

OPT STEM Extension FAQ

Students may be eligible for an OPT extension to 29 months if they graduated with a degree in one of the STEM disciplines and meet other eligibility requirements detailed below.

** We encourage ALL students eligible for the OPT extension to spend the \$380 to apply for the extension. The OPT extension will serve as a “fall back option” or plan B in case an H1B petition filed not chosen in the lottery or is not approved.

What are the eligibility requirements for OPT extension?

1. The OPT I-20 that you currently have from UAHuntsville indicates on pg. 1 line #5 that you received a degree in a STEM discipline (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics) in one of the following fields:

Computer and Information Sciences
Chemical Engineering
Civil Engineering
Computer Engineering
Software Engineering
Mechanical Engineering
Industrial Engineering
Optical Engineering
Optical Science and Engineering

Operations Research
Biology/ Biological Sciences
Biotechnology Science and Engineering
Mathematics
Applied Mathematics
Materials Science
Atmospheric Science
Chemistry
Physics

2. You are currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to your major area of study.

3. You successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field listed above.

4. You are employed currently with an employer registered with the [E-Verify](#) verification system. E-Verify is administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Social Security Administration and electronically verifies the employment authorization of any NEW HIRE. In addition:

- The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the UAH DSO or through "any other means or process identified by DHS."

- An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the employer's consent.

What types of employment are allowed during an OPT STEM extension?

1. Students authorized for an OPT STEM extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to the student's STEM degree.

2. STEM students may work multiple jobs, but all the employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

3. Students on a STEM extension are allowed to volunteer, incidental to their status. This means that volunteer work is allowed but does not count as employment for the purpose of maintaining F-1 status.

Please refer to the OPT FAQ to review details regarding eligible types of OPT employment.

What is the process for applying for an OPT extension?

Immigration requires that the International Student Advisor/DSO verify your eligibility, certify that your degree is on the STEM Degree List, ensure that you are aware of your responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT before recommending the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS and issuing a new I-20 with the recommendation for OPT listed on page 3

See a step by step review of the UAH process on page two of this handout.

UAH process to apply for an OPT extension:

1. Email the completed OPT extension cover page & I-765 immigration form to visahelp@uah.edu . An advisor will use the electronic documents to do a preliminary review of your eligibility and ensure the forms are completed correctly. The OPT extension work authorization start date will automatically be listed as the day after your 12 month OPT expires through 17 months from that date. There is no choice in the OPT extension start/end dates.
2. We will email you to confirm eligibility and tell you that two copies of an I-20 were mailed to you and need your signature.
3. Once you receive the I-20s in the mail, sign both copies, mail one copy of the signed I-20 with the full OPT application documents to:

**University of Alabama in Huntsville,
ATTN: International Student Advisor ISSO MDH 137
Huntsville, AL 35899**

You may want to consider using US Postal Service Express, Fedex, UPS or other guaranteed delivery service so you can track the shipment of your OPT materials. *DO NOT SEND MATERIALS CERTIFIED MAIL.*

A complete application must include the following documents:

- a. **COMPLETE, SIGNED & DATED** I-765 form
 - b. **SIGNED & DATED** I-20 designated for OPT extension
 - c. two passport style photos
 - d. copy of current passport picture page & expiration page
 - e. copy of front and back of I-94 card
 - f. check for \$380 made out to Department of Homeland Security **SIGNED & DATED**
 - g. copy of any EAD cards (or approval or receipt notices if you no longer have the card)
 - h. Copy of diploma and transcripts showing evidence of STEM degree if diploma does not list STEM degree
4. As soon as we receive the complete application materials we will send the documents to immigration to be processed.
 5. As long as immigration receives your OPT extension application prior to the expiration of your current OPT work authorization, you are able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a decision on the I-765 is made or for **180 days**, whichever is first.
 6. Once a receipt notice for the STEM extension OPT request is received from immigration, we will email you a scanned copy so you can track the status of your case on-line at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>

OPT STEM extension reporting requirements?

You will be required to submit a **SEVIS Update form** at minimum 2 times during your STEM OPT. You must submit a SEVIS update form to on the dates indicated via email by the International Student Advisor at the time you apply for the extension. SEVIS Update form is available on the ISSO website at www.uah.edu/ISSO under forms/resources.

In addition, all students authorized for OPT are required to use the **SEVIS Update form** to report the information below to the DSO within 10 days of any address or employment change:

- Any change of name, or living address
- Any change or loss of employment
- Address of employment

What are limited periods of unemployment and how does unemployment affect F1 status?

During post-completion OPT F-1 maintenance of status is dependent upon employment.

- Students granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29 month OPT period.