

# OPT STEM Extension

## DEFINITION

OPT STEM is a 17-month extension of the Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment benefit which may be granted, under specific circumstances, to F-1 students who are currently engaged in OPT to enable them to continue their employment authorization so that they may continue to gain practical experience in their field of study.

## DURATION OF THE STEM EXTENSION

The STEM extension is used immediately following completion of the initial 12 month OPT period. Student do not select the dates for their STEM extension period. The dates are calculated automatically to start on the day after their current OPT ends and to end 17 months after that.

Students cannot apply for the STEM extension when they are applying for their initial 12-month OPT period. This is not a single 29-month period of OPT, but a 12-month period followed by a 17-month extension.

## ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENT

To be eligible for the STEM, the student must meet all of the following conditions:

- The student must be in Active F-1 status.
- The student must be currently engaged in an authorized period of full-time, post-completion OPT.
- The student must have completed a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in a designated STEM degree program, as defined by the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). A list of the STEM degrees can be found on the SEVP website at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>
- The student **must** be employed by or have a job offer from an E-verify employer. **It is not possible to apply for the STEM extension if there is not employment with an E-verify employer.**

Students who meet all of the above criteria are eligible to apply for the 17-month STEM extension. **Students must contact an international student advisor to obtain a new I-20 showing the extension request.** Students should contact the advisor approximately 4 months before the end of their current OPT period.

## ELIGIBILITY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Per federal regulations, employment during the STEM extension must relate directly to the student's field of study.

A student must be employed by or have a pending job offer from an employer who is enrolled in the E-verify program. **The University has no means of determining which employers are enrolled in the E-verify program.** It is the responsibility of the student to ask their employer if they are enrolled in the E-verify program. Students may not work for an employer who is not enrolled in E-Verify while they are on their STEM extension.

Unpaid or volunteer work is not eligible employment for the OPT STEM extension.

## UNEMPLOYMENT LIMITS

During the initial period of OPT, students are limited to 90 days of unemployment. When a student is authorized for the STEM extension, they are given an additional 30 days of unemployment, for a combined total of 120 days.

*Example: A student was unemployed for 50 days during the initial 12-month period of OPT, leaving 40 days of the allowable unemployment period. The student gets a job with an E-verify employer and is later authorized for the STEM extension. The student now gets another 30 days, in addition to the remaining 40 days from the initial OPT period, for a total of 70 days of allowable unemployment remaining.*

After a total of 120 days of unemployment during the entire 29-months of OPT, a student is considered to be out of status and must depart the U.S. immediately. Therefore, we recommend that students start making plans to depart the U.S. or return to a school to pursue a new degree program well before reaching the 120 day limit.

## CONTINUATION OF STATUS AND WORK AUTHORIZATION WHILE APPLICATION IS PENDING

If a student's initial period of OPT expires before USCIS adjudicates the STEM application, as long as the application was properly and timely filed, the student's F-1 status and OPT work authorization are considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the application is pending.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

The STEM Extension is authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS), not by the University. The student will work with an international student advisor to prepare an application packet, which will be sent to USCIS for adjudication.

Students need to contact the Office of International Programs to set up a STEM advising appointment with an international student advisor. This appointment is very similar to the one the student would have had when preparing to apply for the initial OPT period. The international student advisor must recommend the STEM Extension by issuing a new I-20 showing that the STEM Extension has been requested on your SEVIS record; this new I-20 will be provided to you during your advising appointment.

The earliest the student can apply for the STEM Extension is 90 days prior to the end of their current OPT period. Therefore, students should contact the Office of International Programs approximately 3 months before their current OPT period ends.

The STEM Extension application must be received by USCIS and issued a receipt from their system **BEFORE** the end of the student's current OPT period. Students who contact the Office of International Programs shortly before the end of their current OPT period may not have enough time to meet with an advisor and prepare their application packet so that it will be processed into USCIS' system before the OPT end date.

- 1. Contact the Office of International Programs to make a STEM advising appointment.** You must schedule an appointment for STEM advising; the international student advisors will not do STEM advising on a walk-in basis. Be sure to make a note of your appointment date and time.
- 2. Complete the required forms and gather the supporting documents.** The STEM application packet includes 2 forms that must be completed and has a checklist of all the required supporting documents. Use the time until your appointment to complete the forms and gather your documents.
- 3. Meet the international student advisor for your STEM advising appointment.** Please arrive on-time for your appointment and come to the appointment fully prepared. If a student is very late for their appointment, or if the student does not have all of the completed forms and documents, the international student advisors reserve the right to reschedule the appointment for a later date.
- 4. Take your completed packet from your appointment and send it to USCIS for processing.** If you followed all of these steps, you should have a completed STEM application packet. Send it off to USCIS, and wait for a response. Let your international student advisor know when you receive a receipt notice. If you receive any other correspondence from USCIS, contact your international student advisor for further information. It will take approximately 90 days for USCIS to process your application and send you an approval notice and your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card.

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

When you receive your I-797C Notice of Receipt, and later when you receive your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card, you must provide a copy to the Office of International Programs.

Once the STEM period begins, the student is required by law to report to the University at the start of their STEM period, 6 months and 12 months after the STEM begins, and **within 10 days of any changes** to any of the following information:

- Current residential address
- Current employment status (employed, unemployed, self-employed, etc.)
- Employer name – if self-employed, student must provide their company name and federal tax ID number
- Employer address – if the employer has multiple locations, use the address where you usually work
- Supervisor's name and phone number

Students should use LTU's OPT Information Update form (available on-line or in the office) to satisfy the reporting requirements.

Employers of students granted the 17-month STEM OPT extension must also agree to report to LTU within 48 hours the termination or departure of a student if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. The employer may make this report by emailing [international@ltu.edu](mailto:international@ltu.edu).

***Failure to provide these documents and updates may result in the cancellation of your OPT and the loss of your F-1 status.***

# OPT STEM Extension Checklist

**THIS IS ONLY A LIST OF DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO APPLY FOR THE STEM EXTENSION. READ THE ATTACHED “Guide to OPT STEM EXTENSION)” FOR FULL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE STEM APPLICATION PROCESS.**

**You must have all required documents with you and all forms filled out prior to your OPT advising appointment, or the international student advisor may reschedule your appointment for a later date.**

**DO NOT STAPLE ANY ITEMS TOGETHER. THIS WILL FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF MAKING COPIES.**

**Be careful when writing dates and make sure to use the U.S. format: mm/dd/yyyy (2-digit Month/2-digit Date/4-digit Year)**

- Completed OPT Information Update Form.**
  - This is an internal LTU form that is required by the school.
  - We must have your current employment information in order to issue your STEM I-20.
- Completed form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization.**
  - This is the government’s form that is required by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
  - Write your family name first, using all uppercase letters; use uppercase and lowercase letters for your other, given names.
  - **Use the address where you currently reside. DO NOT use an address where you plan to live in the future.** If you move during the application process, you must update your address on-line at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov); click on the “Change Your Address with USCIS” link, located on the left side of the webpage.
    - ➔ Canadian addresses will not be accepted. Canadian residents must use the University address and will be notified of any correspondence that is received on your behalf.
  - Item #16 has already been completed. For STEM extension, it should read (c) (3) (C).
  - You must complete item #17. You will need to get the E-Verify information from your employer.
- Copy of your current EAD card.**
- Proof of your degree.** You may submit a copy of your diploma or an official transcript showing that you were awarded the degree.
- \$380 application fee.**
  - The fee may be paid by a personal check or money order; CASH AND CREDIT CARDS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.
  - The check or money order needs to be from a U.S. bank or other U.S. financial institution and must be payable in U.S. dollars; currencies from other countries, including Canada, will not be accepted.
  - The check or money order must be made payable to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. Use the full name; no abbreviations other than “U.S.”
- Two color photos of you, taken according to U.S. passport specifications.**
  - U.S. passports specifications are 2 in. x 2 in. (5cm x 5cm) in size and on a white background.
  - Photos must be current. **DO NOT USE OLD PHOTOS – IT WILL DELAY THE APPROVAL PROCESS.**
  - Write your name and admission number from your I-94 arrival/departure record on the back of both photos.
- Copies of all prior I-20 forms, even those issued by other schools.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of your passport page(s) showing biographical and validity information.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of your visa page(s) from your passport.**
- Color copies, slightly enlarged, of front and back of your I-94 form.**
- New I-20 showing OPT request on page 3. THIS WILL BE ISSUED DURING THE OPT APPOINTMENT.**

**Send application packet to: USCIS, P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036**

**You are responsible for mailing your application packet to the USCIS Service Center.** Send your package through the U.S. Postal Service, as they are the only service that will deliver to a P.O. Box. They have several service options; go to your local post office for more information. We strongly recommend using a service that has delivery confirmation. If you want to use FedEx, UPS or other courier services, ask the International Advisor for instructions, and send it to this address: *USCIS, Attn: AOS, 1820 Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85034*

**Students residing in other states at the time of application may need to send their application to a different address. Please notify the international advisor if you are not residing in Michigan.**



International Programs

# OPT INFORMATION UPDATE FORM

Office of International Programs ♦ 21000 West Ten Mile Road ♦ Southfield, MI 48075  
Phone: 248.204.4100 ♦ Fax: 248.204.4115 ♦ international@ltu.edu

U.S. federal regulations require anyone on OPT or OPT STEM extension to update their university at the start of their OPT period and every 6 months after, even if no information has changed. Additionally, anyone on OPT must notify their university within 10 days of any change of residential address or any change to employment (new employer, new employer address, temporary unemployment, etc.). Use this form to notify the Office of International Programs of any changes.

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

LTU BANNER ID: \_\_\_\_\_ SEVIS ID: \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ CURRENT PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND INFORMATION

- If you are employed, mark the first box and provide the start date of the employment. Then fill out the section below with your employment information.
- If you are self-employed, mark the first box. The employment start date would be the date your company was established. Complete the employment information by using the name of your company for the employer name. Please provide your company's federal tax ID number, and provide your business address, even if it is the same as your residential address. You do not need to provide supervisor's information.
- If you have more than one job, check the first box, provide the start date of your primary employment, and complete the section below with the information for your primary employer. Attach a separate sheet with your other employers' information.
- If you are currently unemployed, check the second box. You do not need to provide employment information.
- If you were employed and the employment was terminated, provide the end date of the employment. If you have not been employed while on OPT, you do not need to provide employment dates.
- If you are on the STEM Extension, all employers must be enrolled in the E-Verify program. If your STEM employment ends, your employer must email the Office of International Programs at [international@ltu.edu](mailto:international@ltu.edu).

Currently employed      Employment start date: \_\_\_\_\_

Currently unemployed      End date of previous employment, if applicable: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR'S PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

### **OFFICE USE ONLY – NOT TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Updated SEVIS Personal Information                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Updated SEVIS OPT Employment Information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent copy to Enrollment Services for Banner update | <input type="checkbox"/> Banner updated                           |