Information regarding the 17-month OPT STEM Extension

Eligibility for 17-month extension -

- You must apply for and be approved for the initial 12-months of post-completion OPT, first. If you were approved for pre-completion OPT for your first 12-months of OPT, and have subsequently completed your degree, in order for the ISO to process your recommendation to apply for the STEM extension, we must request a data fix in the SEVIS database that can take up to 4-6 weeks to process.
- The 17-month extension is only possible one time per lifetime; a student is NOT eligible to receive an extension more than once, regardless of degree level or degrees earned.
- The extension can only be granted in one 17-month period; the period cannot be “split” into 2 periods.
- Extension is only applicable to students who are currently on OPT for a completed Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral degree.
- A student must currently be on approved post-completion OPT and in good standing (not in violation of status).
- The student’s major must be included in the Department of Homeland Security’s list of approved STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Please see the list of DHS approved STEM majors on the ISO Web site.
- If you look on page 3 of your I-20, you will see your name and primary major listed at the top of the page. The CIP code listed with your major must match the STEM list exactly in order to be eligible for the OPT STEM extension.
- At the time of application for the 17-month extension of OPT, the student must have a job-offer or be employed by an employer registered and in good standing with the E-Verify federal employment verification system. You will have to provide the employer’s E-Verify number when applying for the extension. For information about E-Verify, please visit the DHS Web site: http://www.dhs.gov/ximqtn/programs/gc_1185221678150.shtm
- Students who file a timely application for the 17-month extension will be eligible to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.
- The beginning date of the 17-month extension will be the day after the end date of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization, and ends 17 months later, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved.
- Student should not travel outside of the U.S. if his/her employment authorization document expired and the OPT extension request is pending.
If granted 17-month extension-

• Students may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month (12-month + 17-month) OPT period.

• Students with approved 17-month OPT extension must report to the ISO, within 10 days, any changes to:
  
  • Legal name
  • Residential or mailing address
  • Employer name
  • Employer address, and/or
  • Loss of employment (beginning and end dates of employment).

• Students must report to their school’s DSO every 6 months (starting from the date the STEM extension starts) a validation report that includes:
  
  • Full legal name
  • SEVIS identification number
  • Current mailing and residential address
  • Name and address of the current employer
  • Date the student began working for the current employer.

This report must be provided every 6 months regardless of whether there has been any change to the information or not.

• Students must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a paid position directly related to the student’s STEM degree.

• Students may work/volunteer for multiple jobs but all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

• Students on a STEM extension must not work/volunteer for any employer that is not an E-Verify employer.

• Volunteer work is only allowed “incidental to status” and will not be used to count as STEM employment days for F-1 status purposes. Therefore, you must have a paid job to apply for and to maintain your F-1 OPT STEM status.
Please see the Instructions for applying to 17-month OPT STEM extension on our Web site if you meet the eligibility requirements for the 17-month OPT STEM extension. **But please remember, you must apply for and be approved for the initial 12-months of post completion OPT, first. USCIS recommends applying for the extension 90-120 prior to the end of your current OPT authorization period.**

If you wish to read the actual ruling, please visit the DHS/USCIS Web site listed below:

http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=9a3d3dd87aa19110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD&vgnextchannel=68439c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD

Any questions regarding the 17-month STEM extension may be directed to isoemp@lsu.edu.