

Valparaiso University Office of International Programs STEM OPT EXTENSION

Eligibility Requirements:

To be eligible for the 17-month STEM OPT extension, you must:

- be in valid F-1 status participating in OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related your major field of study
- have earned your most recent degree in a STEM field specified by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist/htm>)
- have an job offer of paid employment from an employer registered in the E-Verify employment verification system program (<http://www.uscis.gov>, search for E-Verify employers); such employer agrees to report your departure or termination of employment
- not have accrued more than 90 days of unemployment during OPT
- have not previously received a 17 month STEM OPT extension (only one extension per student regardless of degree level)
- Agree to make reports to OIP within 10 days of any change in employment status regarding your employment, or every 6 months if no change has occurred.

When to Apply:

You must apply for the extension BEFORE your OPT expires, but no more than 120 days before it expires.

To Apply:

1. Send OIP the completed STEM OPT Extension Form, copy of completed I-765, copy of EAD card, OIP will issue you a new I-20 for the STEM Extension to be included in your application to USCIS.
2. Send USCIS: a certified check or money order payable to Department of Homeland Security for \$380, two passport photos, taken within 30 days, original form I-765
 - * question #16 should be filled with **(c) (3) (c)**
 - * question #17 should include your degree as listed on your I-20, employer's name and E-verify number
 - * new I-20 OIP issue showing your request for STEM OPT extension
 - * copy of all previous I-20s
 - * copy of passport information and expiration page
 - * copy of visa stamp
 - * copy of EAD card(s);
 - * copy of your most recent diplomas in a STEM field
 - * recommended, but not required: statement from the employer regarding how the employment relates to the STEM field

After OIP reviews the documents, you may send your completed packet to the appropriate service center according to your residence. See I-765 Instruction Page for list of addresses. (<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765instr.pdf>).

Once you have applied for the STEM extension:

You will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, for up to 180 days, or after you have received the EAD;

The maximum days of unemployment during the 29 months of OPT (12 months of standard OPT+ 17 months of STEM extension) is 120 days, INCLUDING days accrued during standard OPT.

Any employment during the 17 month STEM extension period must be with an employer registered with the E-Verify program.

All employment during the STEM extension must be paid employment. Volunteer work is allowed but does not count as employment for the purpose of maintaining F-1 status.

All the reporting, travel, and post-OPT issues remain the same as the standard OPT. Please refer to the OPT handout.