

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

# Optional Practical Training (OPT) Manual

Revised 5/25/2017

# Basic steps

## Step 1

About 4 months before your program end date, read the entire *OPT Manual* carefully.

## Step 2

Email your completed *OPT Request Form* (see p. 11) and *Form I-765* (see p. 15) to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu). Your new Form I-20 will be ready in 48 hours.

## Step 3

Every Wednesday (subject to change) the OISS offers an *OPT Workshop* to have all of your application materials reviewed by the OISS staff. To sign up call 310-506-4246.

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# Why you should apply early

- You should allow three months for the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) to process your application!
- If you travel outside the US after you complete your program, and you have not filed your OPT application prior to your departure, you will not be able to return in F-1 status and apply for OPT.
- At job interviews, you will be able to confidently answer “yes” if you are asked whether you are allowed to work in the US!
- You cannot start to work or volunteer before you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the USCIS! It is not possible to request expedited processing, even if you meet the criteria, in time to meet your desired employment start date.
- You cannot renew your driver license without your EAD!
- Your case may be delayed due to problems with your application or mail-delivery issues!
- If your application is denied, you will have a second chance to apply while your 60-day grace period is still in effect!

# Is OPT your “Plan B?”

- If you are planning to apply for admission to another program of study, be aware that you may apply for another period of OPT after completing a new program at a higher educational level. You may wish to reserve some or all of your 12 months of OPT for later, if your new program will be at the same educational level.
- If you are granted OPT but decide not to use it, be sure to send an “exit statement” to the OISS (see page 29). You may have problems entering the US if you have not updated your status in SEVIS.
- You may apply for OPT without a job offer. Some students apply for OPT so that they may remain in status longer than 60 days after their program end date. Be aware that if granted, you must begin employment within 90 days of your OPT start date.

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# Section A: Plan your OPT carefully



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# What is Practical Training?

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)

**Practical training.** Practical training may be authorized to an F-1 student who has been lawfully enrolled on a full time basis, in a Service-approved college, university, conservatory, or seminary for one full academic year. This provision also includes students who, during their course of study, were enrolled in a study abroad program, if the student had spent at least one full academic term enrolled in a full course of study in the United States prior to studying abroad. A student may be authorized 12 months of practical training, and becomes eligible for another 12 months of practical training when he or she changes to a higher educational level. Students in English language training programs are ineligible for practical training. An eligible student may request employment authorization for practical training in a position that is directly related to his or her major area of study.

## There are two types of practical training:



1. Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
  
1. Optional Practical Training (OPT)
  - i. Pre-completion OPT
  - ii. Post-completion OPT
  - iii. STEM extension OPT

# Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(i)

**Curricular practical training.** An F-1 student may be authorized by the DSO to participate in a curricular practical training program that is an integral part of an established curriculum. Curricular practical training is defined to be alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school. Students who have received one year or more of **full time**\* curricular practical training are ineligible for post-completion academic training. Exceptions to the one academic year requirement are provided for students enrolled in graduate studies that require immediate participation in curricular practical training. A request for authorization for curricular practical training must be made to the DSO. A student may begin curricular practical training only after receiving his or her Form I-20 with the DSO endorsement.

For immigration purposes, “part-time” CPT is defined as up to 20 hours per week. “Full-time” CPT is defined as more than 20 hours a week.



**Note:** Receiving one year or more of part-time CPT will not affect your eligibility to apply for OPT. Receiving one year or more of full-time CPT, however, will make you ineligible for OPT. For instructions on how to apply for permission to engage in CPT, go to the “employment information for F-1 students” section in the OISS website.

# Optional Practical Training (OPT)

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(A)

**General.** Consistent with the application and approval process in paragraph (f)(11) of this section, a student may apply to USCIS for authorization for temporary employment for optional practical training directly related to the student's major area of study. The student may not begin optional practical training until the date indicated on his or her employment authorization document, Form I-766. A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for optional practical training:

- 1) During the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, and is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next term or session;
- 2) While school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours a week while school is in session; or
- 3) After completion of the course of study, or, for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent). Continued enrollment, for the school's administrative purposes, after all requirements for the degree have been met does not preclude eligibility for optional practical training. A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following the completion of study, except that a 17-month extension pursuant to paragraph (f)(10)(ii)(C) of this section does not need to be completed within such 14-month period.



**Part-time “pre-completion OPT” is deducted from the 12 months of OPT at the 50% rate. For example, if you are granted 4 months of pre-completion OPT, you will have 10 months of post-completion OPT remaining.**

# Know the filing deadlines!

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(11)(i)(B)

### Filing deadlines for pre-completion OPT and post-completion OPT.

(1) Students may file a Form I-765 for **pre-completion OPT** up to 90 days before being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not start prior to the completion of the full academic year.

(2) For **post-completion OPT**, the student must properly file his or her Form I-765 up to 90 days prior to his or her program end date and no later than 60 days after his or her program end date. The student must also file the Form I-765 with USCIS within 30 days of the date the DSO enters the recommendation of OPT into his or her SEVIS record.



An application is considered to be “filed” on the date it is received by the USCIS, not on the date it is mailed or postmarked. USCIS will deny your application if you file it:

1. Too early (more than 90 days prior to the program end date)
2. Too late (more than 60 days after the program end date)
3. More than 30 days after the date your OPT I-20 was issued

If your application is denied, you may file a new application as long as you file within the 60-day grace period after your program end date.

# Select your OPT start date

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(11)(i)

**Student responsibilities.** A student must initiate the OPT application process by requesting a recommendation for OPT from his or her DSO. Upon making the recommendation, the DSO will provide the student a signed Form I-20 indicating that recommendation.

**Start of employment.** A student may not begin employment prior to the approved starting date on his or her employment authorization except as noted in paragraph (f)(11)(i)(C) of this section. A student may not request a start date that is more than 60 days after the student's program end date. Employment authorization will begin on the date requested or the date the employment authorization is adjudicated, whichever is later.



Enter the date you wish to begin working on the “*OPT Request Form*,” which is available at the OISS website in “employment information for F-1 students.”

- You may choose any date within 60 days after your program end date (this is the date you complete graduation requirements, not the date of the graduation ceremony)
- You may not change the OPT start date after you have filed your application, even though you receive a job offer.
- **WARNING!** You are not allowed to start working or even volunteering until you receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the USCIS.

# Canceling or withdrawing your application

## SEVP Policy Guidance 1004-03

*What happens if a student (excluding those students who have completed all program requirements aside from thesis or equivalent) applied for post-completion OPT before his or her program end date and subsequently fails to complete the requirements for his or her program?*

- ✓ The student should contact his or her DSO immediately for guidance.
- ✓ If the employment authorization application has not been adjudicated by USCIS, the student may withdraw the application by notifying the Service Center where the application was filed. The DSO should also withdraw the recommendation for OPT in SEVIS.
- ✓ If the employment authorization application has already been approved, the DSO should extend the student's program end date to the appropriate date. The student may work **part time** while enrolled in courses to complete the requirements for his or her program and full time during breaks and vacations. After successful completion of all the program requirements, the student may work full time.
- ✓ However, even though the student's program end date was extended, because the OPT was granted as post-completion OPT, the student is subject to the 90-day limitation on unemployment.

**Source:** [http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt\\_policy\\_guidance\\_042010.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf)

**Immediately notify the OISS if your program end date changes! If you do not finish your program requirements on time, your options are limited. Consult the OISS right away.**



- You cannot request an extension of your program end date after the program end date printed on your Form I-20.
- You cannot request a withdrawal of your OPT application after it has been approved.
- If your OPT application has been approved, you must limit your OPT work hours in accordance with the regulations above.

# Section **B**: How to Apply for the 12-month OPT



## ✓ OPT checklist for 12-month OPT

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**NOTE:** Also see *Section E* if you plan to apply for the 24-month STEM extension. You may use a prior STEM degree to apply for a STEM OPT extension, even if your current 12-month period of OPT is based on a non-STEM major, if the prior degree was earned from a US institution of higher education no more than 10 years before the DSO recommends the extension.

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# OPT checklist for 12-month OPT



1. *Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization,"* go to <https://www.uscis.gov/>  
*NOTE: Do not file the I-765 electronically, because you will receive additional instructions from USCIS, including an appointment notice to have your fingerprints taken.*
2. *Form G-1145, "E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance,"* <https://www.uscis.gov/>
1. Personal check made payable to "US Department of Homeland Security." Check the fee chart at <https://www.uscis.gov/> for the Form I-765. Do not use "temporary checks" that have no name or address in the upper left-hand corner. If you purchase a money order or cashier's check, make sure the financial institution that issued it is able to track and verify payment. In the memo line, write your name, date of birth and I-94 number.
1. 2 US-style passport photos taken within 30 days prior to filing the application. Gently write your name and I-94 number on the back of each photo with a pencil or a felt pen with fast-drying ink.
1. Copy of Form I-20 recommending OPT (remember to file your application within 30 days of the date of the DSO's signature on the Form I-20)
2. Copy of previously issued Form I-20's
3. Copy of previously issued employment authorization cards or approval notices from USCIS
4. Copy of your passport, visa, and most recent Form I-94 (go to [www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94) to print your Form I-94)

# Completing the Form I-765 correctly

Download the current Form I-765 at <https://www.uscis.gov/>

- For the 12-month OPT, check the “permission to accept employment” box.
  - For the STEM OPT extension, check the third box (see page 34 in *Section E* of the *OPT Manual* for additional information on how to complete the I-765 for this category)
- #1 Enter your family (last) name in all capital (uppercase) letters in order to distinguish it from your first name.
- #3 If you move while your OPT application is still pending, immediately report your new address to USCIS (see page 21), as well as to the OISS. You may list an address in care of a reliable person (add “c/o” and the person’s name in front of address). If you need more space, attach a sheet of paper with the complete address. Do not use a friend’s on-campus mailbox or a Pepperdine department!
- #11 If you check “yes,” list the USCIS office where your OPT application was processed. You can find this information on the notices you received from USCIS and on your EAD. For example, if your previous application was processed at the Potomac Service Center, your receipt number begins with “YSC.” For “dates,” enter the employment start and end dates you were granted.
- #16 (c) (3) (B) for 12-month post-completion OPT (Note: the letter “B” is capitalized)  
(c) (3) (A) for 12-month pre-completion OPT (Note: the letter “A” is capitalized)  
(c) (3) (C) for 24-month STEM OPT extension (Note: the second letter “C” is capitalized)

**ATTENTION! Your signature must not touch the borders of the box!**

# Photo requirements

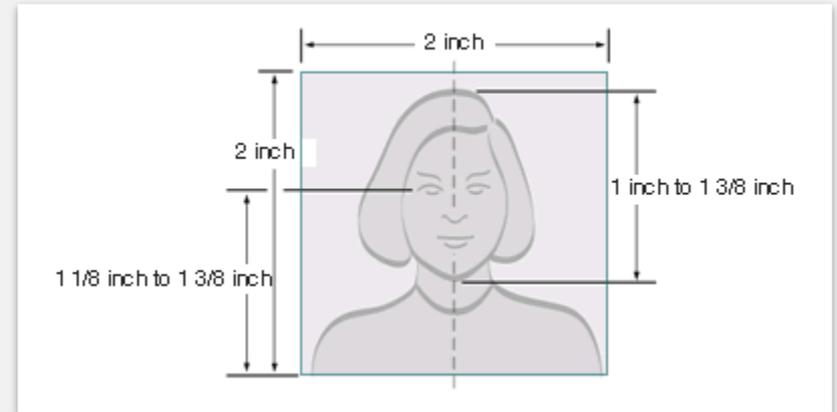
You must enclose two (2) US –style passport photos. You may be asked to resubmit your photos if they do not meet these specifications. For more information on photo specifications go to:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports/photos/photo-composition-template.html>



## Photos must:

- ✓ Be in color
- ✓ Be taken within 30 days before filing your application
- ✓ Show full face, frontal view on a white to off-white background
- ✓ Have no shadows
- ✓ Measure exactly 2 inches by 2 inches
- ✓ Be printed on thin photo-quality paper with a glossy finish, and be unmounted and un-retouched



- ✓ Photo must be 2 inches by 2 inches
- ✓ The height of the head (top of hair to bottom of chin) should measure 1 inch to 1 3/8 inches (25 mm - 35 mm)
- ✓ Make sure the eye height is between 1 1/8 inches to 1 3/8 inches (28 mm – 35 mm) from the bottom of the photo
- ✓ Using pencil or felt pen, lightly print your name and I-94 number (11 digits) on the back of the photos.

# Final check before sending your application



- Have you included all of the documents listed on the checklist?
- Make sure that your Form I-20 recommending OPT was issued fewer than 30 days prior to the date USCIS will receive your application!
- Make a copy of everything for your records.
- After you have read the information and instructions in the *OPT Manual*, you may have additional questions. You may sign up for the *OPT workshop* conducted at the OISS each Wednesday, from 12 pm to 1 pm (time and day are subject to change based on staff availability). If you have a class conflict, please send a request for an appointment to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu).

# Where to send your application

**If the address on your Form I-765 is in one of the following states, use the address on the right:**

Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Marina Islands.

**YOU MUST USE A TRACKABLE COURIER/EXPRESS NEXT-DAY DELIVERY SERVICE!**

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

**If the address on your Form I-765 is in one of the following states, use the address on the right:**

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, US Virgin Islands, Or West Virginia

**YOU MUST USE A TRACKABLE COURIER/EXPRESS NEXT-DAY DELIVERY SERVICE!**

**USCIS  
Attn: AOS  
2501 S State Hwy 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville TX 75067**

# Section C: What to Expect After You Apply



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# Notice of receipt from USCIS



- ✓ You should receive a paper and electronic notice of receipt from USCIS , containing your case number and instructions on how to check your status.
- ✓ If you do not receive a notice of receipt within 2 weeks of filing, check the delivery tracking number to make sure your application was delivered to USCIS.
- ✓ Also check the status of your fee payment. If your check has not been processed for payment, wait one more week. If you still do not hear from USCIS, contact the OISS, so we can help you investigate the reason for the delay.
- ✓ Track your case status as often as possible at <https://egov.uscis.gov> using the information provided in the notice of receipt.

# How to Change Your Mailing Address



If you change your address while your application is pending, and there is no one to receive the OPT card on your behalf at the address you listed on the Form I-765, immediately report your new address by following these steps:

- ✓ First check the status of your application online at <https://www.uscis.gov/> . If your employment card has already been mailed to you, contact the OISS immediately.
- ✓ Report your new address to USCIS online at <https://www.uscis.gov/> by clicking on “check your case status” and “change of address.”
- ✓ Call the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) at (800) 375-5283 to be sure the new address has been logged in by USCIS.
- ✓ Make sure you have also reported your new address to the OISS.

# If you receive a “Request for Evidence (RFE)”



- ✓ If there is a problem with your application, you will receive a “Request for Evidence (RFE)” from USCIS. Immediately contact the OISS and provide a copy of the RFE.
- ✓ You must submit the requested evidence by the deadline listed on the notice, in the envelope provided by USCIS.
- ✓ If you fail to meet the deadline, your application will be denied.

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# Do NOT accrue 90 days of unemployment!

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(E)

*Periods of unemployment during post-completion OPT.* During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total OPT period comprising any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization and the subsequent 17-month extension period.

**Note:** The regulation cited above was written prior to the date the 24-month STEM OPT extension became effective.



## **WARNING!**

A student who has exceeded 90 days of unemployment has violated his or her status and is considered to be “out of status.” If you are at risk of accruing 90 days of unemployment, you should immediately seek part-time unpaid work, go back to school, or pursue another option to maintain lawful status in the US before exceeding 90 days of unemployment.

If you decide not to continue OPT, you must send an exit statement to the OISS (see page 29).

# What types of employment are allowed?

## SEVP Policy Guidance 1004-33

- ✓ **Multiple employers.** A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to the student's degree program and, for pre-completion OPT, can not exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.
- ✓ **Short-term multiple employers (performing artists).** A student, such as a musician or other type of performing artists, may work for multiple short term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- ✓ **Work for hire.** This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.
- ✓ **Self-employed business owner.** A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that he or she has to proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program.
- ✓ **Employment through an agency or consulting firm.** A student on post-completion OPT must be able to provide evidence showing he or she worked on average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- ✓ **Paid employment.** A student may work part time (at least 20 hours per week when on post-completion OPT) or full time.
- ✓ **Unpaid employment.** A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work must be at least 20 hours per week for a student on post-completion OPT. A student must be able to provide evidence acquired from the student's employer to verify that the student worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

Source: [http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt\\_policy\\_guidance\\_042010.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf)



**IMPORTANT!** All employment must be directly related to your degree program!

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# Send an employer letter to the OISS

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(12)

*General.* An F-1 student who is authorized by USCIS to engage in optional practical training (OPT) employment is required to report any change of name or address, or interruption of such employment to the DSO for the duration of the optional practical training. A DSO who recommends a student for OPT is responsible for updating the student's record to reflect these reported changes for the duration of the time that training is authorized.



- ✓ Report your employment by sending OISS a letter written and signed by your employer on business letterhead, using the format of the “**sample letter**” provided in the OISS website. Send it to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu) with “OPT employer letter” in the subject line.
- ✓ Whenever you send a new employer letter, include in your email the last date you worked for the previous employer. It is important that you keep track of your days of unemployment, in order to maintain your legal status in the US.
- ✓ If you do not plan to continue OPT, you must send an “exit statement” to the OISS (see page 29).

# Travel with caution during OPT

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(13)

### *Temporary absence from the United States of F-1 student granted employment authorization.*

An F-1 student who has an unexpired EAD issued for post-completion practical training and who is otherwise admissible may return to the United States to resume employment after a period of temporary absence. The EAD must be used in combination with an I-20 ID endorsed for reentry by the DSO within the last six months.



<b>You must:</b>	<b>You must NOT:</b>
...submit a completed “ <i>Travel Permission for OPT</i> ” form to <a href="mailto:oiss@pepperidne.edu">oiss@pepperidne.edu</a> before each trip to make sure your Form I-20 is up to date!	...depart the US without having applied for OPT. You must be able to prove that your OPT application was filed prior to your departure in order to return in F-1 status.
...make sure the DSO’s travel endorsement signature on the back of your Form I-20 is dated within <u>6 months</u> before the date of your reentry to the US.	...enter the US as a visitor (B-1, B-2, WB or WT) or any other visa classification. You will lose your OPT work authorization!
...make sure your F-1 visa is valid for reentry. If your F-1 visa has expired, you must apply for a new F-1 visa before returning to the US.	...throw away your Form I-20’s or Employment Authorization Card after they have expired. You may need them in the future.

# Send an “exit statement” to the OISS

## 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(10)(ii)

*Duration of status while on post-completion OPT.* For a student with approved post-completion OPT, the duration of status is defined as the period beginning when the student's application for OPT was properly filed and pending approval, including the authorized period of post-completion OPT, and ending 60 days after the OPT employment authorization expires (allowing the student to prepare for departure, change educational levels at the same school, or transfer in accordance with paragraph (f)(8) of this section).

*Termination of practical training.* Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begins study at another educational level.



Send an “exit statement” to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu) to report the end of your OPT. You must report one of the following plans within 60 days of the expiration of your OPT, or at any time during your OPT period, provided you have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment:

- ✓ Provide your date of departure from the US.
- ✓ Provide an acceptance letter for a new program of study. The new program must start within 5 months of your last day of employment.
- ✓ Apply to USCIS for a different visa status in the US.

## Section E: H-1B cap-gap and STEM OPT extensions



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# H-1B cap-gap OPT extension



- ✓ Students who complete a non-STEM major are not eligible for an extension of their OPT. Students who wish to continue working usually apply for the H-1B visa, a temporary visa for foreign workers in a specialty occupation. For complete information visit <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-nonimmigrant-workers>
- ✓ Each Fiscal Year (FY) the H-1B visa has a “cap,” or limited supply. Each FY begins with the first day of filing on April 1, with the requested employment start date to begin not earlier than October 1. When the demand for H-1B visas exceeds the cap, a lottery system is used to select the petitions to be processed. Petitions that are not selected are returned, and the employer must wait until April 1 of the following year to file a new petition.
- ✓ The following employers are exempt from the cap:
  - institutions of higher education
  - nonprofit entities related to or affiliated with an institution of higher education
  - nonprofit research organizations
  - governmental research organizations
- ✓ If you receive a receipt notice for your H-1B petition from the USCIS, your OPT will be extended to September 30, allowing you to continue working until your status changes to H-1B on October 1 (provided your H-1B petition is approved). This is known as the “cap-gap” OPT extension. If your application is denied, your OPT will expire 10 days after the date of the denial.
- ✓ To request a new Form I-20 with the cap-gap OPT extension, send a copy of the notice of receipt of your H-1B petition, issued by USCIS, to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu) .

# Is my major a STEM major?



Pepperdine University offers the following programs that are designated as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) majors based on a comparison with the major descriptions found in the *Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)* of the US Department of Education:

- ✓ BA/BS in Biology
- ✓ BS in Chemistry
- ✓ BS in Computer Science/Mathematics
- ✓ BS in Mathematics
- ✓ BA in Natural Science
- ✓ BS in Nutritional Science
- ✓ BS in Physics
- ✓ MS in Applied Finance
- ✓ MS in Applied Analytics

# Special Requirements for the STEM OPT extension

Students on OPT based on a STEM major may apply for an additional 24 months of OPT. The new STEM OPT rule, published at [81 Federal Register 13039 on March 11, 2016](#), introduced the following requirements, effective May 10, 2016:

- If you file your extension application on time and your OPT period expires while your extension application is pending, you are authorized to continue employment for up to 180 days after the expiration of your post-completion OPT.
- Your job must be a paid job, for at least 20 hours per week.
- Your employer must be registered in E-Verify.
- Your employer must have an Employer ID Number (EIN), also known as the Federal Tax Identification Number.
- You may not be self-employed.
- An additional 60 days of unemployment will be added, allowing up to 150 days of unemployment .
- You may apply for two STEM OPT extensions during your lifetime. The second STEM degree must be at a higher degree level.
- You may use a prior STEM degree to apply for a STEM OPT extension, even if your current 12-month period of OPT is based on a non-STEM major, if the prior degree was earned from a US institution of higher education no more than 10 years before the DSO recommends the extension.

For more information:

<https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-opt>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>

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# How to apply for the STEM OPT extension

**Obtain your new Form I-20:** Submit a completed Form I-765 and Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students," to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu). Indicate whether you will pick up your new Form I-20 or prefer to have it mailed to you.

- A sample Form I-983 is also provided at the OISS website.
- A tutorial for the Form I-983 is available at <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview>.
- NOTE: A temp or staffing agency cannot complete and sign the Form I-983. The "official with signatory authority" must be an employee of the E-verified employer that provides the actual training to the student.

**Prepare and file your application on time:** In addition to the documents listed on page 14 of the OPT Manual, you must send a copy of your STEM degree (diploma or official transcript). Do NOT send the Form I-983 to USCIS!

How to complete the Form I-765:

- Check the third box: "Renewal of my permission to accept employment."
- #16 Enter eligibility category (c)(3)(C) Note: the second "c" is capitalized.
- #17 For "degree," enter the CIP code and major name as they appear on your Form I-20. You will need to hand write this information if space in the box is limited.

Filing deadlines: USCIS must receive your application:

- Before the expiration date of your 12-month OPT
- No more than 90 days before the expiration date of your 12-month OPT
- No more than 60 days after the date your new Form I-20 was issued

# Reporting requirements during 24-month STEM OPT

## Student must send to [oiss@pepperdine.edu](mailto:oiss@pepperdine.edu):

- “**Validation Reports**”--Every six months, the following: legal name, residential or mailing address, employer name and address, and status of current employment/practical training experience
- Within 10 days, any changes to the above information, as well as any loss of employment
- A *new Form I-983* must be submitted within 10 days of beginning a new practical training opportunity with a new employer, or any time there is a material change in the terms and conditions of the original Form I-983.
- “**Self-Evaluations**”--Within 12 months of the STEM OPT start date (Evaluation of Student Progress), and at the end of his or her STEM OPT period (Final Assessment), a self-evaluation must be signed by the student and his or her immediate supervisor for each job. In these evaluations the student must specify the date range or timeline considered during the evaluation and:
  1. Assess their overall performance using the measures identified in the agreed upon training plan
  2. Evaluate their success in applying and acquiring the new knowledge, skills and competencies that were previously identified in the plan
  3. Discuss accomplishments, successful projects, overall contributions, etc., that occurred during the specified review period
  4. Address whether there are any modifications to the objectives and goals for projects or new areas for skill and competency development

## Employer must report to the DSO:

- Any material changes to the *Form I-983*, including but not limited to, any change of Employer Identification Number resulting from a corporate restructuring, any reduction in compensation from the amount previously submitted on the Form I-983 that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked, any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity, any decrease in hours below the 20-hours-per-week minimum required under this rule, and any evidence that the student is not receiving appropriate training as delineated in the Form I-983.
- The termination or departure of the student, within five business days.

# Questions? Contact OISS



OISS@pepperdine.edu



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