WHAT HAPPENS AFTER FILING FOR THE STEM OPT EXTENSION?

Within a few weeks, USCIS will send a “Notice of Action” with a case number to confirm receipt of your application. With the “Notice of Action,” you can check the status of your case online.

- If your application is incomplete or requires further information, USCIS will send a Request for Evidence (RFE).
  - If you use the ISSS mailing address, the RFE will come to ISSS and we will alert you.
- If you respond to an RFE or for any other further correspondence to USCIS about your OPT application, always put a copy of your Notice of Action on top of your correspondence to ensure that it goes directly to your file.
- If you receive an RFE, consult with ISSS to confirm that you are responding appropriately.

As long as you file your STEM OPT application and it is received by USCIS before your current OPT authorization expires (i.e. the end date of your current Employment Authorization Card), your employment authorization is considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT application is pending.

Once you receive the EAC, you are authorized to work during the time period specified on the card. Your employer may need to see the card to prove that you are eligible for employment.

Compliance with STEM OPT reporting requirements is primarily the responsibility of the student and, secondarily, the sponsoring school. The employer also has reporting obligations. To maintain your status, be sure to comply with the necessary reporting in a timely manner. Here is a link to the federal site that describes the regulatory requirements for those on STEM OPT: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students-stem-opt-reporting-requirements.

Note: You cannot be unemployed for more than an aggregate of 150 days (during your combined 36 months of Post-Completion OPT and STEM OPT). It is important to update ISSS with any employment changes right away.

Travel During the STEM OPT Period

You may travel outside of the U.S. after your STEM OPT is approved and you have the new EAD. ****

The safest time to travel outside the U.S. is after your STEM OPT is approved. If you choose to travel while the STEM OPT application is pending, do so with caution. Please refer to the US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) website for answers to F-1 students traveling with a pending OPT application: https://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel.

To return to the U.S. during the F-1 Student STEM OPT period and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 student status, the following documents are needed:

1. A valid passport.
2. A valid I-20 with your STEM OPT recommendation and a valid travel signature no older than 6 months at time of re-entry to the U.S. on page 2
3. A valid F-1 visa stamp (that permits multiple entries) in your passport.
   (Note: Citizens of Canada and Bermuda do not require visa stamps.)
5. PROOF OF EMPLOYMENT such as a job offer letter or employment verification letter is also recommended.
Your non-immigrant status will be determined by the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) official at time of admission (or through USCIS via the adjudication of a change of status petition). When you attempt to re-enter, the U.S. border official may inquire as to whether you are returning to the U.S. to resume employment. You should be prepared for this question. If you have the documents listed above, you should have what you need to show as evidence for your eligibility to re-enter the U.S in F-1 status.

Immigration regulations state that you may return to the U.S. to “resume employment after a period of temporary absence” (less than 5 months). **If you are absent from the United States for more than 5 months**, your F-1 status is broken and your OPT automatically comes to an end.

**If your F-1 visa has expired, you will need to apply for a new F-1 visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate to re-enter the U.S.** We recommend that you do this in your home country per Department of State guidance. You may be required to show documentation that you have a job to return to and sufficient income or funds to cover your living expenses.

*Note: If you apply for a new visa, please be sure to check your passport to ensure that an F-1 visa has been posted. In some cases, Embassies have granted a B-1/B-2 (Business/Tourist) visa in error! You will be able to correct this error relatively easily if you notify the Embassy immediately. If you leave the Embassy without making the correction, it is very difficult to correct at a later date.*

After you re-enter the US be sure to check your I-94 record to ensure you were entering in the US on a F-1/DS status.

and item numbers for which you are providing additional information.