STEM OPT Extension Application

F-1 Students
Spring 2023
Hosts

Jennifer Havlicek
International Student & Scholar Advisor

Ashlee Anton
Assistant Advisor to International Students & Scholars
Today’s webinar is based on government regulations and guidance as of March 28, 2022. The information provided during this webinar is to be used in conjunction with the material provided to you on the HIO website, HIO informational emails and subsequent HIO materials received during the application process.

This webinar will NOT include information about applying for STEM OPT based on a prior degree. For more information, please contact your HIO advisor directly.
This session will cover frequently asked questions regarding the STEM OPT extension application process. If you have questions during the presentation, please use the Q&A function to submit your question. We will answer as many questions as we can at the end of the session.

If we are unable to answer your question by the end of the webinar, please reach out to your HIO advisor.
What is STEM?

STEM OPT is a benefit for eligible F-1 students to work off-campus for an additional 24-months after their Post-Completion OPT in a field directly related to their major area of study.

Students who have completed degrees in a STEM designated field are eligible to apply for this extension.
Am I in a STEM eligible program?

Your CIP code on the front page of your I-20 must be on the government STEM Designated Degree Program List.
Requirements for STEM OPT Employment

1. Job must be a paid job, for at least 20 hours per week at each STEM employer.
2. Must work for an E-Verify employer.
3. Must be a position related to the STEM program major listed under “Program of Study” on the I-20.
   ○ You are responsible for drawing a connection between your position and the skills or knowledge learned in your STEM degree.
4. You must be paid a salary, and be supervised, directly by your employer. You cannot be paid by a third party or staffing agency, or work at a location other than your employer’s place of business.
   ○ For more information, please see “The Employer’s Training Obligation: Staffing and Temporary Agencies” on the USCIS Website.
Requirements for STEM OPT Employment (continued)

5) Cannot be self-employed.

6) If working for more than one employer, each position must meet all of the previously mentioned STEM criteria.

7) In an academic environment, you cannot be paid through an external fellowship. For example, you cannot use STEM for a postdoctoral position in which you are not paid directly by the host institution.

8) You must not have more than 150 days of unemployment time during the entire period of post-completion OPT (regular post-completion OPT and 24-month extension combined).
Remote Work

• Under “normal” circumstances, 100% remote work is not allowed while on STEM OPT. The expectation is that the student will have regular supervisory personnel at the location where the practical training is taking place.

• During “pandemic times,” the Dept. of Homeland Security has allowed some flexibility.

  – “Students currently participating in OPT, including STEM OPT, may work remotely if their employer has an office outside of the United States or the employer can assess student engagement using electronic means. Students participating in STEM OPT do not need to submit an updated Form I-983 to report remote work” (April 26, 2021, FAQ’s for SEVP Stakeholders about COVID-19)

• Keep this in mind when considering your current jobs or future jobs on STEM OPT. The current flexibilities can be rescinded at any time.
You may submit the application as early as 90 days prior to the end date of your regular OPT period.
Your STEM application must be received prior to the end date of regular OPT period.

It will take the HIO 5-10 business days to review your STEM documents and issue the new I-20. If you submit the STEM application to the HIO less than 1 month prior to the end date of your OPT, you risk not having sufficient time to submit your application to USCIS.

You have a 90-day window to submit the STEM application to USCIS:
- You may submit the application as early as 90 days prior to the end date of your regular OPT period.
- Your STEM application must be received prior to the end date of regular OPT period.

You must submit the STEM application to USCIS within 60 days of the HIO processing your STEM recommendation.

This means that ideally, you should submit the STEM request to the HIO 3.5 months prior to the end date of your regular OPT period.
- It will take the HIO 5-10 business days to review your STEM documents and issue the new I-20. If you submit the STEM application to the HIO less than 1 month prior to the end date of your OPT, you risk not having sufficient time to submit your application to USCIS.

Please note: You must be physically present in the U.S. to apply for STEM OPT.
When to Apply for STEM

*These dates are an example. For completion dates other than June, change dates accordingly.
Two Step Process

**Step 1:** Submit request to HIO for I-20 with STEM employer listed.

**Step 2:** Submit your STEM application to USCIS.
Step 1: Submit request to HIO

Submit your STEM OPT Request through the HIO's web-based application and upload:

01 OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
02 Most recent I-94
03 Completed Form I-983 STEM Training Plan
04 $300 HIO STEM Application Fee via Touchnet

*This fee is paid through an Online Credit Card Payment via Touchnet

Students applying for STEM based on a previous degree will need to upload some additional documents. The online request form will walk you through the process.
The web-based HIO STEM Request Form includes a section where you must explain how your job is related to your program of study. This should only be a few sentences, but it is important that you are clear and specific. **NB:** The HIO is required to enter this information in your SEVIS record. Failure to provide adequate information in this section will delay the HIO in issuing your STEM I-20.
5-page document that is an essential part of the STEM OPT Extension.

You and your employer must keep the most updated I-983 in your records at all times.

Please refer to the I-983 guide on the HIO's website for assistance filling out the I-983.

Both you and your employer are required to sign it.

The training plan includes information such as your work site address, salary, hours, supervisor information, the job details, goals and objectives, and evaluations.
This document is not sent with your STEM application to USCIS; however, it is a VITAL part of your STEM OPT work authorization. This document will continue to be used throughout your 24-month STEM OPT extension.

You must not begin work for any new employer without first submitting to the HIO a new, completed I-983 Training Plan for that employer and until after the HIO has processed your new I-20 showing that new STEM OPT employer.
The Form I-983 asks for an ink signature by both the student and the employer. If you and your employer can provide ink signatures, please do so. If it isn’t possible due to remote working conditions, sign the Form I-983 digitally.

If the form is signed digitally, we strongly recommend updating the form later with ink signatures and providing the HIO with a copy.
HIO STEM I-20 Request Preparation: Common Mistakes

**Information on the STEM Extension Request Form and Form I-983 do not match**
- Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Start dates – the start date listed on both forms should be the start of your employment on STEM OPT extension and NOT Post-OPT

**No OPT employer information in SEVIS**
- Make sure your post-completion OPT employer information in SEVIS is up-to-date. You must report your employer information via the HIO's Post-Completion OPT Reporting Form.
- Use the SEVP Portal to review your employment information in SEVIS

**No E-Verify number included in the HIO's online STEM Request Form**
- If your employer does not want to share the E-Verify number, they must provide a formal letter on letterhead confirming that their company is enrolled in the E-Verify program. You must submit this letter with your other materials to the HIO.
Application Preparation: Gather Remaining Documents

While your STEM I-20 request is pending with the HIO, take this time to prepare additional documents for your application to USCIS:

- A copy of your official academic transcript.
- A copy of the biographical page of your passport.
- An image of your diploma in the STEM field.
- Passport photos (not previously used).
- A clear image of your most current I-94 record.
The HIO will issue you a digital STEM OPT I-20 Form. The I-20 will be sent to you via an encrypted email to the email address you provided within your HIO STEM OPT I-20 request form, along with further instructions.

You must print a copy of the STEM I-20 the HIO sends to you via email, and **PHYSICALLY** sign the STEM I-20 in blue ink. USCIS allows universities to digitally sign I-20s, but students are required to manually sign their I-20s. If you digitally/electronically sign your I-20, or if you submit your application to USCIS without your STEM I-20, your application will be rejected or denied.
It is extremely important that you read the instructions carefully and follow all the necessary steps to complete and submit your application to USCIS.
Step 2: Submit application to USCIS

Your final application to USCIS must include:

01. Signed new STEM I-20 from the HIO
02. Clear picture of front and back of Post-completion OPT EAD
03. Most recent I-94
   - Be sure that this I-94 reflects your most recent entry to the U.S. at the time you submit your STEM application to USCIS
04. Clear picture of biographical page of passport
05. Passport photo
06. Clear picture of official transcript
07. Clear picture of diploma
08. Most recent Department of Homeland Security fee
Step 2: Submitting Application to USCIS

e-Filing Form I-765: https://myaccount.uscis.gov/

Helpful step-by-step guide to filing online:

HIO OPT USCIS e-Filing guide: https://hio.harvard.edu/stem-opt-i-765-instructions
After e-filing your STEM OPT application with USCIS, you should receive three (3) pieces of mail from USCIS:

- An I-797 Notice of Receipt (you will also receive a copy of this in your USCIS account immediately after e-filing your application);
- An I-797 Notice of Approval;
- The official STEM EAD card.

*Review the information carefully on all documents.*

Contact your HIO advisor immediately if:

- You do not receive your USCIS I-797 Notice of Receipt within 60 days of submitting your STEM application;
- Your name is misspelled on your I-797 Notice of Receipt, I-797 Notice of Approval, or STEM EAD;
- You receive a Request For Additional Evidence (RFE) from USCIS.
Q & A
Thank you for joining us!

Virtual Advisor-on-Call via Zoom:
M-F, 9-10am and 4-5pm EST
Meeting ID: 867 504 1315
Password: HIOZoom
Link: https://harvard.zoom.us/j/8675041315

HIO Email: internationaloffice@harvard.edu

HIO Advisor Appointment:
HIO Website > Contact Us > Make an Appointment Online