



## **OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) 17-month Extension Instructions for STEM Degree Holders**

### **1. General Instructions**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued an interim final rule revising its regulations on F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), effective April 8, 2008. One of the key regulation changes affects certain STEM degree holders. Effective April 8, 2008, the 12 month limit of F-1 OPT may be extended by 17 months, for a total of 29 months, for certain STEM degree holders. STEM degree fields are:

- Science
- Technology
- Engineering
- Mathematics

### **2. Eligibility Requirements for 17-month extension**

To qualify for a 17-month OPT extension:

- The student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a US employer in a job directly related to the student's field of study
- The student must have successfully completed a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree in a field on the STEM designated Degree Program List (see section 3: Majors at Montclair State University that are eligible for 17 month OPT extension).
- The student has not previously received a 17 month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- The student must be currently working or have a job offer from an employer registered in the **E-Verify** employment verification system at the time of the 17 month OPT extension application.
- The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of an OPT employee to International Services via email at [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu)

This reporting must be done if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT and such reporting must be made within 48 hours of the event. An employer shall consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left the employment or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the consent of the employer, whichever occurs earlier.

### **3. What is E-Verify Employment Verification System?**

E-Verify was formerly known as the Basic Pilot/Employment Eligibility Verification Program. E-Verify is an Internet-based system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration.

E-Verify allows participating employers to verify electronically the employment eligibility of their newly hired employees. E-Verify is free and voluntary. However, there are concerns whether employers will want to join E-Verify. Currently, less than one percent of all US employers are enrolled in E-Verify. If an employer joins, the employer will have to verify ALL new employees, including US citizens, in E-Verify.

There have been reports of significant discrepancies in the databases currently being used that result in verification errors, indicating that a worker is ineligible for employment when that is not accurate. Participating employers must permit visits by Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration to review their employment records and interview employees.

There is not enough information known at this writing to determine if the E-Verify requirement will have a negative impact on employer participation, and thus prevent many students on OPT in STEM fields from seeking the 17-month extension.

For more information on E-Verify, visit:

[http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/programs/gc\\_1185221678150.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/programs/gc_1185221678150.shtm)



**4. Majors at Montclair State University that are Eligible for 17 month OPT Extension**

The following majors at Montclair State University are eligible for 17 month OPT extension:

Information Technology	11.0103
Object Oriented Computing	11.0701
Computer Science-Applied Statistics	11.0701
Computer Science-Informatics	11.0701
Computer Science-Professional Computing	11.0701
Computer Science	11.0701
Mathematics-Computer Science	11.0701
Science Informatics-Computer Science	11.0701
Water Resource Management	14.0805
Biology	26.0101
Biological Science	26.0101
Biology-Biology Science Education (Inst Cert)	26.0101
Biochemistry	26.0202
Chemistry-Bio Chemistry	26.0202
Science Informatics-Biochemistry	26.0202
Biology-Molecular Biology	26.0204
Molecular Biology	26.0204
Science Informatics-Molecular Biology	26.0204
Biology-Environmental Science	26.1305
Mathematics	27.0101
Mathematics-Applied Mathematics	27.0301
Mathematics-Statistics	27.0501
Statistics	27.0501
Physical Science	40.0101
Chemistry	40.0501
Chemistry-Business Administration with Management	40.0501
Earth Science (Inst Cert)	40.0601
Physics	40.0801

If you are not sure if your major qualifies for a STEM extension, contact Beth Calamia Scheckel, International Student and Scholar Advisor, by emailing her at [calamiascheb@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:calamiascheb@mail.montclair.edu)

**5. Application Procedure**

**Step One** - Submit the following to International Services:

1. OPT 17 month Extension Application for STEM Degree Holders (last page of this packet)
2. Letter from employer on official letterhead verifying your current employment and employer’s E-Verify number



If you are currently in the area, it is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Beth Calamia Scheckel, International Student and Scholar Advisor, by calling 973-655-6862. If you are no longer in the area, you can scan and email the above requested documents to [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu) or fax it to 973-655-7726. In the subject line of your email or on the fax cover sheet, please put "Attn: STEM OPT Extension, (student name)"

Upon verifying that the student's eligibility for an extension, an advisor will prepare an I-20 recommending OPT extension.

**Step Two** - You will receive an e-mail approximately 1 week later to pick up the OPT extended I-20. For students outside the area, the I-20 will be mailed to you.

**Step Three** – Prepare the following documents: ***Make copies of all documents to keep in your records before mailing***

- Form I-765 completed and signed in blue ink (**send original**)
  - Form I-765 is available at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf>
  - For STEM extension, enter "c 3 C" under item 16.
  - Under item 3, use only the International Services address (when we receive the Receipt Notice, and EAD card we will notify you by email/phone):  
C/O Montclair State University  
22 Normal Avenue, NJ 07043
- Check in the amount of \$340.00 payable to: **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**
- Photocopy of qualifying STEM degree (diploma)
- Official Transcript in a sealed envelope
- Photocopy of OPT STEM extension I-20 (original is enclosed with this package. Sign the I-20 in blue under # 11 and then make clear copies of all pages)
- Photocopies of all pages of previous I-20s issued by MSU and all other schools attended (make clear copies making sure that any date/visa stamps on the I-20s are clearly visible)
- Photocopy of current Employment Authorization card and any other previously issued cards
- Photocopy of Biographical page(s) of passport - page (s) with your name, date of birth, picture, and passport expiration
- Photocopy of I-94 card- front and back (make clear copy making sure the date/visa stamp is clearly visible)
- Photocopy of F-1 visa stamp, or copy of change of status approval notice
- Photocopy of MSU ID card showing your picture
- Two color pictures passport style – see instructions on reverse side of page  
On the back of the pictures, write in pencil, your full name and your SEVIS ID number

Mail all of the above by Certified, Return-Receipt-Requested mail or by FedEx to:

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries:  
USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

For Federal Express or UPS:  
USCIS  
Attn: AOS  
2501 S. State HWY 121, Business Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067

**Note:** Make sure the Form I-765 is completed properly and signed in blue ink. And make sure to sign the OPT extension I-20 before making a copy of it and submitting the copy with the application. Staple the original OPT extension I-20 to the front of the current OPT I-20.



## 6. OPT Extension Filing Window

The 17 month extension can be filed up to 90 days before the current OPT end date. However, the OPT extension application must be submitted to USCIS within 30 days of the date International Services issues the OPT extension I-20.

## 7. Points to Remember

- Once you mail the application, our office, International Services will receive a Receipt Notice informing us that USCIS has received your application. We will inform you by email that we have received the notice and you can pick it up from our office. You can check the status of your application on-line by visiting [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) (follow the link 'Case Status & Processing Dates'). You will need to enter the Receipt Number from the notice (use the EAC number located on the top left of the receipt notice).
- If you decide not to mail your OPT extension application to USCIS for any reason, you **must** notify International Services immediately so that we can cancel your OPT extension recommendation in a timely manner. Failure to inform International Services that you are not applying for OPT extension can cause problems in the future.
- Upon approval, the Employment Authorization Card (EAD) will be mailed to International Services. We will inform you by email that your card has arrived and you can pick it up from our office.
- You have a 60 day grace period after the end of your OPT. You are not allowed to work during this 60 day grace period. During this time you may prepare to leave the US, transfer to a new degree program and get a new I-20, or change your status. If you are transferring to another degree program at Montclair State University or at another institution, you must contact an International Student Advisor to obtain a new I-20 or to get your SEVIS record released to another institution.

**Note: This must be done within the 60 day grace period. After that your SEVIS record is automatically terminated.**

- If during your OPT you choose to begin a new degree program full-time, whether at Montclair State University or at another institution, you must obtain an I-20 for that degree program. You will lose your remaining OPT time. You are required to cease employment upon receiving a new I-20 for the new degree program, or when your SEVIS record is released from Montclair State University to another institution.

## 8. Student Responsibilities while on STEM Extension OPT

Students pursuing a period of STEM extension OPT must:

- Work in a paid position for an E-Verify employer at least 20 hours per week
- Work in a position related to the STEM degree
- Report to International Services within 10 days of:
  - Legal name changes
  - A change in residential or mailing address
  - Changes in employer, giving the employer name and employer address
  - Loss of employment

These above mentioned changes must be reported to International Services within 10 days and can be reported via email to [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu). The email subject line should read "STEM OPT Reporting Changes for (Student's full name), SEVIS ID \_\_\_\_\_"

- Send a validation report to International Services **every six months** starting from the date the STEM extension begins and ending when my F-1 status ends or the STEM extension ends, whichever is first. The validation report must include the following:
  - Full legal name
  - SEVIS ID number (Number on top of the bar code on your SEVIS I-20)
  - Current mailing and residential address
  - Date the student began working for the current employer



The six-month validation report is due to International Services within 10 business days of each reporting date. The report should be made via email to [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu). The email subject line should read "Six-month Validation Report for (student's full name), SEVID ID \_\_\_\_\_"

### **9. Students on STEM Extension OPT should not do**

Students pursuing a period of STEM extension OPT must **not**:

- Have more than 120 days of unemployment time during the entire period of post-completion OPT (regular 12 month post-completion OPT and 17 month STEM extension OPT)
- Work in a paid position for any employer that is not an E-Verify employer

### **10. Travel during STEM Extension OPT**

If you wish to travel abroad during OPT you must have the following documents with you in order to reenter the US:

1. Valid OPT Extension I-20 which must be signed by an International Student Advisor at International Services
2. Valid Employment Authorization Card (EAD)
3. Valid passport
4. Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport
5. Valid employment letter. This letter from your employer must be on company letterhead and must state type of work, salary information, statement that the employment is temporary, and that the student will be employed after returning from travel.

**If you do not have all of the documents listed above or plan to leave the US while OPT extension is pending, it is not advisable to travel. Contact an International Student Advisor for further guidance.**

### **11. H-1B Cap-Gap Extension of Duration of Status (D/S) and OPT Work Authorization until October 1**

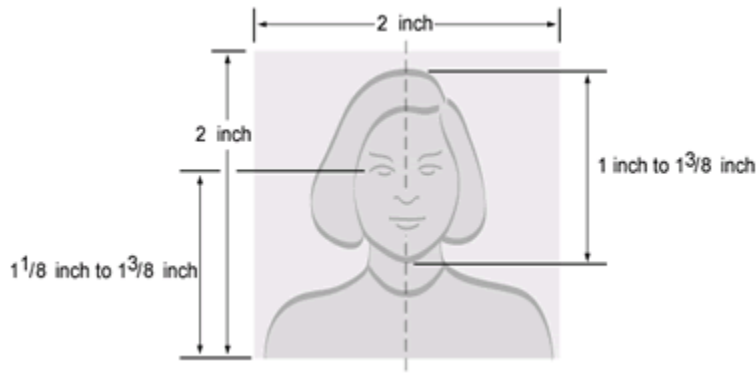
Duration of F-1 student status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT, who is the beneficiary of a timely filed H-1B petition requesting a start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. This applies to all students, not just students in STEM majors. The extension of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf.

If you qualify for a H-1B Cap Gap Extension, then please contact Beth Calamia Scheckel at 973-655-6862 or email her at [calamiascheb@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:calamiascheb@mail.montclair.edu) for further information



## 12. Guidelines for Passport Style Pictures

You will need to submit two color passport style pictures with your OPT application. Make sure the pictures are in color against a plain white background or off-white background. See below examples of good passport style pictures.



### *Good Picture Composition*



### *Local Photo Studio in Montclair*

**Motophoto**  
217 Bellevue Ave  
Montclair, NJ 07043  
(973) 746-6344



**Part 1: To Be Completed by STEM Degree holder who is currently on a 12-month period of OPT**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Last Name* *First Name* *Middle Name*

Residential Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address if different: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of STEM Degree Completion: \_\_\_\_\_

Current OPT Ending date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of current Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of current Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

**By signing this form:**

- I certify that the information provided is true and accurate and I understand the rules and regulations concerning Optional Practical Training.
- I acknowledge that I have not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- I understand that accruing an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total of 29-month OPT period may result in a violation of the F-1 student status.
- I understand that I must report to International Services any change to the following within 10 days:
  - My name
  - Residential or mailing address
  - Employer Name
  - Employer Address
  - Loss of Employment

These above-mentioned changes must be reported to International Services within 10 days and can be reported via email to [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu). The email subject line should read "STEM OPT Reporting Changes for (Student's full name), SEVIS ID \_\_\_\_\_"

- I understand that I have to make a validation report to International Services **every six months** starting from the date the STEM extension begins and ending when my F-1 status ends or the STEM extension ends, whichever is first. The validation report must include the following:
  - Full legal name
  - SEVIS ID number (Number on top of the bar code on your SEVIS I-20)
  - Current mailing and residential address
  - Date the student began working for the current employer

The six-month validation report is due to International Services within 10 business days of each reporting date. The report should be made via email to [intserv@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:intserv@mail.montclair.edu). The email subject line should read "Six-month Validation Report for (student's full name), SEVID ID \_\_\_\_\_"

- I give International Services permission to open correspondence that arrives from USCIS to ensure a timely response to any queries that may arise.

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_