STEM OPT APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read all the information regarding STEM OPT on the International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) website: (http://www.middlebury.edu/international/isss/employment/stem).

2. Give your employer the **STEM OPT Employer Reporting Requirements** document. It provides information about the role the employer plays in the STEM OPT reporting process.

3. Complete and submit to ISSS the STEM OPT Extension Request form and application materials, including:
   b) Completed and signed I-983 Training Plan with all attestations and supporting documentation. The form and instructions can be found at https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview.
   c) The **G-1145 e-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance** form.
   d) **I-765 Application for Employment Authorization** form. (See: I-765 Instructions for guidance.) Below are some answers you will need to complete the form:
      ▪ In the "I am applying for:" section, mark the box next to “Renewal of my permission to accept employment”. DO NOT forget to do this or USCIS will reject your application and return it to you.
      ▪ Line 16: Put (c)(3)(C) as that is the code for STEM OPT.
      ▪ Line 17: Put the STEM degree you earned, for example: BS in Biology and name of employer as it is listed in the E-Verify system.
      ▪ Remember to **sign and date the form** in the Certification section.
   e) Print and sign page 3 of the STEM OPT Request Form to use the ISSS address as your mailing address.
   f) Copy of the diploma and transcripts for the STEM degree.
   g) Copy of your most recent I-94 record to be downloaded from: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/.
      ▪ Choose the button for “Yes, I have read and understand the information and agree to these terms,” then click on submit. You will need your passport to fill out the form to obtain the I-94 record.
   h) Copy of your passport identification page, plus your most recent entry stamp and most recent visa;
   i) Copy of your current OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD); and
   j) Copies of all your previous I-20s (page 1 and the page with all the recommendations and travel signatures—either page 2 or 3 depending if the I-20 was issued before or after July 2015).

4. The ISSS Advisor will review all documents. If you meet all the requirements and all the forms submitted are acceptable, the ISSS Advisor will make the STEM OPT recommendation in SEVIS, and create an updated I-20.

5. ISSS will mail the updated I-20 to you. Upon receipt of the updated I-20, you will:
   a) Sign and date the updated I-20 in the Student Attestation box on the bottom of the first page;
   b) Copy pages 1 and 2 of the new I-20 for inclusion in the STEM OPT application packet;
   c) Assemble the STEM OPT application packet as follows:
      o Money order (preferred) or personal check for $410
      o Made out to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”
      o Paper clipped on top of the other documents.
      o Your name and date of birth should be somewhere on the money order/check.
      o The money order/check must be from a U.S.-based financial institution.
      **>> DO NOT STAPLE ANYTHING IN THE PACKET! <<**
- Original Form I-765 with all items completed in full and signed in **black** ink. *(Be sure to verify that Question 17 includes your STEM degree field, your employer’s name as listed in E-Verify, and your employer’s E-Verify Identification number.)*
- Signed letter regarding using the ISSS address as your mailing address;
- 1 copy of pages 1 and 2 of the updated SEVIS I-20 form with STEM OPT recommendation posted; *(You keep the original I-20 as your current I-20.)*
- 1 copy of your STEM degree diploma and a copy of the official transcript;
- 1 copy of your current electronic I-94 record or your current I-94 paper card (front and back);
- 1 copy of the page of your passport page containing your most recent U.S. entry stamp;
- 2 photos, to USCIS specifications, in an envelope with your name and date of birth written in **pencil** on the envelope, and on the back of the photos;
- 1 copy of your previous EAD card(s);
- 1 copy of your passport identification page/s;
- 1 copy of your most recent F-1 visa page in your passport. If your visa is in an expired passport, and you have a current passport – copy the identification page of your new passport and the visa page from the old passport; and
- 1 copy of the front page and travel signatures page of all previous I-20 Forms.

d) Photocopy your completed application for your records before mailing it. You should always keep a photocopy of any official documents you submit to the government or any other agency. These records may be important to you in the future, so keep them in a safe place.

e) Mail to USCIS the completed STEM OPT Application packet.
- USCIS must receive the completed packet prior to the completion of your active Post-Completion OPT period if this is a new STEM OPT request
- If you are applying for the additional 7 months, then USCIS must receive the completed packet no later than the 150th day before the expiration date of the current STEM OPT EAD.
- USCIS must receive the application packet no more than 60 days from date of the recommendation made by ISSS in SEVIS. Refer to the date by the signature of the DSO on the first page of the I-20 to determine the date.
- Write “**I-765 – STEM OPT Application**” on the front of the envelope. We recommend sending your application by an express mail service such as UPS (United Parcel Service) or FedEx. Express mail enables you to track (and verify receipt of) your application. *(Note: You submit the package based on the mailing address you use on the petition, so if you use the ISSS mailing address, you mail to the Texas location below.)* For express mail packages use this address:
  
  *USCIS*
  *Attn: I-765*
  *2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business*
  *Suite 400*
  *Lewisville, TX 75067*

*(If you choose to use regular U.S. mail, please consult the **USCIS web-site** for the mailing address.)*

**NOTE:** Remember to keep your original updated SEVIS I-20 form with STEM OPT recommendation as your current I-20 form for travel. If you mail the original it will not be sent back to you.
What Happens Next?

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 Document), your employment authorization is considered automatically extended for up to 180 days while the STEM OPT application is pending.

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

Compliance with STEM OPT reporting requirements rests primarily with the student and the sponsoring school. The employer also has reporting obligations. To maintain your status, be sure to comply with the necessary reporting.

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. ****
Please consult with ISSS for specific guidance regarding travel while your STEM OPT application is pending.

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, you must carry:

1. A valid passport.
2. A valid I-20 with a valid travel signature from within 6 months and your STEM OPT recommendation 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 visa 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 will have what you need to be eligible to re-enter the U.S.

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.

Travel to Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent islands with an expired F-1 visa for less than 30 days: Because immigration regulations are constantly changing, if you consider traveling to one of these places with an expired F-1 visa, please consult with ISSS before you make such a trip. ISSS will advise you about current F-1 visa regulations regarding automatic visa revalidation, and whether any other changes in regulations would affect such travel.

If you re-enter the United States through the Visa Waiver program or with a tourist visa, you will not be authorized to work even if you have an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). You must be in F-1 status in order for the EAD and your authorization to remain valid. Your I-94 card is proof of your status; it reflects the status you were granted when you last entered the U.S. or when you changed your status from within the U.S.

If you apply for a change of status from F-1 to another visa category: Before making travel plans to leave the U.S., be sure to consult with the person handling your status change for guidance about the implications of travel on your status or pending application.

### U.S. Income Taxes

While you are authorized to engage in STEM OPT, you continue to be in F-1 status. All individuals in F-1 status are required to file Federal income tax forms, and may also need to file state tax forms. The amount of income tax you are liable for depends upon your tax status and upon the tax treaty (if any) that exists between your country of citizenship and the United States.