OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

24-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 May 10, 2016. One of the key regulation changes affects certain STEM degree holders. Effective May 10, 2016, the 12-month limit of F-1 OPT may be extended by 24 months, for a total of 36 months, for certain STEM degree holders. STEM degree fields are:

- Science
- Technology
- Engineering
- Mathematics

2. Eligibility Requirements for 24-month extension

To qualify for a 24-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 24-month OPT extension).
- The student has not previously received a 24-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 24-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

   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.uscis.gov/e-verify
4. Majors at Montclair State University that are Eligible for 24-month OPT Extension

Refer to the following site for the latest list of majors eligible for the STEM extension:


Your MSU major has been assigned a code; you can find it on your I-20 and compare it to the government’s list.

If you are not sure if your major qualifies for a STEM extension, contact Aditi Patel, Interim Director of International Services by emailing her patelad@mail.montclair.edu

5. Application Procedure

**STEP ONE:**
To apply for an OPT STEM extension, complete the following:

1) The OPT 24-Month STEM Extension Application
2) **Form I-765** (Application for Employment Authorization)
   a. The code for item 16 is (c)(3)(C).
   b. In item 17, please state the name of your degree as it appears on your I-20, the name of your employer as listed on the E-Verify system, and your employer’s E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number.
   c. Please make sure the address you provide is valid for at least 120 days from the date you submit the I-765 form. USCIS will mail your EAD card to this address, and will not forward your EAD card to another address if you move.
3) **Form I-983** (Training Plan and Evaluation)
   a. The I-983 requires a written, formal training plan. This should be completed by both you and your employer. We cannot recommend you for the extension until the training plan is reviewed and approved.
   b. The training plan should describe work-based learning opportunities, as well as: 1) specific goals of the training, 2) how your employer shall meet these goals, 3) how the training directly relates to your STEM degree, 4) how your training will be evaluated by your employer, 5) how your supervisor will oversee your training, 6) your compensation, which should be commensurate to other U.S. employees, and 7) that you and your employer will comply with STEM OPT rules and regulations.
   c. You will need the SEVIS school code. Please reference your I-20 for this number. For the DSO name and contact, please write:

   Aditi Patel, Assistant Director, International Services
   (973) 655 – 6862.

**STEP TWO:**
Submit the three forms from Step One to International Services by email at intserv@mail.montclair with subject line: OPT STEM Application (your Last name, First name), for review and preparation of the STEM OPT I-20. To receive your new I-20, please create a shipment request with eShip Global, enter your address, and pay the fees. We will use this secure account to ship your new, OPT 24-Month STEM Extension I-20 to you.

Once you receive your new I-20, please review it and make sure all information is accurate. If everything looks correct, you must sign your new I-20. If there is an error, we highly recommend notifying the office and returning the I-20 as quickly as possible, so as to not delay your STEP OPT application process.

When applying for your STEM OPT extension, please remember:

2) A photocopy of your new, signed STEM I-20.
3) Application fee of $410. This should be in the form of a money order or check, payable to the Department of Homeland Security. The fee is in US dollars, and should be drawn from a bank located in the U.S.
4) Proof of STEM degree in the form of a copy of your Montclair State transcript.
5) Two U.S. passport-style photos taken within 30 days of submitting your application, and make sure the photos have not been used for a previous application. For information on photo standards, please refer Guidelines for passport style pictures or visit the Department of State website. On the back of each photo, lightly (and legibly) print your name and I-94 admission number in pencil.

6) Photocopies of the following from your passport:
   a. Biographical page(s), including the expiration date. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future at the time of submitting this application.
   b. Your most recent F-1 visa stamp in your passport (Citizens of Canada are exempt).
   c. Your most recent admission stamp in your passport.
   d. A print out of your electronic I-94. You can retrieve this from the CBP website.
   e. Copies of ALL previously issued and signed I-20s from ALL institutions attended. If you do not have copies of all your I-20s, please write a letter stating this.
   f. Any previous employment authorization documents (EAD).

When submitting your application, please make sure all copies are single-sided and are not stapled together. Please check the USCIS website for the most up-to-date and complete mailing instructions. It is extremely important you send your application to the correct address, so as to make sure there are no delays. It is highly recommended that you use either FedEx, UPS, or USPS Certified Mail with a return receipt requested, in order to track your application and make sure it successfully arrives to USCIS.

If you have any questions, please reach out to us at intserv@mail.montclair.edu.

**STEP THREE:**

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

For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: For Federal Express or UPS:
USCIS Attn: AOS
PO Box 660867 2501 S. State HWY 121, Business Suite 400
Dallas, TX 75266 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 24-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 (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 as 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. 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. 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 24-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 Aditi Patel at 973-655-6862 or email her at patelad@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: ____________________    SEVIS ID #: _______________________________

Name of Current Employer: ______________________________________ Job Title: __________________________________________

Address of Current Employer: _________________________________________________________________________________________

Phone 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 24-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 am still in F-1 state under Montclair State University, and 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. 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. 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.

• I understand that I must submit 2 self-evaluations during my STEM OPT period: the first one within 12 months of my start date, and the second evaluation at the conclusion of my STEM OPT period. These evaluations should be submitted to International Services at intserv@mail.montclair.edu

• I understand that I must submit an updated Form I-983, Mentoring and Training Plan, to International Services within 10 days of beginning new employment and/or any time there is a change made to the terms and conditions of the original Mentoring and Training plan.

Student’s Signature: _________________________________    Date: _________________________