Welcome to the STEM Optional Practical Training tutorial for Rice F-1 international students! This tutorial is a comprehensive guide to OPT STEM extensions at Rice University, we hope you find it helpful. Please contact OISS should you have any questions.

The topics covered include:

- Overview – What is OPT STEM Extension?
- Eligibility Requirements
- Application Process
- Application Timeline
- Required Documentation
- Sample OPT STEM I-20 Authorization
- Mailing Instructions
- USCIS Processing Timeline
- Travel During OPT STEM
- Cap Gap and STEM Extensions
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
**What is OPT STEM Extension?**

OPT STEM Extension gives F-1 students who are currently on valid post-completion OPT the option to extend their authorization for an additional **24 months** of practical training.

**Important Factors to Consider:**
- You can work anywhere in the U.S. related to your STEM field.
- Since you will continue to stay in F-1 status during OPT STEM, you must report to OISS.
- The STEM extension can only be applied for twice in your lifetime – not for each degree level.

**8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)**

24-month extension of post-completion OPT for a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) degree. […] An extension will be for 24 months for the first qualifying degree for which the student has completed all course requirements […] If a student completes all such course requirements for another qualifying degree at a higher degree level than the first, the student may apply for a second 24-month extension of OPT while in a valid period of post-completion OPT authorized […] In no event may a student be authorized for more than two lifetime STEM OPT extensions.
Eligibility Requirements

1. Must be in valid F-1 status & currently authorized for OPT.
2. Must have completed a degree in a DHS approved STEM field (science, technology, engineering, or math).
3. Must be working for an E-Verify employer (or have an offer of employment from an E-Verify employer) in your major area of study.
4. Must be within 90 days prior to current OPT end date.
Eligible Fields of Study and E-Verify

• **STEM eligible fields** can be verified by your CIP Code on [http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/science-technology-engineering-and-math-programs](http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/science-technology-engineering-and-math-programs). This is listed on the 1st page of your I-20 with your Major information, as a 6 digit numerical code “xx.xxxx.”

• You **must have** a job offer by an employer with E-Verify to apply. It is best to check with your employer’s HR department to obtain their E-Verify information.

• Your employer **must** provide a formal training plan articulating your learning objectives during the STEM extension on the Training Plan Form I-983.
  
  - If you change employers or information within the Form I-983 changes, you must submit an updated copy to [oiss@rice.edu](mailto:oiss@rice.edu) within 10 days of the change.

• You **must** submit your current OPT employment via the SEVP Portal *before* we can process your request.
Dates of STEM Extension

STEM begins on the date after the expiration of standard OPT. For example:

Standard OPT:
07/15/2017 – 07/14/2018

STEM Extension:
07/15/2018 – 07/14/2020
Application Timeline

12 month OPT Period

24 month OPT STEM Extension

Grace period

Important: You must show proof of your STEM degree AND employment by an E Verify employer.

Important Factors to Consider:

1. Apply early. USCIS takes approx. 90-120 days to process OPT STEM applications.
2. USCIS must receive your STEM Extension application before the end date of your current EAD.
3. You may continue working for your E-Verify employer while your STEM application is pending with USCIS (up to 180 days). 8CFR213.2(f)(11)(i)(C) and 8CFR274a.12(b)(6)(iv).
Application Steps

1) Review this OPT STEM Extension Tutorial and our [STEM website](#)
2) Schedule an appointment (in person or on the phone) if you have follow-up questions before applying
3) Secure all the necessary documentation (** see next slides for requirements)
4) Submit your current OPT information to OISS via the SEVP Portal
5) Submit your required documents to OISS as close to 90 days before your OPT end date as possible
6) Respond to any inquiries from OISS regarding your STEM OPT Extension request
7) Receive your new I-20 from OISS and discuss next steps with an OISS advisor
8) Mail your application to the appropriate USCIS Lock Box location
9) USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of I-20 issuance AND prior to the end of your authorized OPT period.
10) Send OISS a copy of your STEM OPT EAD card once your request is approved
Required OISS Documentation for a STEM OPT I-20

OPT STEM Handouts
OPT STEM Handout (and required forms) can be found online at [http://oiss.rice.edu/STEM/](http://oiss.rice.edu/STEM/)

The documents required to receive an OPT STEM I-20 are:

1) Updated employment information via the SEVP Student Portal
2) OPT STEM Student Statement of Understanding
3) Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
4) OPT STEM Employer Statement of Understanding or letter verifying that employer is E-Verified.
5) Form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT Students (to be completed with employer)
6) Proof of payment of the $500 STEM OPT extension administrative fee – [https://signup.rice.edu/STEMextension/](https://signup.rice.edu/STEMextension/)
7) If STEM OPT extension is based on a previous degree from another university, provide copies of the corresponding I-20 and posted degree

Not located in Houston?
If you live outside the Houston area, please submit these documents to the OISS via email (oiss@rice.edu) and provide us with either 1) the name of a friend who will pick up your documents and mail them to you OR provide a prepaid shipping label from FedEx, USPS, or UPS with your address. When making a shipping label online you may use our mailing address then send us the pdf attachment:

The Office of International Students and Scholars
Rice University, OISS
6100 Main St. MS-365
713.348.6095 (telephone)
2) OPT STEM Student Statement of Understanding

This Statement of Understanding will outline the requirements of being in good F-1 status while on OPT STEM Extension. Also provides OISS and SEVIS with a non-Rice email for continued communication.

3) Completed I-765 Form (use a computer to fill out this form to insure legibility – do not hand write)

(https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf)
Required OISS Documentation for an STEM OPT I-20 (continued)

4) OPT STEM Employer Statement of Understanding

This Statement of Understanding will outline the requirements for anyone employing an F-1 STEM OPT student.

5) Completed I-983 Form


6) Proof of payment of the $500 STEM OPT extension administrative fee

Pay the fee online at https://signup.rice.edu/STEMextension, and include a copy of the email confirmation with your application.
**What it is:**
Form I-983 “Training Plan for STEM OPT Students” only applies to the STEM OPT extension period and not your original/current OPT employment. It is a training plan outline for the two years of STEM OPT, created by you and your E-verify employer. It is submitted to OISS for review of your eligibility to receive the STEM OPT I-20 and it will not be mailed to USCIS as part of your STEM OPT application.

**Most Common Mistakes on Form I-983**

**Section 1: Student Information (Completed by Student)**
1) Ensure all applicable pages reflect your name in this order: [SURNAME, GIVEN NAME]
2) Start date of STEM OPT period is the day after OPT expires
3) End date of STEM OPT period is two years later and one day less (ex: 7/15/2018 – 7/14/2020)
4) Qualifying Major and CIP code (ex. Computer Science, 11.0101)
5) Based on prior degree? (if using same degree that OPT was granted for, then “No”)

**Section 3: Employer Information (Completed by Employer)**
Start Date of Employment – Date when you begin the STEM OPT training with the employer (earliest date is the start of the STEM OPT extension, even if you are a continuing employee).

**Final Section: Evaluation on Student Progress (last page) –** Leave this page blank; evaluations will be due after completing 1 year on STEM OPT and at the end of employment.
Next Steps After Submission of Documents to OISS

- An advisor will review your documentation and either process your OPT STEM I-20 or ask for more verification from you. This process usually takes approximately 5 working days.

- You will then be directed to schedule a pick-up appointment time. If you no longer live in the Houston area, an advisor will work with you via phone and/or email to complete the remaining steps to submit your STEM Extension paperwork.
Please collect the following documents:

- Check addressed to Department of Homeland Security for $410.00, make sure to put your I-94 number in the Memo section, OR G-1450 authorizing a credit card payment
- 2 US Passport style photos, *taken within the last 30 days*, with your name and I-94 number on the back in pencil,
- Copies of your passport, visa, I-94, and current (and any previous) EAD(s) (front and back),
- A typed I-765. A USCIS uses computers to read the form and handwritten applications can cause issues with misinterpreted information,
- Official Rice Transcript,
- Photocopy of diploma
- G-1145 (This will allow you to receive an electronic confirmation when USCIS has received your application)
Please mail your application with the following documents to the appropriate USCIS Service Center, based on the mailing address on your I-765. To find out which address to use, visit http://www.uscis.gov/i-765-addresses#LockboxAddresses.

Include the following when mailing your OPT Application to USCIS in the order listed *(make sure to make a copy of documents for yourself)*:

- *(Optional)* Cover Letter
- 2 Passport-style photos *taken within 30 days*
- $410 check addressed to “Department of Homeland Security OR Form G-1450 authorizing a credit card payment
- *(Optional)* G-1145 E-notification
- Completed and signed I-765 Application Form
- Photocopy of updated I-20 reflecting OPT STEM Extension Recommendation (be sure to sign) *(You will keep the original I-20, do not mail it out!)*
- SEVIS employment history printout (OISS will provide this together with your new I-20)
- Photocopies of passport, visa (ok if visa is expired), I-94 card or printout
- Photocopy of front and back of current (and any previous) EAD(s)
- Official Rice transcript
- Photocopy of Diploma

**USCIS must receive your STEM Extension application before your OPT end date.**
Cover Letter (Recommended)

[Today’s Date]

[Your Full Name]
[Your Address (use same address as the one listed on I-765)]

USCIS
Attn: I-765 for OPT STEM Extension
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

Re: Form I-765, Application for Renewal of Employment Authorization for:

[Last Name, First Name]

I-94 #: [Write out I-94 #]

Dear USCIS Officer:

I, [Your Name], am an F-1 student applying to renew my EAD in order to partake in the 24-month extension for STEM Optional Practical Training (c)(3)(C). My requested start date for the OPT STEM Extension is [list requested start date as the day after your OPT expires]. Please find my I-765 Application for Renewal of Employment Authorization enclosed with the following documentation:

- 2 passport-style photographs;
- Check/money order of $410 made out to U.S. Department of Homeland Security;
- Form G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance;
- Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization;
- Copy of Form I-20 with OPT STEM Extension Recommendation;
- Employment history printout from SEVIS;
- Copy of passport;
- Copy of visa;
- Copy of Form I-94;
- Copy of previous EAD card;
- Official Rice transcript;
- Copy of diploma showing degree received and field of study

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

[Your Signature]

[Your Full Name]
USCIS Processing Timeline

- **Two Weeks:** USCIS typically sends a I-797 Notice of Action form once your application is received. This notice will contain a receipt number which you can use to check application status at [https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp](https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp).

- **3-5 Months:** Average processing time for the STEM Extension request.

- **180 Days:** Amount of time from your current OPT end date that you are allowed to work for your E-Verify employer while STEM application is pending with USCIS, as long as you filed your extension request before the end of your post-completion OPT.

- **10 Days:** Your reporting window to send updates to OISS and to SEVP Portal. This includes a copy of your new EAD card once it arrives, and information on your address and employment!

If you have any questions regarding your application, we advise you to contact an OISS advisor before calling USCIS Customer Service.
Travel Outside of the U.S. While on STEM OPT

**Can I travel outside of the U.S. while my STEM application is pending?**

Traveling during this time is **not** recommended and should be undertaken with caution. Please speak with an OISS Advisor for more information.

If USCIS approves your application, you will be expected to have your new EAD in hand to re-enter the United States. Remember, USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address. Application for F-1 visa renewal during OPT (especially while the STEM application is still pending) can be risky.

**Can I reenter if I left the U.S. while on STEM OPT?**

F-1 students authorized for STEM OPT can travel outside the U.S. and re-enter provided they have all of the following documents:

1) Passport valid at least 6 months;
2) Unexpired F-1 visa stamp in passport;
3) I-20
   - Showing “STEM OPT Approved” on pg. 2,
   - Employment info has been updated via the [http://oiss.rice.edu/opt/](http://oiss.rice.edu/opt/) and is accurate on the I-20, and
   - Signed for travel by OISS advisor. Travel signatures are valid for 6-months. Be sure to get a new travel signature from the OISS if you reentry date to the US will be more than 6 months after the most recent travel signature on pg. 2 of the I-20.
4) STEM EAD card;
5) Employment letter. Application for F-1 visa renewal during STEM OPT can be risky.

*Note: If you need a new travel signature, please keep in mind that OISS does not express mail documents. You will either need to leave enough time for regular mail or have a Rice friend pick up your new I-20 and express mail it to you.*

**Please meet with an OISS advisor and refer to [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/) for further discussion of travel during OPT (or travel while STEM application is pending).**
After STEM OPT Application Approval

**Required Communication with OISS**

- Scan OISS [oiss@rice.edu](mailto:oiss@rice.edu) a copy of the front of your EAD card
- Notify OISS if you permanently left the US or change to another visa status, and send corresponding documents.
- Complete F-1 STEM OPT validation report online (required every 6 months)
- Submit an update to the SEVP Portal anytime your personal information is updated (physical and mailing addresses and telephone)
- Submit an updated Form I-983 to OISS when you complete your self-evaluations (1\textsuperscript{st} evaluation within 12 months of your STEM OPT Extension, 2\textsuperscript{nd} evaluation at the end of your STEM OPT Extension)
- Submit an updated Form I-983 to OISS if you change employers during your STEM OPT Extension

**For more detailed information, please visit: [http://oiss.rice.edu/opt](http://oiss.rice.edu/opt)**

**Unemployment During OPT STEM**

Students are required to work full time (defined as over 20 hours per week) during STEM OPT. Students are permitted 150 total days of unemployment during the entire 36-month OPT (+STEM) period.
When Your STEM Extension Has Ended

**Grace Period**
You have a 60-day grace period at the end of your OPT STEM Extension before you must depart the U.S. You cannot work during that time, but you can travel around the U.S., transfer to another institution, or change your visa status. If you do leave the U.S. during your grace period you will not be allowed back in on your F-1 visa.

**Cap-Gap Extension**
Cap-Gap provides an extension of OPT for students whose H-1B applications are pending or approved before the annual October 1st H-1B start date. This allows F-1 students to remain in the U.S. and continue working even after the completion of OPT. The extension should be automatic but it is best to verify with an OISS advisor. Please send OISS a copy of your H-1B Approval Notice so that we may update your record. Note that cap-gap extensions are typically issued to students with a pending Change of Status to H1B and not for consular processing. You may verify whether you have a pending change of status to H-1B with your employer.

**For more information on possible options for working in the U.S. after OPT, please contact an OISS Advisor.**
What is a STEM Extension?
Students in STEM fields are eligible to apply for an additional 24 months of OPT. However, employment with an E-Verify employer is required in advance and application must be made before the regular OPT has expired. For additional information, make an appointment with an OISS advisor.

When should I apply for STEM OPT Extension?
You may begin applying for a STEM Extension as early as 90 days before the end date of your current OPT. Please keep in mind USCIS must receive your STEM application before your current authorization expires. In addition, please note that typically it is not possible to renew a Texas driver license until your STEM OPT has been approved and you have the EAD card. Applying for the STEM Extension early is therefore also beneficial to avoid having a gap in your driver license validity.

What do the photos for my application need to look like?
Standard U.S. passport photos: Square 2" x 2" (5cm x 5 cm), front view, full face, white or off-white background. For full specifications, see https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/photos.html. Many FedEx, CVS, and Walgreens branches offer reasonably priced passport photo services near Rice.

What happens after my STEM OPT application is mailed to USCIS?
1. USCIS sends a Notice of Action form once your application is received, usually in about two weeks. This notice will contain a receipt number to check application status at https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/jsps/index.jsp.
2. USCIS mails your STEM EAD card. Processing time varies but expect it to take between 90-120 days.

What happens if my plans change after applying for STEM OPT?
Immediately schedule an appointment with an OISS advisor if your plans change after your OPT STEM application has been submitted.

What if I want to travel outside of the U.S. during my STEM OPT period – what do I need to keep in mind
F-1 students authorized for STEM OPT can travel outside the U.S. and re-enter provided they have all of the required documents: which are outlined on the Travel While on STEM OPT slide. Application for F-1 visa renewal during STEM OPT can be risky. Please meet with an OISS advisor and refer to http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#_Toc81222042 for further discussion of travel during STEM OPT (or travel while STEM OPT application is pending).
What is “Cap-Gap”? 
Cap-Gap provides an extension of OPT for students whose H-1B applications are pending or approved before the annual October 1st H-1B start date. This allows F-1 students to remain in the U.S. and continue working even after the completion of OPT. The extension is automatic and does not require a new I-20 (one may be requested, however, if needed to prove ongoing work authorization to an employer).

Is there any required follow-up with OISS when I am on STEM OPT? 
Yes! You are required to:
1. Bring or send OISS a copy of your STEM EAD card
2. Notify OISS if you permanently left the US or change to another visa status, and send corresponding documents.
3. Complete F-1 STEM OPT validation report online (required every 6 months)
4. Submit an update to the SEVP Portal anytime you personal information is updated (physical and mailing addresses and telephone)
5. Submit an updated Form I-983 to OISS when you complete your self-evaluations (1st evaluation within 12 months of your STEM OPT Extension, 2nd evaluation at the end of your STEM OPT Extension)
6. Submit an updated Form I-983 to OISS if you change employers during your STEM OPT Extension

**For more detailed information, please visit: [http://oiss.rice.edu/opt]**

What information do I update via the SEVP Portal? 
- Physical home address
- Mailing address
- Telephone number

What information do I update through OISS? 
- New Employer
- Gaps in Employment
- Make sure to also send a copy of an updated I-983 anytime you have a new employer or if there are changes to the original document (new supervisor, etc.)
FAQs

What status am I on while on STEM OPT?
You are still on F-1 status. OPT is not a status in itself.

Once I receive my STEM OPT I-20, how much time do I have to send my application to USCIS before it is voided?
USCIS must receive your application within 60 days of I-20 issuance, and before the end date of your current EAD.

My EAD states ‘not valid for re-entry” on it. Does that mean I cannot travel outside of the U.S. while on STEM OPT?
No. It means that your EAD card alone will not allow you admission into the U.S. You will need to bring the other required documentation (see travel slide).

I’ve had a STEM Extension before, can I have another one?
Possibly. Under the new 24-month STEM extension regulations, students are now eligible for up to two STEM Extensions during their lifetime. Please contact OISS for more information.

May I apply for the STEM OPT Extension based on a previous STEM degree, even if my current degree is not in a STEM field?
Possibly. Students may apply for the 24-month STEM Extension based on a prior eligible STEM degree if they did not have a STEM Extension associated with this degree in the past. However, the work performed under the STEM Extension must be directly related to the STEM degree obtained, instead of the most recent degree.

Can I use a previous STEM degree from abroad to apply for a STEM extension?
No, only U.S. accredited universities may be considered. In addition, the degree must be within 10 years.

How much does it cost to apply for the STEM Extension?
There are two separate fees that you must pay:

1. The USCIS application fee is $410
2. The one-time Rice STEM OPT Extension administrative fee is $500.
How do I pay for the $500 Rice STEM OPT Extension administrative fee?
Please go to https://signup.rice.edu/STEMextension, where you will be able to pay the fee with a credit or debit card. You will receive a confirmation email once the fee has been paid, which you will need to submit to OISS as proof of payment.

Is my employer allowed to pay the fees on my behalf?
Yes, your employer is allowed to pay both the USCIS application fee and the Rice STEM OPT Extension administrative fee.

Can I start my own business or work for a start-up company on STEM OPT?
The official communication states that the employment “Must be a bonafide employer and employee relationship.” If you have a start-up, there must be someone else in the company that can serve as a supervisor and train you in the STEM field you have studied. Additionally, the company must also fit all the government requirements to be a STEM OPT eligible employer.

I still have questions, where can I get more information?
You can schedule an appointment with an OISS advisor either in person or over the phone by emailing oiss@rice.edu or calling our mainline at 713.348.6095. Please also see the following helpful websites:

- Study in the States STEM OPT HUB
- STEM OPT Extension Overview
- Overview of the Form I-983 Training Plan
- The 24-month STEM OPT regulation
FAQs

What is the Form I-983 Training Plan?
The Form I-983 is the Training Plan required under the 24-month STEM regulations. Please visit the Study in the States website for an explanation of the Form I-983 as well as guidance on how to complete it.

What information about Rice and my DSO do I need to complete the Form I-983?
In section 1 of the Form I-983 you will be asked to complete the following:

- SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT – You will find Rice’s School Code on your I-20 under the section titled “School Information”
- Designated School Official (DSO) Name and Contact Information – Please use “Adria L. Baker, 6100 Main Street, MS-365, Houston, TX 77005, 713-348-6095, oiss@rice.edu”
- Student SEVIS ID – You will find your SEVIS ID at the top of the first page of your I-20
- Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code – You will find your CIP code on your I-20 under the Major information in the section “Program of Study”

There is also a slide in this tutorial with tips on completing the first page of the Form I-983, and it is also included in our 24-month STEM Extension Handout, available at: http://oiss.rice.edu/STEM. Please note that Form I-983 applies to the STEM OPT period only! This means that the earliest “start of employment” on page 2 should be the start of your STEM OPT extension, even if you are a continuing employee with the company. Additionally, the final page should be left blank as the evaluations are not due until completion of at least 1 year of STEM OPT. You and your employer are highly encouraged to review the instructions at https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/i983Instructions.pdf

Will my training be evaluated during my STEM employment?
Yes, in addition to submitting a validation report to OISS every 6 months, you are also required to conduct an annual self-evaluation which will be reviewed and signed by your employer and submitted to OISS on the Form I-983.
Office Location
Lovett Hall, Entrance A, 2nd Floor

Phone
713-348-6095

Email
oiss@rice.edu

Website
http://oiss.rice.edu/stem/