What to Expect after Mailing Your STEM OPT Application
(Your Responsibilities & Maintaining F-1 Status)

After mailing your STEM OPT application to USCIS, it is important that you read and understand the information presented below. More detailed information can be found on the HIO website, https://www.hio.harvard.edu/stem-opt

- Maintain your FedEx/UPS/USPS proof of delivery, confirming that your OPT application was received by USCIS. You must have proof of delivery if you wish to take any subsequent action on your case.
- You should receive three (3) pieces of mail from USCIS: an I-797 notice of receipt, an I-797 notice of approval, and, ultimately, the official EAD card. Review the information carefully on all documents.
- You can check your OPT application’s status at https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/mycasestatus.do

Contact your HIO advisor immediately if:
- You do not receive your USCIS receipt notice within 60 days of submitting your OPT application
- You receive a Request For Additional Evidence (RFE) from USCIS
- Your OPT application is returned to you by USCIS
- There is incorrect information on your EAD card

WHILE MY STEM APPLICATION IS PENDING…

CAN I CONTINUE TO WORK?

- Pursuant to 8 CFR 274a.12 (b)(6)(iv), a person granted OPT may continue to work for up to 180 days following the expiration of the original OPT, as long as the STEM extension is properly filed and is pending with USCIS. This regulation only applies if the STEM extension was filed and received by the USCIS (as documented on the I-797 Receipt Notice) prior to the expiration of the original OPT authorization.

CAN I CHANGE EMPLOYERS?

- Yes, but you MUST contact your HIO advisor immediately so that we can inform USCIS of the change of employer. Failure to do so may result in a delay or denial of your application.

CAN I TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.?

Travel during the COVID-19 pandemic is rife with complications. Harvard University is prohibiting any University travel and strongly discouraging personal travel. Before traveling, always consult your HIO advisor and review updates in the HIO’s comprehensive FAQ here: https://hio.harvard.edu/coronavirus

- You can travel abroad and reenter the U.S. with your expired Post-Completion OPT EAD card and the original I-797 Receipt Notice for your STEM OPT application, in addition to the documents listed on the following page. You cannot travel with a USCIS email or text confirmation, or a printout of your online case status, in lieu of the physical receipt notice. This only applies during the 180-day period of authorized employment while your STEM OPT application is pending.
CAN I RENEW MY VISA?

- You can apply for a new F-1 entry visa using the documents listed on the following page, including the expired Post-Completion OPT EAD card and the original receipt notice for your STEM OPT application issued by USCIS. Follow the regular procedures to apply for an F-1 visa outside of the U.S.

I'VE DECIDED TO NOT USE MY STEM EXTENSION. HOW CAN I WITHDRAW MY APPLICATION FROM USCIS?

- Please contact your HIO advisor if you wish to withdraw your STEM application from USCIS. Application withdrawals are discretionary with USCIS. There is no guarantee that your withdrawal will be accepted by USCIS.

NOW THAT MY STEM APPLICATION IS APPROVED….

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER RECEIVING MY EAD?

- **Check the accuracy of your EAD**: Once you receive the STEM OPT EAD, review all the information (biographical information, start date, end date) displayed on the card. Contact your HIO advisor immediately if there are any discrepancies, especially if the time period you requested is different from the time period on the card.

HOW MUCH UNEMPLOYMENT TIME DO I HAVE?

- You have 150 days of unemployment time during the entire 36-month OPT period – including your post-completion OPT authorization and 24-month STEM Extension. Please note that international travel while on OPT required by your employer, and regular vacation days allowed by your employer, will not count as part of the 150 days of unemployment.

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- **Travel once the STEM extension is approved** is permitted provided you have ALL required documents listed below in order to return to the U.S. Please note that the EAD contains the statement “not valid for reentry;” this means that you cannot use the EAD by itself to return to the U.S. In addition to your new STEM EAD, you must have:
  
  - An unexpired passport; when you enter the U.S., your passport should be valid at least 6 months into the future.
  - The most recently issued Form I-20, signed on page 2 by an HIO advisor. The signature must be less than six months old at the time of reentry to the U.S. Contact your HIO advisor if you need an updated signature;
  - An unexpired F-1 visa in the passport (Canadians do not need a visa). If your F-1 visa stamp has expired or will be expired at the time of your re-entry to the U.S., please review our visa renewal information at [http://hio.harvard.edu/renewing-visa](http://hio.harvard.edu/renewing-visa);
  - A job offer letter or a letter of resumption of employment that confirms employment for the period of your approved OPT; and
  - A SEVIS fee payment receipt. Go to [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com) to print out one if you don’t have it.

For information about F-2 dependent’s travel, please review [http://www.hio.harvard.edu/travel-opt-or](http://www.hio.harvard.edu/travel-opt-or)

CAN I TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S. WITH A PENDING H-1B APPLICATION?

- Contact your employer for information about international travel with a pending H-1B petition.

CAN I CHANGE EMPLOYERS WHILE ON STEM OPT?

- Yes, you may change employers during the STEM OPT period, and you must report the change of employer to the HIO so that we can update your SEVIS record with the new employer information. For instructions on how to report a change of employer, please refer to the STEM OPT Reporting Instructions and Reporting Worksheet handout.
I AM RECEIVING NOTIFICATIONS FROM THE SEVP PORTAL. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

The SEVP Portal is a reporting tool for F-1 students on OPT and STEM OPT to update their employment and address information. The Portal is a relatively new function in SEVIS and periodically, the Portal sends reminder emails regarding STEM reporting deadlines. These reminders are not always accurate therefore, we recommend that you update your address and employment through the HIO website using the STEM OPT reporting form. Submitting your STEM OPT employer information to the HIO will enable an advisor to review the information and ensure data accuracy. The HIO STEM OPT reporting form is available at: https://hio.harvard.edu/stem-opt-reporting-form

The HIO provides general guidance on your OPT/STEM OPT application based on information obtained from reliable sources and reflecting our years of experience in working with students. We make every attempt to ensure that we provide you with the most up-to-date information available. Any advice provided to you by our office (as well as the information in this packet) does not constitute legal advice, however. The OPT application is a personal application for which you are responsible; the application preparation and USCIS case decision will vary depending on the facts at issue in your particular case. The HIO does its best to provide you with the most current guidance, but please be mindful that USCIS may change its interpretation of these policies, procedures, regulations, and eligibility requirements at any time. The HIO is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or for the results obtained from USCIS.