OPT STEM Information and Application Tutorial

Center for International Education
California State University, East Bay
COVID-19 Updates - USCIS

- USCIS remains open for OPT/STEM I-765 application processing.
- STEM I-765 applications must be submitted from inside the USA. You must be physically present in the US when your application is received by USCIS.
- USCIS has not changed application timelines and deadlines due to COVID-19.
- USCIS has not changed the 150 day unemployment rule due to COVID-19.
- USCIS now allows your application to be submitted online at www.uscis.gov.
- USCIS still requires a handwritten “wet” (pen ink) signature on the paper version of the I-765. NO DIGITAL or ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES will be accepted.
OPT STEM Tutorial

Please note this presentation is for instructional purposes only.

An OPT STEM application to USCIS is your own personal application (you are signing the I-765, not us). You alone are responsible for timely filing with the required documentation, understanding F-1 regulations regarding OPT STEM and maintaining F-1 status.

This presentation is not legal advice. If you have more detailed questions, we recommend consulting an immigration attorney.
It is your responsibility to understand the details and requirements of your F-1 status.
You must maintain your F-1 status while on OPT STEM
Read this entire tutorial carefully to understand:
- Eligibility
- Timelines
- Procedures
- Requirements
- Validation reports
OPT STEM Overview

Students in F-1 status who are currently on OPT can extend their work authorization an additional 24-months if they meet certain criteria.

Students who extend their OPT are required to maintain their status under the OPT STEM regulations.
OPT STEM Extension Eligibility

Requirements:

- You must be a recipient of a U.S. Bachelor’s, Master’s or Doctoral degree in a STEM designated degree program
  - Compare your I-20 CIP to this **STEM Designated Degree List**
- You are currently authorized for Post Completion OPT (12 months) and have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment
- Employed or have a job offer related to your field of study from an employer who is registered in the **E-Verify Program**.
- Employer must have an EIN number and must be willing to complete **Form I-983**, abide by all **employer obligations**, including Dept of Homeland Security Site visits.
- You may apply up to 90 days before your OPT EAD expires.
  - Your application must reach USCIS **before** the expiration date on your EAD. You cannot apply for STEM during your 60 day grace period
- Can apply based on any previous STEM degree from an SEVP, accredited U.S. institution within the past 10 years.
- Reminder- Only 2 OPT STEM Extensions may be granted per lifetime
Types of Employment

All employment must be related to your major

- Must be a bona fide employee of the employer completing the Form I-983. The employer signing the I-983 must be the same entity to employ you and provide the practical training experience required by the I-983.

- Temp/Staffing Agencies, 3rd party worksites
  - Staffing and temporary agencies may employ students but only if they will be the entity that provides the practical training to you
  - OPT STEM participants may engage in a training experience that takes place at a 3rd party worksite as long as all of the training obligations are met.
    - A STEM OPT Employer may not assign its training responsibilities to a non-employer third party.

- Volunteer/Unpaid positions and Self Employment are **NOT** permitted on 24 Month STEM Extension.
Unemployment during OPT STEM

- If your OPT STEM application is received by USCIS before your post completion OPT expires, you can continue working for up to 180 days after the expiration date of your OPT EAD.

- Students who receive OPT STEM are given an additional 60 days of unemployment for a total of 150 days over their entire post completion OPT period
  - Any leftover unemployment days (90) from your Post Completion OPT can be added to the 60 days from the OPT STEM, not to exceed 150 days

- Example: If you used 30 days of unemployment while on Post Completion OPT, then you have 120 days of unemployment once you receive your OPT STEM EAD

**Warning:** SEVIS may terminate students who have used all unemployment dates!
Application Timeline

• You may apply as early as 90 days before your OPT EAD end date
• You must submit your STEM I-20 Request to CIE at least 2 weeks before your current OPT EAD expires
  - Some employers take longer than others to complete and sign the I-983 so plan accordingly
• USCIS MUST receive your STEM application before the expiration date of your Post Completion OPT EAD.
• USCIS processing time range from 3-5 months
  - There is nothing you can do about the USCIS processing times, other than to apply as early as possible!

Reminder: You can continue to work for up to 180 days while your OPT STEM application is pending with USCIS.
Application Process Overview

1. Complete the I-983 with your employer
   You and your employer must complete and sign the I-983. This is also a good time to confirm your employer is enrolled in E-Verify.

2. Request OPT STEM I-20 from CIE
   The I-20 will be emailed to you with 3-5 business days after submitting complete supporting documents.

3. Prepare, collect & submit your application to USCIS
   A complete application must be received by USCIS before the end date of your current OPT EAD. You must be physically inside the USA to apply for OPT STEM.

4. Receive your STEM EAD
   Average processing time with USCIS is 3-5 months. Reminder you can continue to work for up to 180 days while the STEM application is pending.

5. Maintain your F-1 status while on OPT STEM
   You must report all employment changes, address changes and contact information as well as validation and evaluation reports.
Complete Form I-983

- **ICE Form I-983** is a formal training plan.
- It must state the student’s learning objectives and affirm the employers commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives.
- You and your employer must complete and sign Form I-983 and then submit pages 1-5 (page 5 will be blank) to CIE.
- You must have a completed I-983 for each employer during your OPT STEM Extension.

Resources

- CIE’s **I-983 Helpful Hints** Sheet
- **Study in the States**
  - **OPT STEM Hub**
  - **Detailed Tutorial**
Signatures on the Form I-983 During COVID

The I-983 requires hand written (ink) signatures. During COVID, CIE will accept you and your employer e-signatures on the I-983.

Acceptable signatures include Adobe Docu-signatures (verified), Apple Pen signatures and handwritten signatures that have been scanned and pasted into the signature field.

CIE will NOT accept an I-983 where a person’s name is simply typed into the signature line.

NOTE: This ONLY applies to the I-983. The paper I-765 must be printed then signed and dated in black ink pen.
Complete I-983

STEP 1: Download fillable PDF [Form I-983](#).

STEP 2: For detailed instructions on how each field should be completed, please review the [SEVP STEM Hub](#) and [CIE's helpful hints](#).

STEP 3: Note who is responsible for completing each section of the Form I-983:

- Sections 1 & 2: Completed by Student
- Sections 3 & 4: Completed by Employer
- Section 5: Completed by Student and Employer
- Section 6: Completed by Employer
- Evaluations: Leave these blank for now
STEP 4: Complete Form I-983, paying attention to these important reminders:

a. Pay attention to the questions and answer the whole question.

b. Your Designated School Official (DSO) is your International Student Advisor.

c. The STEM OPT Requested Period begins the day after your current EAD card ends and continues up to 24 months later.

d. Classification of Instruction Program (CIP) code is found on page 1 of your I-20, next to your major/program of study.

e. Based on Prior degree- if you are applying for this 24 month extension based on your most recent CSUEB degree, check “no”.

f. Employment Authorization Number is the 9-digit “A” number/USCIS # on your EAD card.
Complete I-983

STEP 5- Continue to complete the I-983

- All fields related to your employer must be completed on page 2
- Pages 3-4 contain the details of the required training plan to be determined by you and your employer. To avoid rejection of your I-983, think carefully about each question and answer fully and completely.
  - Responses should include the relationship between your degree and your role with your employer.
  - Need to list learning objectives and goals
  - List and explain methods of oversight, measures and assessments (simply listing daily/weekly checkin’s isn’t sufficient)
- One sentence responses will result in rejection of your I-983
- If you need additional space, you can use the “Additional Remarks field or attach a separate sheet.
Request OPT STEM I-20

1. Complete the **Form I-983** with your employer
2. Log into your SEVP Portal and confirm all information is accurate
3. Complete the CIE “OPT STEM I-20 Request Form” & “Reporting Responsibilities” in our [OPT STEM Handout](#)
4. Email CIE the following documents
   a. Completed and signed OPT STEM Request Form & Reporting Responsibilities
   b. Completed and signed I-983
5. CIE will email you a list of required corrections, if necessary
6. CIE will email your OPT STEM Request I-20
7. You are required to review all OPT STEM information on page 2 on the I-20.
8. If no changes are required, you will need to print and sign the I-20.
OPT STEM I-20

STEM OPT I-20 processing time is 3-5 business days. Check your I-20 and notify CIE if there are any errors on your I-20.

School Attestation
Make sure there is a CIE Advisor signature. Check the date—USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of the ISSUE date listed on page 1.

Student Attestation
You should sign and date the I-20 after you print it. Students 18 and older do not need a parent’s signature.
Page 2 of the I-20 will list your current Post Completion OPT and the request for OPT STEM extension.

Employment Authorization Dates
Check 24 month STEM OPT start and end dates. Verify employer name for accuracy.

We recommend that you download, save then print the I-20 for better quality.
Methods of Applying

You can submit your application to USCIS either by

- **Online Application** - You will submit your application and supporting documents online via [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)
  - We recommend using this option
  - This presentation will focus on this method to submit your application

- **By Mail** - you can mail your paper application and copies of supporting documents to USCIS.
  - If you wish to mail your application, please see our [OPT STEM Mailing](http://www.uscis.gov) handout for instructions.
USCIS Online Application

Documents we recommend you have scanned and labeled appropriately to upload to your application

- OPT STEM Request I-20 issued by CIE
  - DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION UNTIL YOU HAVE YOUR STEM I-20 FROM CIE!
- Passport Photo
- Current OPT I-20
- Current EAD
- I-94
- Diploma
USCIS Online Application

Why Go Online?

- File a form online
- Access notices we send you
- Ask about a typo or missing mail
- Send us secure messages & get answers
- Check case status & sign up for alerts
- Pay online with via ACH a credit or debit card
- Respond to a request for evidence
- Update your address & contact information
- Access case information 24/7 from any device
Create a USCIS Account

Create your account at myaccount.uscis.gov

Select Account Type
You are an applicant
Welcome To Your USCIS Account

Select What You Want To Do

- Add a paper-filed case
  View your case status and case history by adding your case to your account

- File a form online
  Start a new form, upload evidence, and pay and submit online

- Enter a representative passcode
  Review and sign forms prepared for you by your attorney or representative

- Verify your identity
  Answer questions about your immigration history to verify your personal identity

SELECT
USCIS Account

Select the Form

- Filing for OPT requires you to complete USCIS Form I-765

You MUST select “I-765, Application for Employment Authorization”

- Once selected, you will see the different employment categories.
- OPT STEM Extension category is (c)(3)(C)

⚠️ Note: You may submit Form I-765 online only if your eligibility category is:
- (c)(3)(A) - F-1 student, pre-completion OPT;
- (c)(3)(B) - F-1 student, post-completion OPT;
- (c)(3)(C) - F-1 student, 24-month extension for STEM students (students holding a degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics);
- (a)(12) - Temporary Protected Status (You are submitting an initial Form I-821 or you have an approved Form I-821); or

Select “Start Form” to proceed
USCIS Form I-765

You MUST read and make sure you understand this section.

- Eligibility
- Fee
- Documents you may need
- Track your case
- Decision

Select “Next” once you have read it
Completing your Form Online

• Filing Online

• Complete the Getting Started section first

• Provide as many responses as you can

• We will automatically save your responses

• How to continue filing out your form

• Privacy Notices

• Security Reminder

• Select “Start” to begin
USCIS Form I-765

What is your eligibility category?

- The category you pick here will determine the rest of the application and the documents you are required to upload.
- Your category for OPT STEM Extension is c(3)(C)
USCIS Form I-765

STEM Degree
• List your major

Employer Info
• Your employers name as listed on E-Verify
• List the company E-Verify number. This is a requirement and is NOT the same as the EIN!
USCIS Form I-765

Reason for applying?
- Select Initial Permission to accept employment

Previous I-765?
- Yes- you applied for your current Post Completion OPT
Preparer and Interpreter Information

The majority of you will select “no”.

CIE is not assisting you with this application, we are not immigration attorneys.
USCIS Form I-765

About you

Your Name

• This will be how your name will appear on the EAD card

Have you used any other names since birth?

Other names used may include nicknames, aliases and maiden names.

- Yes
- No

If you select Yes to “other names” you will be asked to provide those names
USCIS Form I-765

Contact Info
Use email you check often, doesn’t need to be CSUEB address

Mailing Address
This is the address your EAD and any other documents will be mailed. Try not to change this address during the process.

Physical Address
If you live someone other than your mailing address, input that address here. It is ok if this address changes during the application process.
USCIS Form I-765

Describe yourself

List your gender and Marital Status

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

What is your marital status?
- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
USCIS Form I-765

Birth Information

List your city and state of Birth. Pick the country from the drop down menu.

Date of Birth
Month/Date/Year
USCIS Form I-765

Immigration Information

Pick your **country of citizenship** for dropdown menu. If you have more than one, select “add country”.

Obtain your I-94 Record number at [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94)

**Place of Arrival** - airport you went through CBP

**Status of Last Arrival** - unless you changed your status in the USA, it should state

F1 - Student, Academic Or Language Program.
USCIS Form I-765

Immigration Information

**Passport number** of your most recently issued passport

Leave **Travel Document** number blank

**Expiration Date** of your passport you listed above

**Country that issued** your passport

- Do not use United States if you renewed in the USA, use the country who issued the passport
USCIS Form I-765

Immigration Information

In order to be eligible for Post Completion OPT, your current immigration status must be F-1

List your SEVIS number from your current I-20. It is located on the upper left corner.
USCIS Form I-765

Other Information

Use the USCIS # listed on your current EAD for your A-

You will only have a USCIS Online Account Number if you have previously submitted a document or application via USCIS online.
Has the Social Security Administration (SSA) ever officially issued a Social Security card to you?

- Yes
- No

What is your Social Security number (if known)?

- [ ]

Do you want the SSA to issue you a Social Security card?

- Yes
- No

Other Information

Select Yes to Social Security card

List your SSN

Since you don’t need another Social Security card, select No.
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

2x2 Photo
You must provide a photo which meets Department of State’s specifications. This photo will be used on your EAD card.

- Taken within the past 6 months
- Full face view with white background
- In color

File requirements
- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, or PNG
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

I-94 Arrival/Departure Record
You must upload your most recent I-94 record which you obtained at www.cbp.gov/i94
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

Government Issued ID
Upload the front and back of your current Post Completion OPT EAD card.

- You do not need to upload multiple types of ID.
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

OPT STEM Request I-20

Upload your most recent OPT STEM Request I-20 which CIE recently issued you.

- No, you do not need to submit any other I-20’s
- Remember it has to be uploaded and submitted within 60 days of CIE recommending your OPT STEM in SEVIS.
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

College Degree

Upload a copy of your diploma which shows the STEM degree you completed.

College Degree

Upload evidence the degree that is the basis for the STEM OPT extension is in one of the degree programs currently listed on the STEM Designated Degree Program List or a copy of your prior STEM degree.

File requirements

- Clear and readable
- Accepted file formats: JPG, JPEG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF
- No encrypted or password-protected files
- If your documents are in a foreign language, upload a full English translation and the translator’s certification with each original document.
- Accepted characters: English letters, numbers, spaces, periods, hyphens, underscores, and parentheses
- Maximum size: 6MB per file

Choose or drop files here to upload

Back

Next
USCIS Form I-765

Evidence

Institution Accreditation

The majority of you will **NOT** upload anything for this section.

This section is intended for students who are applying based on a *prior degree*, not the degree you completed at CSUEB.
Additional Information

If you need to provide any additional information for any of your answers to the questions in this form, enter it into the space below. You should include the questions that you are referencing.

If you do not need to provide any additional information, you may leave this section blank.

• Example- your passport has expired and you have submitted a renewal application and have a receipt that you would like to submit.
USCIS Form I-765

Review and Submit

Confirms the fee $410

The system will review your application and alert you the status.

Green- good to go

Yellow- you should review

Red- not eligible to submit until corrected.
Review and Submit

Your Application Summary
You can print/save a copy of the I-765 form by clicking here.
• Strongly recommend you save a copy for your records

This will show all your responses from the form.
Applicant's statement
You must read and agree to the statement below.

☐ I can read and understand English, and have read and understand every question and instruction on this application, as well as my answer to every question.

Statement
You must agree to the statement that you can read and understand English and you have understood the questions.
Applicant’s Declaration and Certification

You must read and agree to the certification below. If you knowingly and willfully falsify or conceal a material fact or submit a false document with your application, we can deny your application and may deny any other immigration benefit. You may also face criminal prosecution and penalties provided by the law.

Copies of any documents I have submitted are exact photocopies of unaltered, original documents, and I understand that USCIS may require that I submit original documents to USCIS at a later date. Furthermore, I authorize the release of any information from any of my records that USCIS may need to determine my eligibility for the immigration benefit that I seek.

I furthermore authorize release of information contained in this application, in supporting documents, and in my USCIS records, to other entities and persons where necessary for the administration and enforcement of U.S. immigration law.

I understand that USCIS may require me to appear for an appointment to take my biometrics (fingerprints, photograph, and/or signature) and, at that time, if I am required to provide biometrics, I will be required to sign an oath reaffirming that:

1) I reviewed and understood all of the information contained in, and submitted with, my application; and

2) All of this information was complete, true, and correct at the time of filing.

I certify, under penalty of perjury, that all of the information in my application and any document submitted with it were provided or authorized by me, that I reviewed and understand all of the information contained in, and submitted with, my application, and that all of this information is complete, true, and correct.

☐ I have read and agree to the applicant’s statement

Once you have read it and checked the box, a **signature box** will appear. You will type your name and this will be considered your **digital signature**.
**USCIS Form I-765**

**Pay for and submit your application**
The final step to submit your Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization is to pay the required fee.

Your application fee is: **$410**.

Refund Policy: By continuing this transaction, you agree that you are paying for a government service and that the filing fee, biometric services fee and all related financial transactions are final and not refundable, regardless of any action USCIS takes on an application, petition or request, or how long USCIS takes to reach a decision. You must submit all fees in the exact amounts.

We will send you to Pay.gov — our safe and secure payment website — to pay your fees and submit your form online.

_____________________________

Here are the steps in the payment and submission process:
1. Provide your billing information on Pay.gov
2. Provide your credit card or U.S. bank account information
3. Submit your payment

_____________________________

When you have paid your fee, your form will be submitted.

Pay.gov will redirect you to a uscis.gov confirmation screen, which will include your receipt number. Please keep a copy of your receipt number for your records. You can track the status of your application through your USCIS online account.

**STOP**: this is the best time to confirm everything is complete. Once you pay for the application, you cannot alter any of your answers!! Payments are NON-REFUNDABLE

Once you are ready to **submit your application and pay**, you will be directed to **pay.gov** to complete the payment.
USCIS Form I-765

Review and Submit

Pay.gov

You will be given 2 options to pay online.
- Via your bank
- Debit or Credit card

Payment Information
Payment Amount $410.00

I want to pay with my
- [ ] Bank account (ACH)
- [ ] Debit or credit card

Continue   Cancel
USCIS Form I-765

Review and Submit

Pay.gov

Debit or Credit Card Option
USCIS Form I-765

Review and Submit

Pay.gov

Bank Option- Check
Make sure you have enough funds in your account!
You have successfully submitted your application to USCIS.

- Click on “Go to my cases” to get your receipt!
USCIS Form I-765

Tracking Your Case

All notices are posted to your account
- Receipt notice
- Biometrics notice
- Request for Evidence (RFE)
- PDF of completed form
- Decision letter

* Notices are also mailed to the mailing address on file
Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

USCIS takes approximately 3-5 months for processing.

- Review card to make sure the information is accurate. If not, contact CIE.
- Present your EAD to employers as proof of your legal work authorization
- The EAD is a required document for entry into the US during OPT STEM.
- Email a copy to CIE upon receiving the card
Reporting Requirements

Required Reporting (within 10 days of the change)

- Report address changes
- Report phone and/or email address changes
- Report employer changes
- Report employer updates
- 6-Month Validation Reports
- Date of departure from the U.S. if you leave prior to
  OPT STEM end date and want to end your OPT
- Change of status to another immigration status

Download SEVP’s [STEM OPT Reporting Requirements one-pager](#)!

Reporting is MANDATORY! If you fail to report, your SEVIS record will be subject to termination.
The SEVP Portal

- You can update your address, email and phone number in the SEVP Portal.
- You will not be able to update employer information in SEVP Portal
  - You will need to submit a new I-983 to CIE to update employer information
  - Updates made by CIE can take up to 24 hours to reflect in your SEVP Portal
- Your validation reporting schedule is in your SEVP Portal
Evaluations & Validation Reports

Validation Reports

• You must submit a validation report to CIE every 6 months starting from the date the 24-month STEM begins and ends when your EAD expires or your F-1 status ends
• 4 validations in total over 24 months
  - Mark your calendar to report 6 months from your EAD card start date
• Failure to report could affect your SEVIS status

Annual Evaluations

• You must submit Form I-983 page 5 to CIE at each 12 months along with your validation report
• You also must submit the evaluation when you leave an employer

Review CIE’s [OPT STEM 24-Month Reporting](#) page for reporting method and requirements
Report Material Changes to Form I-983

Material changes to the I-983 must be submitted to CIE via an updated I-983. Material Changes may include, but are not limited to:

- Change in your employer address or supervisor
- Any changes to the employer’s Employer Identification Number resulting from a change in the employer’s ownership or structure
- Any reduction in your compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked
- Any significant decrease in hours per week that you engage in a STEM training opportunity.
- Changes to the employer’s commitments or your learning objectives as documented in your I-983
Changing Employers While on OPT STEM

If you change employers during your 24-month STEM OPT or while your OPT STEM application is Pending with USCIS follow the instructions listed on our Changing Employers while on OPT STEM page.
Travel while on OPT STEM

Documents required to return to the USA

- A valid EAD card
- An endorsed I-20 (Endorsement only valid for 6 months)
- A valid F-1 visa
- A valid passport
- A letter from your employer (recommended)

Please review CIE’s Travel page for any updates and form links

Travel while OPT STEM is pending, but before STEM OPT Cards is Received

- There is a higher risk with traveling while your application is pending after your Post Completion EAD expires
- If your OPT STEM application is denied while outside the U.S., and your Post Completion EAD has expired, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply
Completing OPT & Grace Period

- You have a 60 day grace period following the end of your OPT STEM EAD. Your options include:
  - Exit the U.S. within 60 days
  - Obtain a new I-20
    - Transfer your SEVIS record to a new program or request a Change of Level I-20 if you are continuing your studies at CSUEB
    - Work with an immigration lawyer regarding a Change of Status application to a new visa status.
- The only additional extension of OPT is OPT Cap-Gap, for students who have an accepted H-1B application.
REMINdERS

• You must obtain an OPT STEM I-20 from CIE before submitting your OPT STEM application to USCIS.
• You must sign (ink signature) your I-20 before submitting as part of your application
  - You are currently not eligible to electronically sign your I-20 at this time
• Application must be submitted within 60 days of CIE Advisor’s signature on page 1
• You must be INSIDE the USA to apply for STEM OPT
• If you receive an RFE during your OPT STEM application, please contact CIE with a copy of the RFE.