or otherwise delegate, its training responsibilities to a non-employer third party (e.g., a client/customer of the employer, employees of the client/customer, or contractors of the client/customer).

- According to guidance from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, if a student uses a temporary or staffing agency to place them in a training opportunity, the agency cannot complete and sign the Form I-983, “Training Plan for STEM OPT Students,” unless:
  - The staffing/placement agency is an E-verified employer of the student,
  - The staffing/placement agency provides and oversees the training.
Unemployment During STEM OPT

• As long as you have submitted a timely filed STEM application to USCIS, you can continue working for up to 180 days after the expiration of your original OPT EAD while you wait for the STEM EAP approval.

• During **12-month OPT** you have a maximum of 90 days of unemployment over the 12 month period. During the STEM period you are allowed an additional 60 days of unemployment.

• **After your STEM OPT Extension approval**, the total allowed unemployment days extends to a maximum of 150 days of unemployment during the entire OPT/STEM period, *beginning from the start of your original OPT EAD card*.

• This is NOT just 150 days at the *beginning* of OPT or STEM. You are only allowed 150 total days over the entire 3 years.

• If you exceed 90 days of unemployment during your original 12-month OPT you are not eligible to apply for the STEM OPT Extension.


You used 60 days of unemployment during your **12 month OPT period** from Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2020. Your **STEM period** begins on Jan. 1, 2021. You continue your work after Jan. 1, 2021 with Company A. On March 1, 2021 you end your job with Company A. You later apply for a new STEM I-20 authorization for a job with Company B that begins on April 30. You have used another 60 days of unemployment, for a total of 120. You now have only 30 more days of unemployment remaining for the rest of your STEM period until December 31, 2022.
Alert! Increased OPT/STEM

OPT Scrutiny by DHS

- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has recently applied increased scrutiny to the OPT and STEM OPT programs, resulting in recent arrests for students who reported fraudulent employment with non-existent employers or false employment information.
- Falsifying your OPT employment records or reporting employment that is not legitimate may result in serious repercussions.
- SEVIS may also automatically terminate F-1 records for students who have more than 90 days of unemployment.
- During the STEM period, DHS has the right to conduct a site which is part of the agreements included on the I-983
When to Apply

STEM OPT I-20 Timing Considerations:
• You may apply as early as 90 days before your OPT EAD end date.
• You must submit your STEM I-20 request AT LEAST 2 weeks before your current OPT EAD expires.
• USCIS must receive your application before the expiration date of your OPT*. Check your OPT EAD card for the expiration**.
• Check USCIS’s current OPT and STEM OPT processing times. Select Form: “I-765” Form Category: “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” Service Center: “Potomac Service Center”. (Over the years, BIO has observed processing times ranging from 1-5 months, with most processed within 90 days.)
• If you are applying for an OPT STEM Extension at the same time you are filing for an H-1B employment visa you MUST review both the H-1B & STEM Extension information at the end of this tutorial and the Cap-Gap webpage.

IMPORTANT!
* Your OPT employment authorization will be automatically extended for 180 days after your OPT EAD end date while your OPT STEM application is pending.

** For E-filed applications, USCIS uses UTC or Coordinated Universal Time to determine the time/date filed. If you are filing CLOSE to your deadline check the UTC time/date of filing!
Application Process Overview

In most cases we recommend beginning the OPT STEM application process 90 days before the expiration of your 12-month OPT period. The following slides will give you detailed information about each step.

1. Complete the I-983 & Request Your STEM OPT I-20
   - Complete the I-983 with your employer.
   - Access BIO SSU Hub to update employment, complete the Apply for STEM form and pay your BIO Post-Completion Services Fee. This step can be completely entirely online in your BIO SSU Hub.
   - Receive STEM OPT I-20 from BIO. The I-20 will be 5 business days after submitting your complete application and payment in SSU, according to your preferred delivery method. (EMAIL RECOMMENDED!) USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of BIO recommending you, which is the date on the school attestation section of your I-20.

2. Prepare, collect & submit your application materials to USCIS.
   Allow approximately 1 week to gather and organize your materials for submission to USCIS. You can either e-file the application online, or submit a paper application through the mail (NOT RECOMMENDED). A complete application must be received by USCIS before the end date of your current EAD card. You must be physically present in the United States to file the OPT STEM Remember: You may continue to work on OPT for up to 180 days while the STEM application is pending with USCIS.

3. After Filing With USCIS
   - Track Your Case & Issues
     Check USCIS’s current OPT and STEM OPT processing times, Select Form: “I-765”Form Category: “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” Service Center: “Potomac Service Center”. (Over the years, BIO has observed processing times ranging from 1-5 months, with most processed within 90 days)

4. Maintain your F-1 status while on OPT STEM Extension.
   You must report general address/employer updates to BIO within 10 days of any change. 24 Month STEM Extension students must also submit a validation report every 6 months and training evaluations each 12 months. Find information about STEM Reporting here. Your I-20 travel endorsement is valid for only 6 months while on OPT STEM. Failure to provide timely updates may result in termination of the F-1 record.

Can I do anything about long USCIS processing times?
There is nothing you can do about the USCIS processing time, other than to apply as early as possible! See USCIS Issues & Tracking for how to report a case processing longer than the current USCIS processing time.
OPT STEM Application Timeline: (Example: July 9th 12-month OPT end date)

- **Submit STEM OPT request in SSU to BIO as early as 90 days before OPT ends.**
- **Prepare I-983 w/employer; Update SSU.**
- **STEM OPT I-20 processed by BIO in 5 business days; Submit I-765 & supporting materials to USCIS only after receiving I-20.**
- **12-month OPT end date (example); last possible date for USCIS to receive STEM application.**
- **24-month STEM EAD received; Upload image of STEM EAD card to SSU.**

You may continue to work on OPT for up to 180 days after your OPT expires while the STEM application is pending with USCIS.
Step 1: Completing I-983 & Requesting OPT STEM I-20
Step 1: Complete Form I-983

The formal training plan must clearly articulate the OPT STEM learning objectives and affirm the employer’s commitment to helping you achieve those objectives. To fulfill this requirement, you and your employer must complete and sign Form I-983 and then submit pages 1-4* to BiO.  

*Do not upload page 5 of the I-983 at this time. See Annual Evaluation for when you will submit page 5.

The following slides provide specific details regarding the I-983; please confirm your application follows the requirements, even if your employer plans to prepare the form on your behalf.
I-983 signed by both you & your employer!

The I-983 requires signatures or digital signatures on pages 1, 2, and 4. The following are acceptable signatures:

- Handwritten: You print the form and sign it and then make a scanned copy.
- Electronic signatures using software programs or applications.
- Electronically reproduced copies of a signature. A digitally reproduced copy may be a scanned image of a physical signature.
Complete I-983

Always download the current I-983 from the SEVP website. USCIS often updates the expiration date. If the expiration date is passed, that’s OK—USCIS may be in the process of updating the form.

Use the UC Berkeley School code found here, even if your STEM degree was from a different school.

If your STEM Degree is from a different school (NOT UC Berkeley), you will need to enter the name of the school where you obtained your STEM degree.
Complete I-983

Please write in the contact information of our SEVIS Manager, Mikaela, here. **Please fill out this field EXACTLY as it appears here. (DO NOT use a different name).** Please include ALL of the contact information. If there is not enough room, you can write it in by hand.

Note this is **NOT** the same name as the DSO who produced your I-20.

Your I-983 will be rejected if you write a different name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 1: STUDENT INFORMATION (Completed by Student)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear, Oski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Email Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:Oski@email.com">Oski@email.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of School Recommending STEM OPT:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR214F00615000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikaela Auerbach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 500, Berkeley, CA 94704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>510-642-2818 <a href="mailto:SEVISCoordinator@berkeley.edu">SEVISCoordinator@berkeley.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student SEVIS ID No.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found on page 1 of your I-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT Requested Period: (mm-dd-yyyy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day after current EAD ends i.e: - 05/10/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 months from STEM start date i.e.- 05/09/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Awarded: (mm-dd-yyyy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on Prior Degree? □ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Authorization Number:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete I-983

The CIP code is a 6-digit code (XX.XXXX) found on your I-20
- Page 1 if I-20 issued on/after 6/26/2015
- Page 3 if I-20 issued before 6/26/15

Example: Computer Science, 11.0701

What are CIP Codes? Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes are published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NES) & are used by SEVIS to designate a student’s major. Your CIP code determines whether your major has been designated as a STEM degree.
Complete I-983

If your STEM degree is listed on your UC Berkeley I-20, check “no.”

Check “yes” ONLY if your STEM degree is NOT the degree listed on your UC Berkeley 12-Month OPT I-20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 1: STUDENT INFORMATION (Completed by Student)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Name (Surname/Primary Name, Given Name):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Email Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of School Recommending STEM OPT:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of School Where STEM Degree Was Earned:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student SEVIS ID No.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT Requested Period: (mm-dd-yyyy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From: _______________ To: _______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: ________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level/Type of Qualifying Degree: ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Awarded: (mm-dd-yyyy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on Prior Degree? ☐ Yes ☐ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Authorization Number: _________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I.e. Bachelors, Masters, PhD

Indicate your graduation date here

“USCIS #” listed on your 12-Month OPT EAD
Complete Form I-983

See SEVP’s Overview and instructions information on completing the rest of the I-983.

Page 2 Common questions:

• What is the start date of employment? Technically the I-983 instructions state this is the start date of the STEM period employment. But BIO will accept either your STEM period employment start date or the original start date of the employment.

• What is my company’s NAICS number? Your company can find this information in their “My Company Profile” in the e-Verify system.

Pages 3-4 contain the details of the required Training Plan to be determined by you and your employer. To avoid rejection of your application, think carefully about each question and answer fully and completely. Imagine this is an essay exam to be graded- have you and your employer addressed all parts of each question, clearly and specifically? See the next 2 slides for more details.

Other points for consideration:

• Please ensure all responses are visible and upload fully complete I-983. (If you don’t have enough room, please submit an attachment.)

• Please upload all pages as a single pdf file! (Not as 4 separate files.)
I-983 Training Plan Section 5

**Student Role:** Describe the student’s role with the employer and how that role is directly related to enhancing the student’s knowledge obtained through his or her qualifying STEM degree.

- Responses that don’t include the name of your STEM degree and a description of the relationship between your role and your degree will be rejected.
- Example of response: [Description of role]. The student’s role enhances their knowledge related to their [STEM Degree] by [describe relationship].

**Goals and Objectives:** Describe how the assignment(s) with the employer will help the student achieve his or her specific objectives for work-based learning related to his or her STEM degree. The description must both specify the student’s goals regarding specific knowledge, skills, or techniques as well as the means by which they will be achieved.

- Responses that don’t include learning objectives or how they will be achieved will be rejected.
- Example of response: The student’s work-based learning goals/work objectives related to their STEM degree are [describe goals & relation to degree] and they will be achieved by [describe methods].
I-983 Training Plan Section 5

- Responses that do not include a specific description of method(s) of oversight and supervision will be rejected.
- Example of response: The employer provides oversight and supervision through [describe methods].

- Responses that do not include description of how knowledge and/or skills are assessed will be rejected.
- Example of response: The employer will measure and assess the student’s new knowledge and skills by [describe methods].
Step 2: Update BIO SSU Hub

Log in to your BIO Student SEVIS Update (SSU) Hub account in order to submit your STEM I-20 request. (*Note: most processing delays are due to failure to update all new required fields in SSU.*)

Before applying for STEM, you must:
1. Update your current address/email/phone
2. Update all current & previous OPT employment
3. Upload a copy of your OPT EAD (if you haven’t already)

After you have done this, click the “Apply for STEM OPT Extension” link in the Other Requests and Reporting Forms section, near the bottom of the screen.

See next slide for instructions...
Step 1: Update SSU (Apply for STEM)

On the STEM OPT Application page SSU Indicate with which employer you will be applying for your STEM Extension

- If applying with a **current employer**, select the employer, and click “Apply with this Employer”
- If applying with a **new employer**, click “Add New Employer and Apply”

This will lead you to the Employer Information form. Select the answer to next questions indicating “I am requesting my 24-month STEM OPT Extension I-20”
Step 1: Update SSU (Employer info)

For Current Employer: **Edit or update any information that has changed.** You’ll also be asked to complete the extra STEM section of this form (see next slide).

For New Employer: you’ll be asked to complete all fields.

**Employer Name:** Should be the name as it is listed on your I-983 AND in e-Verify.

**Address:** This should match the Site Address on page 3 of your I-983. If you are working remotely, this should reflect your remote work location.

We recommend that you verify the standard formatting of your employer’s address by using the “look up a ZIP code” feature on USPS.com.

**Address Street 1** should NOT contain the suite or office number. Please enter that in the field **Address Street 2.**
Step 1: Update SSU (Employer info)

For your STEM employer, please also complete sections 13-18. This information is required for STEM reporting.

13: E-Verify: Enter the company's E-Verify Company Identification Number.

14: Enter the company's Employer Identification Number (EIN).

15: Company Official's First Name (See I-983 Form section 5 for your Company Official's name & contact information).

16: Company Official's Last Name

17: Company Official's Phone Number

18: Company Official's Email Address

Employer’s E-Verify Company Identification Number: Your employer should be able to provide you with this information. DO NOT LOOK IT UP YOURSELF. If your employer isn’t sure, see: Where can my employer find their e_Verify number? See here for general information about the E-Verify program.

Employer Identification Number (EIN): Your employer should be able to provide you with this information.

Company Official Information: This should match the information you listed on I-983 form section 5.

On the next pages, you will be given some instructions and asked to upload your I-983.
Step 1: Update SSU (Upload I-983)

Upload Documents

Please upload your completed I-983(a) following the instructions below.

Important Points for consideration:
- The I-983 is a 6-page form and must be uploaded in ONE FILE, not as individual pages.
- We do not accept electronic signatures on the I-983. Please obtain handwritten signatures.
- Please ensure all responses are visible on the I-983. The fillable PDF is cut off, so if your text exceeds the space allowed, please submit a separate attachment.
- Does Section 1, DSO Name and Contact Information look like this? If no, please edit it before uploading.

Mikaela Auerbach
2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 500,
Berkeley, CA 94704
510-642-2818
SEVISCoordinator@berkeley.edu

TO UPLOAD:
1. Click the green Add files button.
2. Select the correct file to upload.
3. Once file has been uploaded, identify your document by selected an option in the drop down menu under “Type of Document” on the right.
4. Repeat this process for all required documents. You may upload more than one type of each document, if necessary.
5. To finish the process, click Submit Uploads. You will not be able to make changes after you click Submit.

According to your profile information, Granola, Vanina, we need the following documents from you:
- Additional I-983

Note: Maximum File Size limit is 10MB

Select I-983
Step 1: Submit Your SSU Form

Summary

⚠️ Warning! Your application is not complete until you review your information and click "Submit" below ⚠️

At the end, you will reach the summary page. Review your information and click Submit at the bottom of the page.

Lastly, you will get to the Submission Confirmation page.

Submission Confirmation

✅ You have successfully submitted this form.
Step 1: Submit STEM OPT Post-Completion Services Fee Payment

The STEM OPT Post-Completion Services fee pays for all BIO services related to your F-1 24-month STEM OPT period visa status maintenance provided by BIO as required by DHS federal regulations.

*STEM I-20 requests will not be processed without payment or a complete application. This fee is non-refundable.*

Fee: $550 until January 31, 2024 and $575 on or after February 1, 2024

In your SSU Hub, submit your Post-Completion Services Fee to Berkeley International Office via credit/debit card by clicking “Submit your STEM OPT Payment” link at the bottom of the SSU Hub homepage.

You will receive a receipt via email.
Step 1: Receive your STEM OPT I-20

Receive your I-20 and check it for accuracy

STEM OPT I-20 processing time is 5 business days. Your I-20 will be emailed to you by the end of the 5th business day.

(If your application contains errors, this may delay your I-20 completion and delivery)

Check your I-20 and notify BIO immediately if there are any errors with your I-20.

School Attestation
Make sure there is a BIO advisor signature. Check the date – USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the ISSUE Date listed on page 1.

Student Attestation
You should sign & date I-20. Students 18 and over do not need a parent’s signature.
Check your OPT I-20 for accuracy

Employment Authorization Dates
Check 24-month STEM OPT start and end dates. Verify employer name for accuracy.

Travel Endorsements
Check for adviser signature. Endorsements are good for 6-month periods.

You will receive a new travel signature at the time you request your OPT STEM I-20.

Please note: USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the DATE ISSUED date on PAGE 1, not the travel signature date. (The travel signature may be a later date.)
Step 2:
Prepare & Submit
Your Application Materials to USCIS
Can I file my USCIS OPT/STEM OPT Extension online?

This tutorial provides instructions for submitting the OPT or STEM OPT application by e-filing with USCIS. It’s also possible to file by mail. E-filing is RECOMMENDED. See the USCIS e-filing website for more information.

What is e-filing?
USCIS e-filing allows you to:
• Create a USCIS account
• Pay the USCIS I-765 fee online
• Complete the I-765 form online and upload documents

USCIS will send all notifications to you via your online account. These include pending notices, requests for evidence, denials and approvals. USCIS will also send you these notices in paper form through the mail.

If you encounter problems, check with BIO and we will do our best to direct you to resources for support. The USCIS Ombudsman has a helpful website with a detailed Q&A about I-765 e-filing questions which may be helpful to you.
Options to Submit OPT STEM Application  
(USCIS Form I-765)

**E-filing: Filing Online (recommended)**

Continue to the next slides in the tutorial for instructions specific to filing your OPT application with USCIS online.

**Online Filing Benefits:**
- Simpler and has less risk of application documents lost in the mail, or mail delays.
- Immediate receipt number upon submitting application.
- Lower risk of rejection due to payment issues, mistakes in filling out the application or forgotten documents.
- You can receive and respond to requests for evidence or other problems online.
- You can communicate with USCIS via your online account.
- USCIS will send all notifications to you via your online account. These include pending notices, requests for evidence, denials and approvals. USCIS will also send you these notices in paper form through the mail. See the [USCIS e-filing website](https://www.uscis.gov) for more information.

**Filing by Mail**

If you choose to file by mail (**not recommended**):

1. You can request basic instructions from a BIO advisor on how to file the I-765 by mail. BIO no longer provides step by step paper I-765 instructions.
2. You will mail the complete paper Form I-765 and copies of required documentation to USCIS.
3. Continue in this tutorial to [Section 3: After Filing & OPT STEM Issues](#)

**Why is filing by Mail NOT recommended?**
- This application process is slower due to mailing.
- You will not receive receipt notices or request for evidence electronically.
- Higher risk of lost application, denial due to incorrect fee payment, late applications.
### Required documents for e-filed OPT I-765 application

- U.S. Passport Photo taken within the past 30 days.
- USCIS Fee - See the [USCIS I-765 page](#) for current filing fee.
- Form I-765- You will submit this form online. See the [USCIS I-765 page](#). DO NOT submit the I-765 before you have received your OPT I-20!
- Copy of STEM OPT I-20 (pages 1-3) issued by BIO within the past 60 days. Don’t forget to sign it!
- Copy of your previous OPT and/or previous STEM OPT I-20s.
- Copy of any previous OPT EAD or STEM EAD. If you still have the approval notice (form I-797), attach a copy as well.
- Copy of currently valid passport biographical page and F-1 visa stamp, if applicable.
- Copy of expired passport biographical page if you used that document to enter the U.S. most recently
- Printout of [electronic I-94 record](#) or copy of paper Form I-94 (both sides).
- Proof of final STEM degree: Final Transcript and/or copy of your diploma showing the major and degree level that makes you eligible for the STEM extension.
- **RARE:** If the OPT STEM extension is based on a prior degree (not the degree listed on your current OPT I-20) include:
  - the I-20 from your previous school. If the I-20 is not available, request a screenshot of your SEVIS record
  - Evidence that the previous school is [currently accredited by the U.S. Department of education](#) and is [certified by SEVP](#)
- Additional Documents- Check the [BIO STEM webpage](#) “Additional STEM OPT Extension Documents” to see if you should submit additional support letters with your STEM application for concurrent H1-B filing or for certain specific majors

No documents are required for F-2 dependents.
Step 2: Prepare and Submit the OPT STEM Application

Gather the required documentation

Passport Photo Requirements

Photos 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 website.

E-FILING: You must either scan a physical photo or take a picture with your phone. Follow the instructions above and in the online I-765 application!
Preparation of your USCIS fee payment method: Filing online

Filing online

- If you file the form I-765 online, the online form will automatically calculate the correct fee and you will pay online when you submit the e-filed application.
- You must pay with a valid credit or debit card, or provide your bank routing and checking account numbers to have money taken directly from your U.S. bank account.
- Check the USCIS I-765 website for the current filing fee.
- DO NOT complete the submission of your I-765 or pay the fee until you have your OPT STEM I-20 and all other required documents!
Gather the required documentation

Photocopy of UCB OPT STEM I-20 (all 3 pages):

- Must be received by USCIS within 60 days of DATE ISSUED on page 1.

- Original must be signed by a BIO advisor, either by hand or electronically.

- Original must be signed by hand by the student at the bottom of page 1 before copying. If you received an electronic copy of your I-20, you must print it out and sign it by hand.

- The requested OPT start and end dates will appear on page 2. CHECK THE OPT STEM RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2!
Gather the required documentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEVIS ID: N0012645978 (F-1)</th>
<th>NAME: Bear Osaki</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>FULL/PART-TIME</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>START DATE</th>
<th>END DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POST-COMPLETION OPT</td>
<td>FULL TIME</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2016</td>
<td>14 JUNE 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT</td>
<td>FULL TIME</td>
<td>REQUESTED</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2017</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EMPLOYER INFORMATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>AUTHORIZATION DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POST-COMPLETION OPT</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2016 - 14 JUNE 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>AUTHORIZATION DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM OPT</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2017 - 15 JUNE 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER NAME</th>
<th>START DATE</th>
<th>END DATE</th>
<th>CITY &amp; STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley International Office</td>
<td>22 AUGUST 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td>Berkeley, CA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYER NAME</th>
<th>START DATE</th>
<th>END DATE</th>
<th>CITY &amp; STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley International Office</td>
<td>15 JUNE 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td>Berkeley, CA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gather the required documentation

Photocopy of PREVIOUS OPT I-20 (all pages):

Page 2 should show your initial 12-month OPT authorization.

Do I need copies of my previous CPT I-20s?

No! USCIS doesn’t need to review your previous CPT usage. They only need to review your prior OPT and STEM authorizations.

You may need to request copies of any lost OPT/STEM OPT I-20s.

- UCB I-20s: Email BIO for an I-20 Copy request form.
- Previous School I-20s: contact them directly
Gather the required documentation

Photocopy of Passport and Visa:

- Photocopy your current passport biographic page with the photo and passport expiration date.

- If this is not the passport you used on your last entry to the U.S., also include a copy of the passport you used when you made entry to the U.S., even if it is expired. (You will provide information on the expired passport on pg. 7.)

- Photocopy the F-1 visa, if applicable; visa does not need to be valid.
Gather the required documentation

Photocopy of I-94 Information:
The I-94 can be either:

- An electronic I-94 record. Visit: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov) to access and print your record. Select “Get Most Recent I-94”.

**OR (less common)**

- A paper I-94 card stapled into your passport. Include a copy of both sides, even though the back side may be blank.

**OR (less common)**

- A copy of an I-797 Change of Status Approval Notice which includes a new I-94.
Gather the required documentation

Photocopy of current OPT EAD: (and previous STEM or other EADs if applicable)

- Include a copy of the front and back of the card.
- Include I-797 notice of approval if available.
Gather the required documentation

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. Final Transcripts are preferred.
- See here for information on how to obtain your UC Berkeley Diploma or Transcript
Gather the required documentation

Special Case: Previous Degrees or Previous STEM Extensions

• If the OPT STEM Extension is based on a *previously earned STEM degree* (NOT the degree listed on your current 12-Month OPT) you must also include:
  – A copy of your I-20 from the previous school. If the I-20 is not available, either request 1) a screenshot of your F-1 SEVIS record from the previous school OR 2) a letter from your previous international office stating your name, SEVIS ID, the dates of your attendance, and your STEM major and CIP code.
  – Evidence that the previous school is [currently accredited by the U.S. Department of education](#)
  – Evidence that the previous school is [certified by SEVP](#)

• **YOU DO NOT NEED TO SUBMIT THIS IF YOU ARE APPLYING FOR STEM WITH YOUR MOST RECENTLY EARNED DEGREE FROM UC BERKELEY, WHICH IS LISTED ON YOUR OPT I-20!**
Gather the required documentation

Additional STEM OPT Documents: CIP Code/Major Name Mismatch

• In some cases, your UC Berkeley Major Name on your transcript/diploma is extremely different than the CIP Code name listed on page 1 of your I-20. (Example: Your Major title is “Journalism” the designated CIP code for the Journalism degree at UC Berkeley is 09.0702—Digital Communication and Media/Multimedia.)

• BIO recommends that students in these “CIP Code/Major Name Mismatch” programs submit a letter of explanation with the STEM application to avoid any confusion by USCIS.

• Review the Additional STEM OPT Documents, CIP Code/Major Name Mismatch section of the STEM webpage to see if a letter is recommended for your major.

What are CIP Codes? Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes are published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NES) & are used by SEVIS to designate a student’s major. Your CIP code determines whether your major has been designated as a STEM degree.
Gather the required documentation

Additional STEM OPT Documents: Concurrent H-1B & STEM Applications

Filing an H-1B and a STEM applications concurrently can sometimes cause complications in your SEVIS record. If you are planning to file for an H-1B and STEM at the same time, you should submit your OPT STEM application on time, before the original 12 month EAD expires.

BIO recommends including the following letter with your STEM Extension application to USCIS:

- **STEM/Cap-Gap Letter**: Include this letter ONLY if a Cap-Gap Extension appears on your OPT STEM I-20.

- **STEM/H-1B Letter**: Include this letter if NO Cap-Gap Extension currently appears on your I-20, but your employer has filed for an H-1B for you and your OPT expires before 9/30.

- See [H-1B & STEM Extension](#) information at the end of this tutorial.
Step 2: Prepare and Submit the OPT STEM Application

Application Deadline

USCIS must receive the OPT STEM application:

- No later than **60 days after the OPT STEM I-20 ISSUE DATE on page 1**.
  - 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 OPT EAD. (If filing by mail, account for mailing time.)
- If you have received a Cap-Gap Extension of your I-20, you must still submit your STEM application to USCIS **before** the expiration of your 12 month EAD
- You may apply up to 90 days before your current OPT end date.
- E-filed applications are immediately receipted on the day you fully submit the online request.
- For E-filed applications, USCIS uses **UTC or Coordinated Universal Time** to determine the time/date filed. If you are filing CLOSE to your deadline check the UTC time/date of filing!
- Track the status of your application to be certain it was submitted on time.

We recommend that you apply early.

Your application must be submitted to USCIS from within the U.S. If you exit the U.S. and do not re-enter and file BEFORE your OPT EAD end date you cannot return and will lose your option for STEM OPT.
Online Form I-765

If you don’t already have an account, you should create a USCIS account: [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/)

USCIS online filing allows you to:

- Create a USCIS account
- Pay the USCIS I-765 fee online
- Complete the I-765 form online and upload documents

See instructions on [how to create a USCIS online account](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/)

If you already have a USCIS account, you can just log in!
Online Form I-765

After logging in
• select “File form online”

• Select I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, click ‘Start form’ button
• Review the information, click ‘Next’
• Review ‘Completing Your Form Online’
Online Form I-765

Getting Started

• Basic of eligibility
  - What is your eligibility category? Select eligibility category: (c)(3)(C) STEM Extension
  - What is your degree? Indicate your degree level AND the name of your UC Berkeley STEM-qualifying Major as it appears on your transcript or diploma (Note that for some programs, the name of your Major differs from the way it appears on your I-20. This will be addressed LATER in the Additional Evidence section of the I-765.)
  - What is your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify? This should also match what is in SSU Hub, on your I-983, and on your STEM I-20
  - What is your employer’s E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number?

• Reason for applying
  – What is your reason for applying? Select ‘Initial permission to accept employment’
  – Have you previously filed Form I-765? Select ‘Yes’

• Preparer and interpreter information
  – Is someone assisting you with completing this application? This is asking if an attorney or translator has assisted you. Select ‘No’. Then Next. If your employer’s immigration legal counsel is assisting you with the STEM filing, ask them how to complete this question.
Online Form I-765

About You

Your name

• What is your current legal name?
  - Enter your name exactly as it appears in the Surname/Family Name and Given Name fields on your I-20.
  - Note your I-20 DOES NOT use the Middle Name field. Leave the Middle Name field blank.

• Have you used any other names since birth?
  - If you select ‘Yes’, enter your previous names, including nicknames you have used in official records or documentation.
  - If your I-20 Preferred Name is different then the names you wrote for #1, include that here. Click Next.

Your contact information

• How may we contact you?
  - Provide ‘Daytime telephone number’, ‘Mobile telephone number’ (if different from Daytime telephone number) and ‘Email address’.

• What is your current U.S. mailing address?
  - Enter your mailing address.
  - If the address belongs to someone other than yourself, put their full name (First Name Last Name). This person MUST be listed as a resident of the address with the U.S. Postal Service.

• Is your current mailing address the same as your physical address?
  - If ‘No’, enter your physical address.
Online Form I-765

The responses to these questions should be straightforward.
Please complete them accurately.

• Describe yourself
  - What is your gender*?
  - What is your marital status?
  - When and where you were born
  - What is your city, town, or village of birth?
  - What is your state or province of birth?
  - What is your country of birth?
  - What is your date of birth?

* NOTE: The gender selected does not need to match the gender listed on other immigration documents nor does it need to match other supporting identity documents, such as a birth certificate, a passport, or state identification.
Online Form I-765

Your Immigration Information

• What is your country of citizenship or nationality?
  – List all countries where you are currently a citizen or national.

• What is your Form I-94 Arrival-Departure Record Number (if any)?
  – Enter your current I-94 number. This is at the number found on the electronic I-94 record or on the top left corner of the paper Form I-94 card.

• When did you last arrive in the United States?
  – List your arrival date (your most recent entry date found on your passport admission stamp, electronic I-94 record or paper I-94 card), place of arrival (choose ‘San Francisco Intl’ if entered via SFO Airport), and visa status at arrival.

• What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?
  – Passport information should match the country on your I-20

• What is your travel document number (if any)?
  – Leave blank. (You have a passport, not a travel document!)

• What is the expiration date of your passport or travel document?

• What country issued your passport or travel document?

• What is your current immigration status or category?
  – Current status should be “F-1 student.” If not, talk to a BIO advisor, and this status should be reflected in your current I94.

• What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)?
  – Use the “Additional Information” section later to include all previously used SEVIS numbers, if you had any previous F-1 or J-1 record.
Online Form I-765

Other Information

• **What is your A-Number?**
  – Fill in the USCIS number listed on your OPT EAD card

• **What is your USCIS Online Account Number?**
  – Provide your USCIS Online Account Number (OAN) if you have one

• **Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?**
  – If answer ‘Yes’, enter your SSN.
  – If answer ‘No’, proceed to the next question.

• **Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?** Since you probably already have an SSN, you will likely not need to apply for one.
  – Check “Yes” if you need a new or replacement SSN card and complete If ‘Yes’, review consent and click ‘Yes’. Provide your father’s and mother’s birth names accordingly.
  – Select ‘No’ if you already have a social security number and card.

You should receive your SSN card from SSA about 2 weeks after receiving your EAD card from USCIS.
Evidence

Upload supporting documents

- **2 x 2 Photo of You** - Review descriptions for photo file eligibility requirement and file requirements for uploading

- **I-94, Arrival and Departure Record**

- **Employment Authorization Document**
  - Upload front/back copies of any previously issued OPT/STEM EAD card.
  - Upload a copy of passport and visa
  - Upload I-20 copies of any *previously authorized OPT/STEM OPT*. See next slide: Additional Information section.

- **Form I-20** – Upload a copy of the current STEM OPT I-20 (all 3 pages), no later than 60 days after the I-20 ISSUE DATE on page 1.

- **College Degree** - Final Transcript and/or copy of your diploma showing the major and degree level that makes you eligible for the STEM extension.

- **Institution Accreditation** – RARE: If the OPT STEM extension is based on a *prior degree* (not the degree listed on your current STEM OPT I20 from BIO), include I-20 from your previous school. If the I-20 is not available, request a screenshot of your SEVIS record. Provide an additional explanation in the Additional Information section.
Online Form I-765: Additional Information

- **Use this section to provide additional explanations.** If you do not need to provide any additional information, you may leave this section blank.
- **If you need to use this section select “Add Response”.** You will then need to refer to specific questions from the previous sections for which you are adding additional evidence.

### Degree name:

(Select section: Getting Started - Basic of Eligibility - “What is your Degree”? )

Write “Name of major in SEVIS: XXXXX University of California, Berkeley Approved CIP Code for Major XX.XXXX:” Include your major name [XXXX] and CIP code as written on your I-20 [XX.XXXX]. (If your STEM degree was received from a different school, NOT from UC Berkeley, use your STEM degree school’s name.)

- If your UC Berkeley Major Name on your transcript/diploma and does not closely match the CIP Code name listed on page 1 of your I-20, enter “See attached I-20 and diploma or transcript” and upload the CIP Code/Major Name Mismatch explanation letter to the College Degree section. See [STEM OPT webpage](#) section “Additional STEM OPT Extension Documents” to locate your program/major.
Online Form I-765: Additional Information

• **Previous I-765** (Select section: Getting Started– Reason for Applying--Have you previously filed Form I-765?) Enter: “I have previous OPT/STEM Authorization. See attached documentation for previous OPT or STEM authorization(s).” and then list your previous OPT and STEM OPT start & end dates and receipt numbers. (Example: “OPT 07/10/2021-07/09/2022. Receipt number: SRC1234567890”) Upload copies of all previous and OPT/STEM I-20s and EAD card(s) to the Evidence – Employment Authorization section.

  • Not common: If your previous OPT application was rejected or denied, enter “See attached documentation for previous I-765 OPT denial.” Upload a copy of the previous denial, etc.

• **Expired passport** (Select section: About You– Your Immigration Information-- What is the passport number of your most recently issued passport?) : If you most recently entered the US on a passport that is no longer valid and you now have a renewed passport, enter “I most recently entered the US on MM-DD-YYYY with passport ######## and was issued I-94 ########. Since this date, I have renewed my passport. My new passport number is ########. See attached copies of both passports”. Then, upload copies of new and old passports to the Evidence section.

• **Previous SEVIS number** (Select section: : About You– Your Immigration Information-- What is your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Number (if any)? : If you have previously had other F or J SEVIS ID numbers, list previous SEVIS IDs.
Online Form I-765

Check your application before you submit

We will review your application to check for accuracy and completeness before you submit it. We encourage you to provide as many responses as you can throughout the application, to the best of your knowledge. Missing information can slow down the review process after you submit your application. You can return to this page to review your application as many times as you want before you submit it.

Your fee

- Your form filing fee is: $410

Refund Policy: USCIS does not refund fees, regardless of any action we take on your application, petition or request, or how long USCIS takes to reach a decision. By continuing this transaction, you acknowledge that you must submit fees in the exact amount and that you are paying the fees for a government service.

Applicant’s statement

You must read and agree to the statement below.

- I can read and understand English, and have read and understand every question and instruction on this application, as well as my answer to every question.

You must provide your digital signature below by typing your full legal name. We may deny your application if you do not completely fill out this application or fail to submit required documents. We will record the date of your signature with your application.

Oski Bear

Review and Submit

- Review your information and uploaded evidence for accuracy and completeness. The form filing fee and warning about incomplete sections in your application will be listed on this page.

- Next page, check your application summary, print for personal record.

- Next page, read and agree to the statement by checking the box.

- Next page, review Applicant’s Declaration and Certification, check box “I have read and agree to the applicant’s statement”, and type your digital signature.

- Next page, pay for filing fee and submit your application electronically. Once paid and submitted your application successfully, you should receive the receipt number. Keep this for your personal record.
TOP 4 MOST COMMON OPT STEM DENIAL REASONS

1. **Online filing without OPT STEM I-20**
   - Be sure to include the OPT STEM I-20 before fully submitting online application.

2. **Submitted STEM OPT Application after deadline** *
   - Your OPT STEM application must be received by USCIS before the expiration of your OPT EAD card.

3. **Applied for the wrong I-765 category**
   - You are applying for category: (c)(3)(C) STEM Extension
   - Watch out for drop-down menu errors!

4. **Copy of OPT STEM I-20 (pages 1-3) is TOO OLD**
   - **New STEM OPT applications**: USCIS must receive your complete OPT application no later than 60 days* after the ORIGINAL OPT STEM I-20 ISSUE DATE on page 1 of the I-20.
   - **Resubmission after OPT Rejection or Denial**: If your OPT STEM is REJECTED OR DENIED you must NOTIFY BIO. You may need to request a NEW STEM OPT I-20 recommendation FROM BIO before you resubmit your OPT STEM application. Again- USCIS must receive your new, complete OPT re-application no later than 60 days after the OPT I-20 ISSUE DATE on page 1 of the I-20 and before the expiration of your OPT EAD.

* For E-filed applications, USCIS uses **UTC or Coordinated Universal Time** to determine the time/date filed. If you are filing CLOSE to your deadline check the UTC time/date of filing!

Applications may be rejected or denied for other reasons. These are the most common reasons as observed by BIO advisers. If your application is rejected or denied you might still be able to re-apply to USCIS before the end of your OPT EAD. If you receive a Rejection or Denial (or Request for Evidence) notify BIO immediately, and ask for advice before your response. BIO sees many re-application denials which could have been avoided by consulting an adviser before response.
Step 3: After Filing & STEM OPT Application Issues
I-797C Notice of Action

Mail: You should receive the notice by mail within 2-4 weeks after mailing the OPT application to USCIS.

E-file: You will receive a receipt notice immediately via your USCIS online account, and later receive the paper receipt notice by mail.

- The I-797C is very important. If you lose the receipt, it may be very difficult to replace it.
- The I-797C is necessary if you want to:
  1. inquire about the status of your OPT application.
  2. travel outside the U.S. while your OPT is pending.

Receipt Number
The case number for the OPT STEM application at USCIS. Check the status of the case via your USCIS account or at uscis.gov

Received Date
Date when 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 your name, date of birth, and address on the I-765 receipt notice. (Date of birth does not appear on e-filed notices.) If incorrect, contact BIO immediately.

Contacting USCIS
If you have any problems or questions with the OPT application, contact a BIO advisor before contacting USCIS Customer Service.
USCIS Issues & Tracking Your Case

**E-Filing:**
You can use your [USCIS online account](https://www.uscis.gov) to:

- Get your current case status and the history of your case;
- Respond to Requests for Evidence (RFEs);
- Access every notice USCIS sends you; and
- Send USCIS secure messages and get answers.

**Address Changes:**
If your address changes, you can update it online through your existing [USCIS online account](https://www.uscis.gov) if you filed your form online.

Keep in mind that address changes can take time to process, and could jeopardize your OPT EAD delivery. We recommend keeping the same address for your entire OPT processing, if possible.

**Filing by Mail?**

- **Sign up for an account** at [https://www.uscis.gov](https://www.uscis.gov). This will allow you to receive automatic updates and monitor your case. Click “Check Your Case Status” and then select “Sign Up.”
- **Add your paper-filed case to your account** (Step 13)
- **General Case Tracking:**
  If you don’t sign up for an account (NOT RECOMMENDED), you can still track your case using the “Check Your Case Status” Tool.
Premium Processing

Premium Processing is now available for the I-765 form.

What is premium processing?
• USCIS will process your OPT/STEM I-765 request **within 30 days** of submission of the fully completed I-907 form.

How much does it cost?
• It’s expensive! See the current Premium Processing for Form I-765 under the “Filing Fee” section on the [Form I-907](#) website.

How can I request premium processing
• You can either file at the same time you complete your I-765 application. Or you can file the [Form I-907 online](#) later and “upgrade” your already pending OPT application. (The 30 day processing guarantee only starts from when you pay the I-907 premium fee.)
• For more information see [How Do I Request Premium Processing?](#)

Is it worth it?
• Check current USCIS Processing times for “I-765” “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” with “Potomac Service Center”
• Premium processing doesn’t guarantee OPT approval! It also doesn’t guarantee you will receive your EAD card within 30 days because mailing isn’t included. You will just be guaranteed a **decision** within 30 days: either an approval, denial, or request for additional evidence.
USCIS Issues: Case Inquiries & Expedites

Case Inquiries & Processing times:

You can submit inquiries and requests about your case using the Case Inquiry tool for these issues:

- If you don’t receive your receipt notice, EAD or other notifications
- If there is an error on your receipt notice or EAD card
- If your case is pending longer than the normal processing time. Check current USCIS Processing times for “I-765” “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” with “Potomac Service Center”
  - Scroll down the page, enter your receipt date and select “Get Inquiry Date”. This will advise you on if your case is being processed within normal timeframes, and provide you the first date you can make an inquiry.

Expedites (without paying Premium Processing):

USCIS almost always denies F-1 expedite requests for OPT. USCIS may consider expediting if the request meets one or more of the expedite criteria below. See expedite criteria & instructions here.

- Severe financial loss to a company or person, if expedite is not due to applicant’s failure: (1) to file the benefit request in a reasonable time frame; or (2) to respond to any RFE in a timely manner;
- Urgent humanitarian reasons;
- Compelling U.S. Government interests (such as urgent cases for the Department of Defense or DHS, or other public safety or national security interests); or
- Clear USCIS error.

NOTE: 1) Severe financial loss to a company means the company would be at risk of failing. 2) The need to obtain employment authorization, standing alone, without evidence of other compelling factors, does not warrant expedited treatment.
Application Problems: RFE, Rejection, Denial

**RFE** - If there is a problem with your application, the USCIS may send you a notice called a “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.

**Denial** – Denials are usually the result of the student not fulfilling the basic eligibility requirements, e.g. application not received by deadline, no STEM I-20. Denials are issued by adjudicators.

**Filing by Mail: Rejection** - USCIS mailing Lockbox typically reviews and rejects OPT STEM applications within 2-4 weeks of receipt of the application packet due to a variety of reasons: missing documents in the application packet, issue with OPT application fee (credit card declined, check bounced), student forgot to sign I-765, etc.

- In some cases, USCIS will return the entire application to you by mail. If this happens, you must make corrections and send a new application. You may need to request a NEW STEM OPT I-20 recommendation from BIO before resubmitting your STEM OPT application. USCIS must receive your new, complete OPT re-application no later than 60 days after the OPT STEM I-20 ISSUE DATE on page 1 of the I-20 and before the end date of your OPT EAD card*.

Tips: To avoid delays, review your application materials for completeness and sign all the forms before submitting them to the USCIS.

* For E-filed applications, USCIS uses UTC or Coordinated Universal Time to determine the time/date filed. If you are filing CLOSE to your deadline check the UTC time/date of filing!

Contact BIO IMMEDIATELY if you receive an RFE, rejection, or denial notice for assistance!
How will I receive an RFE, Denial, or Rejection?

- **E-File**: You will receive all notices in your online account, and will receive a copy by mail as well.
- **Filing by Mail**: You will receive all notices by mail. If you’ve added paper-filed applications to your online USCIS account, you may be able to access notices there.
The Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

- USCIS takes approximately 3 months for processing. The observed average processing time at USCIS is 90-120 days, but processing can take longer in some cases. Check current USCIS Processing times for “I-765” “Based on a request by a qualified F-1 academic student [(c)(3)]” with “Potomac Service Center”

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.

- A change in employment will require a new BIO 24-Month STEM request AND a new I-983 with the new employer.

- You must work full time in your field of study while on your OPT STEM Extension

- You may accumulate up to 150 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.

- Review card to make sure the information is accurate. If not, contact a BIO advisor.

- Present your EAD to employers as proof of your legal work authorization in the US.

- The EAD is a required document for entry to the U.S. during STEM OPT.

- Upload a copy of your EAD card at io.berkeley.edu/ssu
Driver License Applications & Renewal

- If your California Driver License has expired, you can only renew the license after your STEM OPT EAD has been approved.

- This is because your OPT EAD will expire, and without proof of the STEM OPT approval (and continuing F-1 status) you won’t qualify to renew the license.

- If you live in a state other than California, check with the local DMV regarding requirements for renewal.
Avoiding Immigration Scams

• It is very rare for USCIS or SEVP to contact you via phone regarding your application or your SEVIS record. Most notices from SEVP Portal are sent by email, and most notices from USCIS are sent via mail. They will generally never ask you for money.

• See USCIS’s Avoid Scams Initiative website on how to avoid immigration scams, report fraud, and find authorized legal services.
Step 4: Maintaining Your F-1 Status & STEM Reporting Requirements
Reporting Requirements

- Submit updates online at io.berkeley.edu/ssu
- You must report any changes to your employment, address, and/or name within 10 days.
- Complete 6 Month validation with BIO.
- Report Material Changes to your I-983 to BIO within 10 days.
- Annual Evaluation of Student Progress due at 12 and 24 Months

See STEM Reporting Requirements for instructions on how to submit updates, validations, and evaluations.
Reporting Your Information

While on OPT STEM, you must update the Berkeley International Office within 10 days of any changes to the following information:

- Your Name
- Your Residential Address
- Your Phone & Email Address
- Employer Name or Address
- Starting or Ending Employment
- Date of departure from the U.S. if you leave prior to OPT STEM end date and want to end your OPT.
- Change of status to another visa category

We recommend saving the website page showing your updated information.

In order to update your information, you will need your UC Berkeley Student ID # and SEVIS # (found on your I-20; starts with Noo...).
Reporting Requirements: BIO SSU HUB (MANDATORY)

- ALL STUDENTS ON OPT/STEM ARE REQUIRED TO USE THE BIO SSU HUB TO SUBMIT OPT UPDATES. BIO SSU Hub is a BIO system.

- Submit updates online at io.berkeley.edu/ssu.

SEVP Portal (OPTIONAL)

- The Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has its own “SEVP Portal” for students on OPT/STEM. On day 1 of your approved OPT, you will receive an email from SEVP with instructions on how to create an account. This email will come from do-not-reply.sevp@ice.dhs.gov.

- Be aware of scams: SEVP will NEVER ask you for a payment to register for the optional SEVP Portal.

- Registration for SEVP Portal is OPTIONAL. BIO WILL NOT USE the SEVP Portal for OPT reporting purposes. BIO recommends using SEVP Portal as “view-only.”
Changing Employment While on STEM OPT Extension

If you change employers during your 24-month STEM OPT period, follow the instructions below. (If your STEM EAD has not yet been approved by USCIS, contact a BIO advisor for more information.)

Log into SSU and do the following:
1. Update your address/phone/email.
2. Add the new employer information and upload a new I-983 form for the new employer. You will choose the delivery method for your new I-20.
3. Edit your previous employer and add end date and upload the Final Evaluation I-983 page 5.
4. Upload a copy of your STEM EAD (if we don’t have it already).
Report Material Changes to Form I-983

Material changes may include, but are not limited to:

• Change in employer address or supervisor.
• Any change of the employer’s Employer Identification Number, (i.e., the company’s Federal Tax ID number) resulting from a change in the employer’s ownership or structure.
• Any reduction in your compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
• Any significant decrease in hours per week that you engage in a STEM training opportunity.
• Changes to the employer’s commitments or your learning objectives as documented on the Form I-983.
• Updated Material Changes via a revised I-983 needs to be submitted to BIO within 10 business days.
6-Month Validations & Annual/Final Evaluations

• STEM OPT students must submit a validation report to BIO every six months starting from the date the 24-month extension begins and ending when the student’s F-1 status ends.

• 4 validations in total over 24-month OPT STEM Extension time.
  – 2 6-Month Validation Reports (at 6 and 18 months)
  – 2 Annual or Final Evaluation reports (at 12 and 24 months)

• Check your STEM OPT start date and mark your calendar for each 6 month interval of your STEM Extension for your reporting deadlines. Example: Your STEM Extension Starts January 1, 2017.
  – You must submit 6-Month Validations on July 1, 2017 and on July 1, 2018
  – You must submit an Annual Evaluation on January 1, 2018 and a Final Evaluation on Jan 1, 2019.

• Your F-1 record may be terminated if you fail to report each 6 months.

• Be sure to check email reminders from BIO.
Annual and Final Evaluations

• You must submit Form I-983 page 5 “Evaluation of Student Progress” to BIO each at 12 and 24 months and/or any time you leave an employer.
• Your employer must review and sign the self evaluation to attest to the accuracy.
• Check your STEM start date and mark your calendar for each 12 month interval of your STEM Extension for your reporting deadlines. (Example: Your STEM Extension Starts January 1, 2017. You must submit an annual evaluation January 1, 2018, and a final evaluation by January 1, 2019.)
• Your F-1 record may be terminated if you fail to submit your evaluations.
• Be sure to check email reminders from BIO.
SSU Hub Reporting

- You can see your reporting deadlines in the SSU Hub.
- Validation Report links will become available during your reporting period.
SEVP Portal Reminders

- SEVIS SEVP Portal will also email you reminders regarding your 6 Month Validations and Annual Evaluations. Remember, you’ll do this reporting through the BIO SSU Hub.

- You can also check your reporting deadlines via the SEVP Portal.
Important Information Regarding Travel

- Avoid long absences from the U.S. during the STEM OPT period. Time spent outside of the U.S. while unemployed by a U.S. employer counts toward your 150 days of unemployment.
- Attempting to re-enter the U.S. close to the expiration date of your OPT can be risky.
- You must not enter the U.S. in a status other than F-1. This may result in the loss of your OPT eligibility.

Travel While STEM OPT is Pending, But Before STEM OPT Card is Received

- There is a higher risk associated with travel and return while your STEM OPT is pending after the program completion date of your OPT EAD. If there are any problems with your application, you may not be able to respond to USCIS in a timely manner, which could delay processing of your EAD.
- If your STEM OPT application is denied while outside the U.S., and your original OPT EAD has expired, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply.
Applying for an F-1 Visa on STEM OPT

If you are traveling abroad and your F-1 visa has expired and you want to travel outside the US, you must obtain a new F-1 visa before returning to the U.S. Please consult with a BIO advisor to discuss the visa process and travel risks. General information can be found on BIO’s Applying for a Visa page. If your F-1 visa has expired, and your OPT STEM Extension is still pending, you will NOT be able to apply for a new F-1 visa until the application is approved and you have the EAD.
Completing OPT & Grace Period

- You have a 60 day grace period following the end of your STEM OPT EAD.
- The only additional extension of STEM OPT available is the [OPT Cap-Gap Extension](#), for students who have an accepted cap-subject H-1B application.
- Failure to exit, continue your F-1 status, or timely request a Cap-Gap Extension or USCIS Change of Status is a violation of status.
- If you receive a Cap Gap extension of your OPT, the grace period will begin after the end of the Cap Gap extension period.

If you do not extend your STEM OPT via the H1-B Cap-Gap, and your EAD expires, you have the following options before the end of the 60 days grace period:

1. Exit the U.S. within 60 days.
2. Continue your F-1 Status & Studies: Transfer your I-20 to continue studies at another school OR request a Change of Educational Level to begin new studies at UC Berkeley.
3. Work with immigration legal counsel regarding a Change of Status application to a new visa category. You will need to check with your legal counsel regarding your allowed period of stay or required exit date if you have a pending change of status when your grace period ends.
H-1B and STEM Extension

Can I file for an H-1B and a STEM Extension at the same time?
Yes, but filing these applications concurrently can sometimes cause complications in your SEVIS record. You can apply for an STEM OPT Extension before your OPT EAD expires. If you are planning to file for an H-1B and STEM at the same time, you should submit your STEM OPT application on time, before the original 12 month EAD expires. You should also be mindful to take extra steps when filing for your STEM OPT Extension and continuing your F-1 status:

- Before requesting a STEM I-20, check with your employer and the legal counsel working on your H-1B and confirm that your employer recommends that you file STEM/H-1B concurrently at this time.
- When submitting your STEM OPT Extension, include the **STEM/Cap-Gap Letter** if a Cap-Gap appears on your OPT STEM I-20.
  - If no Cap-Gap currently appears on your I-20, but your employer has filed for the H-1B and your OPT expires before 9/30, include the **STEM/H1B Letter**.
  - Update BIO as soon as possible regarding any Withdrawal or Denial of your H-1B petition. These actions may have an impact on your SEVIS record, and a BIO adviser will need to review the record to see if any corrections need to be made.
  - If your H-1B is approved, the STEM OPT Extension (or pending STEM OPT Extension) will end on the date your H-1B becomes effective. Report the end of your OPT via the [SSU Hub](#). Select “Report Early OPT/Academic Training Completion” and provide your I-797 Approval Notice From USCIS. Your F-1 record will be completed after the effective date of your H-1B.
H-1B and STEM Extension

My employer filed for my H-1B and the petition has been approved. Should I file for the STEM OPT Extension if my H-1B is already approved for Oct. 1?

You may not need a STEM OPT Extension if your OPT is ending, and your H-1B has already been approved. If this is your situation, check with a BIO adviser before submitting your STEM OPT Extension request. An adviser will need to review your record and H-1B approval notice. An adviser will determine whether a STEM OPT Extension or Cap-Gap I-20 is better for you.

Before contacting a BIO adviser, make sure that you have 1) uploaded a copy of your OPT EAD card to the SSU Hub and 2) have your H-1B I-797 Approval Notice From USCIS.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Employment

What is considered full-time employment on the 24-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, following the goals and objectives stated in the I-983 training plan. All employers must be authorized on the I-20 and in SEVIS.

I have two part-time jobs. One of the employers is enrolled in E-Verify but the other is not. Is this allowed? No, only full-time employment is allowed at your STEM-eligible E-Verify registered employer.

How many days of unemployment am I allowed while on the 24-month STEM OPT Extension? Students who receive a 24-month OPT STEM extension are given an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days over their entire post-completion OPT period. From the start of the OPT EAD to the end of the STEM OPT EAD.

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 24-month STEM OPT Extension is pending? If a student’s EAD expires while the STEM Extension application is pending with USCIS, 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 STEM OPT is pending? The student should present the employer with the expired EAD card, the form I-20 recommending the student for STEM OPT Extension, and proof of the timely filing with USCIS (STEM OPT I-797 receipt notice).

Can I change STEM employers after my STEM EAD is approved? Yes, see our OPT Reporting page for instructions on submitting a request to change employers. You should not start working before receiving authorization for the new employer.

Can I switch employers while my STEM OPT application is pending? Yes, but we do NOT recommend this. We recommend changing employers after the EAD is approved, if possible. Please contact BIO for instructions regarding how to change employers while your application is pending.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):
Travel & Re-Entry

**Can I travel outside the US during my approved OPT STEM period?**
Yes.* However, if the student whose approved period of OPT has started travels outside of the U.S. while unemployed, the time spent outside the U.S. will count as unemployment against the 90/150-day limits. See the [OPT Travel page](#) for required documents.

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 U.S. while my 24-month STEM Extension OPT is pending?**
Yes*, travel while your OPT STEM application is pending is possible if you have a valid F-1 visa and STEM I-20 signed within the past 6 months. You should travel with a copy of your I-797 receipt notice and proof of your STEM employment. See the [OPT Travel page](#) for required documents and possible risks.

*If your employer has filed for an H-1B for you, please discuss your travel plans with your BIO adviser and with the legal counsel working on the H-1B request. BIO advisers can advise on travel as an F-1, but we cannot advise on how the travel might impact your H-1B application.

**Can I renew my visa while on STEM OPT?**
Yes, you are eligible to renew your visa while on STEM OPT. Remember, that you are still applying for an F-1 nonimmigrant 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 STEM OPT and feel free to discuss your concerns with an adviser. Be advised that you MUST have an approved STEM EAD to apply for a new visa.

**What documents do I need to re-enter the US with approved STEM OPT?**
See the [OPT Travel page](#) for required documents.
Final check of your STEM OPT application

Want to review all your documents in detail before submitting them to USCIS? Attend one of BIO’s STEM OPT Document Check Workshops!

These group workshops allow you to follow along as a BIO adviser leads you through the application step by step and cover required documents, how to fill out the forms, and most common mistakes in the application. In addition, there is a Q&A portion during which you can ask specific questions about your own application.

See our Events calendar to sign up for an upcoming session.

Still have questions?
Come talk to a BIO advisor at Berkeley International Office during Drop-In Advising hours.
Office Hours

internationaloffice@berkeley.edu

510-642-2818