

STEM Extension of Optional Practical Training Information Session



Tufts International Center

<https://icenter.tufts.edu>

Spring 2021

Introduction

The purpose of this workshop:

- STEM Extension OPT purpose – what is the extension for?
- STEM Extension OPT eligibility – who qualifies?
- STEM Extension OPT application deadlines and basic process

More information can be found on the International Center web site at <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-stem>

Basic Definitions

- **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**
 - Work authorization for F-1 students
 - Maximum of 12 months per degree level
 - Allows work related to student's major field of study
 - Can be done before (pre-completion) or after (post-completion) finishing degree requirements
- **STEM Extension of Post-Completion OPT (STEM Extension)**
 - Extends post-completion OPT for an additional 24 months
 - Allows work related to a student's science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) degree
 - A maximum of 2 authorizations per lifetime can be granted

Separate Application Required

- Post-completion OPT and STEM Extension are two separate applications submitted to US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)
 - **Application 1: Post-completion OPT (for up to 12 months)**
 - Can apply up to 90 days before completion degree requirements
 - **Application 2: STEM Extension of Post-Completion OPT (24 months)**
 - Can apply 90 days before end of post-completion OPT and no later than the end of post-completion OPT



Eligibility for STEM Extension

- You must be an F-1 student currently using post-completion OPT
- You must have a qualifying US degree in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field and
- You must have a full-time (20+ hours / week) job offer in the STEM degree area from a qualifying employer
- You must submit your application to USCIS before your post-completion OPT period expires

Purpose of STEM Extension OPT

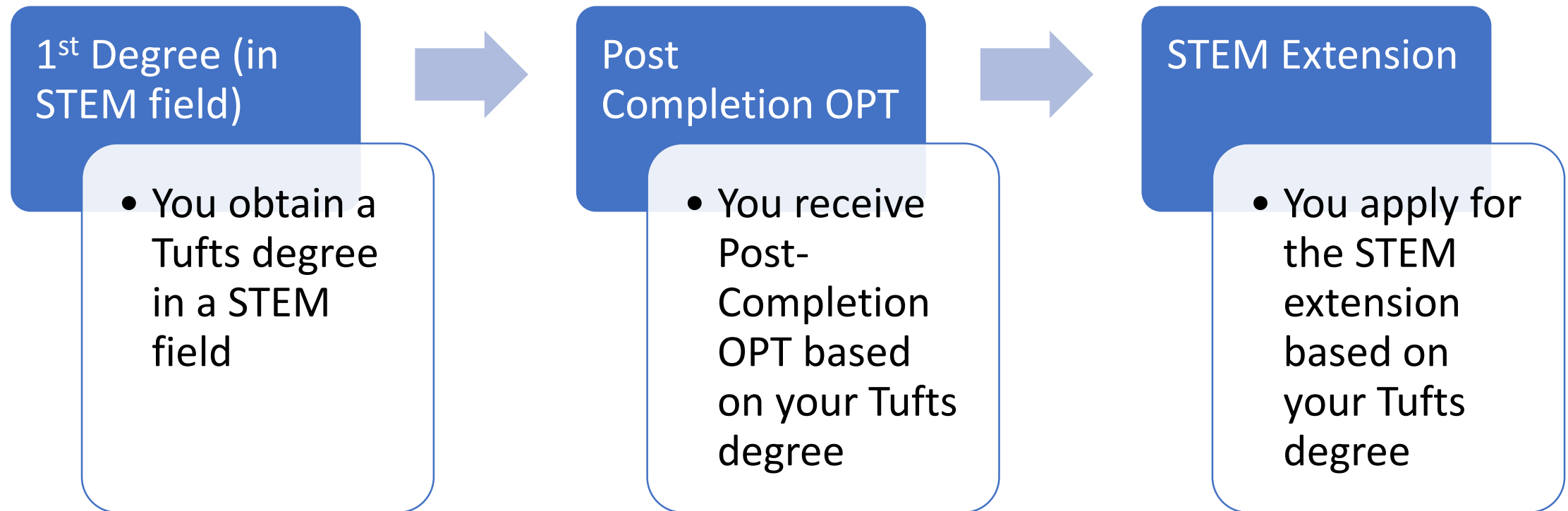
- The purpose of the STEM Extension of OPT is to give you up to 24 months of work authorization to get **supervised training** in your STEM degree
- Both you and your employer have to make sure your work will involve **training and learning in your STEM field**
- Volunteering and self-employment are NOT permitted under STEM Extension

Which
Degrees
Qualify for the
STEM
Extension?

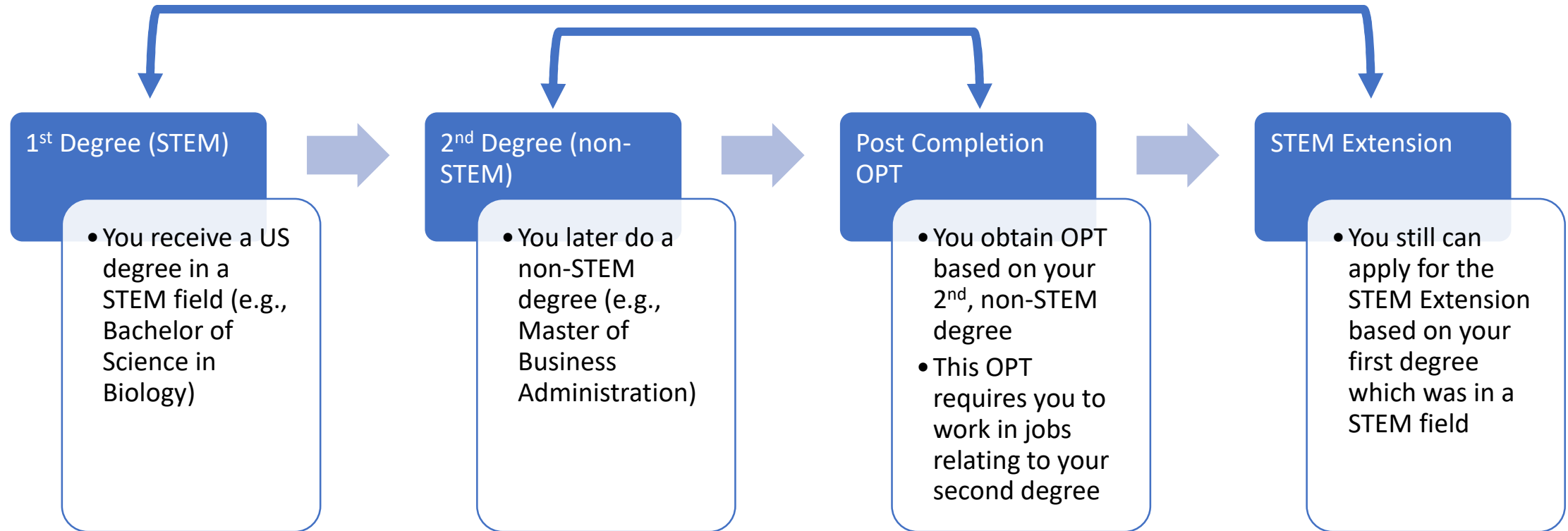
Which Degrees Qualify for the Extension?

- The STEM Extension can be based on either your **most recent** US degree OR an **earlier** US degree in a STEM field
 - Each degree can only be used once to qualify for a STEM Extension
 - You can only get the STEM Extension twice in your lifetime
- The degree must have been granted to you within the last ten years by an accredited US college / university that is currently eligible to sponsor F-1 students
 - Degrees from non-US institutions are not eligible for the STEM Extension

Example 1: STEM Extension Based on Most Recent Degree from Tufts



Example 2: STEM Extension Based on Earlier Degree



STEM Extension always follows post-completion OPT

FAQs

Can I take a “break” after using post-completion OPT by going home, and then come back and use my STEM extension later? No. The STEM Extension always immediately follows post-completion OPT. There is no “gap” permitted between post-completion OPT and the STEM Extension.

I have two STEM degrees. Can I get two STEM approvals back-to-back? No. You must be on post-completion OPT first before you can get a STEM Extension, so back-to-back STEM approvals is not possible. To qualify for a second STEM extension, you must do another degree, qualify for another post-completion OPT, and then get the second STEM extension.

STEM Majors

Question: *“I took a lot of computer science classes for my business degree. That means I was a STEM student, and qualify for the Extension, right?”*

Answer: *The STEM OPT regulations look at your degree and major – not at your classes, concentrations, minors, etc.*

- Many programs may have STEM-related classes or have significant STEM components
- However, the F-1 STEM rules are very specific about which programs qualify for a STEM Extension
- Eligibility depends on the “CIP CODE” for the degree




Which Majors Qualify?

If you studied in the US and earned a degree, your degree / major will have been assigned a “**CIP**” (Classification of Instructional Program) code

- Universities and colleges assign CIP codes to their programs so that they can collect statistics on what their students are studying and report these to the US federal government
- The CIP code should be printed on your most recent I-20 from that school or program; you can also consult with the Registrar for your school to determine what the CIP code for your program was

Example: CIP Code Printed on I-20

PROGRAM OF STUDY		
EDUCATION LEVEL DOCTORATE	MAJOR 1 Petroleum Engineering 14.2501	MAJOR 2 None 00.0000
PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Required	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY NOTES Student is proficient	EARLIEST ADMISSION DATE 02 DECEMBER 2010
START OF CLASSES 01 JANUARY 2011	PROGRAM START/END DATE 01 JANUARY 2011 - 31 JULY 2014	



STEM OPT CIP Codes

- The US Department of Homeland Security lists the CIP Codes that qualify for the STEM Extension:
<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension>
- **Common CIP codes that are STEM eligible:**
 - 14.XXXX – Engineering fields
 - 26.XXXX – Biological Sciences fields
 - 27.XXXX – Mathematics fields
 - 40.XXXX – Physical Sciences
- Check your I-20 to see if your CIP code is included! If you no longer have your I-20, contact the International Center (for Tufts degrees) or your international office (for degrees earned from other colleges / universities)

Summary

- You must have a US degree in a STEM field
- The degree must have been granted within ten years from the time of application, by a school that is currently approved to sponsor F-1 students
- Your degree must have a CIP code included in the Department of Homeland Security's list of STEM-eligible CIP Codes
- NOT every program, even with STEM classes and content, will count – always check to be sure

Which Jobs
Qualify for
the STEM
Extension?

STEM Extension Requires an E- Verify Employer

- **To apply for the STEM Extension of OPT, you must have a full-time, paid job offer from a US employer**
 - Job must be at least 20+ hours per week
 - Job offer must involve duties that are directly related to your STEM degree
- **Also, your employer must be enrolled in the E-Verify Program and provide you with their E-Verify participant number**
 - E-Verify is a US government system used to verify employee Social Security Numbers
 - You cannot work for an employer that is not actively enrolled in the E-Verify Program
 - **E-Verify web site: <https://www.e-verify.gov/> (includes list of participating E-Verify employers)**

E-Verify Web Site

E-verify.gov

The screenshot shows the official website of the Department of Homeland Security and USCIS. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the E-Verify logo, a search bar, and links for Home, Employers, Employees, About E-Verify, and myE-Verify. The main header features a large blue and red graphic with the text "Learn More About E-Verify and myE-Verify" and two buttons: "I AM AN EMPLOYER" (red) and "I AM AN EMPLOYEE" (blue). Below this is an "ABOUT E-VERIFY" section with three paragraphs of text explaining the system's purpose, its voluntary nature, and its availability. A "LEARN MORE ABOUT E-VERIFY" button is positioned below the text. The bottom section consists of three columns, each with an icon, a title, a brief description, and a button: "WHAT'S NEW" (cross icon), "E-VERIFY COMPLIANCE" (magnifying glass with checkmark icon), and "E-VERIFY EMPLOYERS" (briefcase icon).

Official Website of the Department of Homeland Security and USCIS Enroll • Login | Español

E-Verify Home Employers Employees About E-Verify myE-Verify

Learn More About E-Verify and myE-Verify

[I AM AN EMPLOYER](#) [I AM AN EMPLOYEE](#)


ABOUT E-VERIFY

E-Verify is a web-based system that allows enrolled employers to confirm the eligibility of their employees to work in the United States. E-Verify employers verify the identity and employment eligibility of newly hired employees by electronically matching information provided by employees on the Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, against records available to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

E-Verify is a voluntary program. However, employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that contain the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) E-Verify clause are required to enroll in E-Verify as a condition of federal contracting. Employers may also be required to participate in E-Verify if their states have legislation mandating the use of E-Verify, such as a condition of business licensing. Finally, in some instances employers may be required to participate in E-Verify as a result of a legal ruling.

E-Verify, which is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, is currently the best means available to electronically confirm employment eligibility.


[LEARN MORE ABOUT E-VERIFY](#)



WHAT'S NEW

Stay current and updated with what's going on


[WHAT'S NEW](#)



E-VERIFY COMPLIANCE

E-Verify compliance activities

[COMPLIANCE](#)



E-VERIFY EMPLOYERS

Find out who is currently enrolled in E-Verify

[EMPLOYERS SEARCH](#)

Form I-983 Training Plan

- When applying for the STEM Extension, you and your employer must prepare **Form I-983 Training Plan** that describes your job (including work location, hours, salary information) and the training experience (duties, supervision, learning goals)
- For more information about how to complete Form I-983 go to
 - <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-stem> (with sample I-983)
 - <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview>
- Once your STEM Extension starts, you may need to update your training plan if your job duties or work activities change

Bona Fide Employer- Employee Relationship

- You must have a 'bona fide' employer – employee relationship with the employer signing Form I-983
- The employer must provide you with supervision, training, facilities, and resources, and control your work
- Volunteering and self-employment not permitted during STEM Extension (it is permitted during regular OPT)
- Working for temp / staffing agency is permitted only if the agency is the actual employer helping to complete Form I-983 with you and providing the training – if working for an 'outsourced' company, that company must be an E-verify employer signing the I-983 and providing the training



Important Notes about Form I-983

- The STEM Extension is designed not only to give you work authorization, **but additional training in your STEM degree**
- The I-983 must provide a description of how the job provides supervised training and learning in your STEM major – what will you learn, what skills will you develop, and what techniques will you use to gain professional training and experience in the STEM field
- **USCIS may review Form I-983 both during the STEM application process and later (when applying for H-1B visas, green cards, etc.)**
 - It is essential that Form I-983 establishes a strong connection between your STEM major and your employment
- Make sure you, your employer, and the International Center has updated copies of Form I-983 both during and after your STEM employment period



Adding STEM Employers

- You can have more than one STEM employer and you can also change STEM employers
- **HOWEVER these conditions must be satisfied for every employer/job:**
 - each new employer must be in the E-Verify program
 - you must complete a new Form I-983 Training Plan BEFORE you start working
 - each new job must also be 20 or more hours per week
- You must submit the new I-983 Training Plans to the International Center **within ten days of starting your new job**
- If the new employer is approved, you will receive a new Form I-20 that lists the updated employment information

What is the Timeline for
Applying for the STEM
Extension?

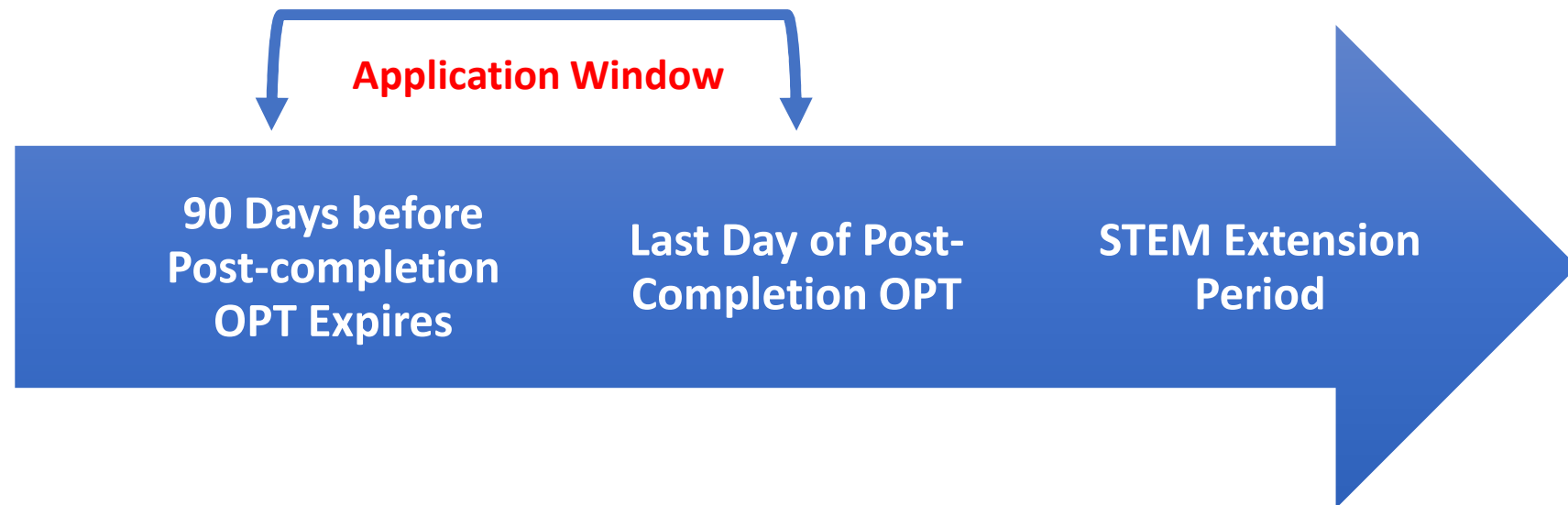
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Steps to the STEM Extension

1. Find a STEM employer that is enrolled in the E-Verify program
2. With your employer, complete the Form I-983 Training Plan
3. Submit your request for a STEM Extension OPT to the International Center and pay the STEM SEVIS Maintenance Fee of \$200.00
4. Receive your STEM Extension I-20 from the International Center (**International Center Processing Time: TWO WEEKS**)
5. Submit your completed STEM Extension application packet to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
6. Receive your STEM Extension EAD card from USCIS (**USCIS Processing Time: 3+ MONTHS**)

Deadlines!

- **IMPORTANT! Your Form I-765 application packet must be received by USCIS no later than the LAST day of your Post-Completion OPT**
- You can submit your application as early as 90 days before your Post-completion OPT expires



Temporary Work Authorization

- Once USCIS receives your STEM Extension application, you are automatically given up to 180 days of temporary work authorization
- Example:
 - USCIS receives your STEM Extension request on May 15
 - Your Post-Completion OPT expires on May 31
 - You are given temporary work authorization for 180 days starting June 1
- **Show your employer your receipt notice from USCIS that confirms USCIS received your application**
 - USCIS Publication M-274 describes the temporary extension rules
- The temporary work authorization ends immediately if your application is rejected or denied

Application Instructions

All application instructions can be found on our web site at <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-stem>

- Submit your request to the International Center online – you do not need to submit documents in person
- The International Center will notify you when your new STEM Extension I-20 is ready
- Once your new I-20 is ready, you can submit your application packet to USCIS
- REMEMBER that USCIS must receive your application packet no earlier than 90 days before and no later than the last day of your post-completion OPT

USCIS Processing

- USCIS can take 3+ months to process a STEM Extension application
- Current USCIS filing fee (as of March 2021): US \$410.00
- Once approved you will receive a new EAD card in the mail

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION

SPECIMEN TEST V 01 JAN 1920

Surname
SPECIMEN

Given Name
TEST V

USCIS#
000-000-703

Category Card#
C09 SRC00000000703

Country of Birth
Brazil

Terms and Conditions
None

Date of Birth
01 JAN 1920

Sex
M

Valid From: **02/26/18**

Card Expires: **02/25/20**

NOT VALID FOR REENTRY TO U.S.



EAD Card Sample

What are Your Visa
Requirements during
STEM Extension?

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Your Immigration Requirements

- During the STEM Extension period you are required to satisfy basic F-1 rules and regulations
- It is your responsibility to remember these requirements
- Keep in touch with the International Center during your STEM Extension period – we are here to help you maintain valid immigration status
- **ALWAYS update your contact information (email and US address) – notify the International Center within 10 days of any change (it's required by US immigration regulations!)**

Job Requirements during STEM Extension

Work ONLY for your STEM employer for the job as described in your Form I-983 Training Plan

- Work at least 20+ hours per week
- Do not work for outside, non-STEM employers
- **If you add or change STEM employers, you must submit a new Form I-983 Training Plan to the International Center for each new employer**
 - If you leave your STEM job and do not have a new job, you must report this to the International Center

Keep Track of Unemployment Time

What if you leave or quit your STEM job?

- Report the departure to the International Center
- Complete a final self-evaluation form (Page 5 of your Form I-983 Training Plan)
- During the STEM Extension, you are given sixty (60) additional days of unemployment to add to the ninety (90) days given to you during post-completion OPT for a maximum of 150 days of unemployment
- Example:
 - During post-completion OPT you were unemployed for 50 days, leaving you with 40 days of unemployment ($90 - 50 = 40$)
 - Once your STEM Extension starts, you are given 60 additional days for a total of 100 days ($40 + 60$ additional days = 100)
- **If you reach your unemployment maximum your F-1 benefit may be ended**

Complete Six Month Validation Reports

- Once your STEM Extension starts, you must complete a validation report every six months
- The validation report will ask you to
 - Confirm your US address
 - Confirm that you are still working for your STEM employer
- You will receive a reminder email from SEVP
- BE SURE that we have an updated email address for you and that your updated email is in your SEVIS record
- Go to the International Center STEM page at <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-stem> to access the STEM Reporting Tool to validate your information

Write Your Self- Evaluation Reports (Mid- Term & Final)

- **You must complete a Self-Evaluation (page 5 of Form I-983 Training Plan)** that reports your progress in meeting your STEM training goals and objectives
- You must write the Self-Evaluation and your employer (usually your supervisor) must review and sign it
- The self-evaluation must be submitted to the International Center at these times:
 - **Midterm Self-Evaluation:** after the first year of STEM employment
 - **Final Self-Evaluation:** at the end of the STEM employment period, or any time you leave a STEM job
- Upload a copy of your midterm / final evaluations using our STEM Reporting Tool at <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-stem>.

Prepare for Possible Site Visits

- The US Department of Homeland Security may conduct a site visit of your workplace to confirm that you are working at the location listed on your Form I-983 Training Plan, and getting the kind of training described on the Form I-983
- Employers agree to the possibility of a site visit when they sign the Form I-983, but it's important for both you and your employer to be aware of this possibility
- Site visits may happen with 48 hours notice

Know when STEM Extension Ends

Your STEM Extension ends when one of the following takes place:

- If you reach your unemployment maximum
- If your immigration status changes to another type (e.g., H-1B)
- You decide to voluntarily stop your STEM Extension and leave the US
- When your EAD card expires

Once your EAD card expires, you still have a sixty (60) day “grace period” to prepare to leave the US or to explore other immigration options

Note on STEM Extension and H-1B Status

Many students on the STEM Extension may also be working with their employers to apply for H-1B status.

- Consult with your employer and your employer's immigration attorney regarding the H-1B process
- If your STEM is expiring but your employer's H-1B petition for you is accepted, you may be eligible for a "cap-gap" extension of your STEM Extension – contact the International Center or go to <https://icenter.tufts.edu/f1-cap-gap> for more information.

Can I Travel during the
STEM Extension?

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Travel During the STEM Extension

During the STEM Extension period, **you are still considered a Tufts F-1 student** and should use valid F-1 travel documents:

- Unexpired passport valid 6 months into the future on date of return
- Valid F-1 visa
- STEM Extension I-20 with a travel signature from the International Center; travel signature should be no more than six months old on date of return
- Your EAD card issued for the STEM Extension
- Recommended: proof of employment with your STEM employer

Special Travel Issues

The International Center does not recommend traveling outside the US while your STEM Extension application is still in process.

If you are changing your status from F-1 to another visa type (e.g., H-1B) during your STEM Extension, consult with your employer about your travel plans.

Thank You!

Contact the International Center at internationalcenter@tufts.edu or go to <https://icenter.tufts.edu> for more information.

