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

Eligibility Requirements for 24-month extension
To qualify for a 24-month OPT extension:
All of the below criteria must be met for a student to be eligible for the OPT STEM extension:
- Students who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT, and reported their employment to International Services; and
- Who have not exceeded 90 days of unemployment during post-completion OPT period and will not exceed that limit prior to the STEM OPT extension start date; and
- Who have earned a degree in a field included on the U.S. Government's list of qualifying Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields; and
- Who are employed in or have a job offer for a job directly related to his/her field of study; and
- Who are working for or have a job offer from an employer that is enrolled in the U.S. Government's E-Verify program; and
- Be within 90 days of their post-completion OPT end date

What is E-Verify Employment Verification System?
E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly-hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify.

Majors at Montclair State University that are Eligible for 24-month OPT Extension
If a student earned a degree in a field that appears on the U.S. government's official list of STEM fields, he/she may be eligible for the 24-month OPT extension. In order to verify that your degree is on this list, look at the code listed under “Primary Major” on your Page 2 of your I-20 form, and then look for that code in the CIP code column of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security STEM Designated Degree Programs 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
**OPT STEM Application Time Frame**

Students must apply for the 24-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of the first 12 months of “regular” OPT. The application must be received by USCIS prior to the expiration date of the first OPT period EAD in order to be properly (timely) filed. USCIS will not accept I-765 applications for STEM extensions any earlier than 90 days before the current EAD expiration date.

Please note: you cannot apply during the 60 day grace period.

**Work authorization status while STEM extension is pending:** If you successfully file the application for your 24-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of your current 12-month OPT period EAD, you may continue employment even if your previous EAD card is expired until your OPT extension is processed or until 180 days has passed, whichever is sooner.

**Starting and ending dates**

The start date of the 24-month OPT extension will be automatically set to the day after the expiration of the current 12-month OPT authorization. The end date will be 24 months later. (It is not possible to request smaller increments of time for the OPT extension.)

**Application Procedure**

1. Submit electronic **OPT STEM Extension I-20 Request Form**
   - Students will be required to upload a completed Form I-983 with their I-20 request. Form I-983 is the Training and Evaluation Form
     - The I-983 requires a written, formal training plan. Both you and your employer must complete this form. Complete pages 1-4
     - We cannot recommend you for the extension until the training plan is reviewed and approved.
     - 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.
     - 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
   - Students will also be required to upload a completed **Form I-765** (Application for Employment Authorization)
     - 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 employers E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number.
     - 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.

2. International Services will review your application and if everything is complete, the I-20 will be issued and you will be notified by email. Usual processing times are about 10 business days.

3. Once you receive the I-20 check it for accuracy, and then sign the I-20 in blue ink.

4. Follow the checklist below to get all the documents together for mailing to USCIS
   a. The original **Form I-765** Application for Employment Authorization. (make sure to sign the form in blue ink)
b. **G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance** (optional)

c. A photocopy of your new, signed STEM I-20.

d. Application fee of $410. This should be in the form of a check, payable to the Department of Homeland Security.

e. Photocopy of your Montclair State University Diploma, or official transcript

f. Two U.S. passport-style photos taken within 30 days of submitting your application. 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.

g. Photocopy of the biographical page(s) of your passport, including the expiration date. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future at the time of submitting this application.

h. Your most recent F-1 visa stamp in your passport (Citizens of Canada are exempt).

i. Your most recent admission stamp in your passport.

j. A print out of your electronic I-94. You can retrieve this from the [CBP website](https://www.cbp.gov).  

k. Copies of ALL previously issued and signed I-20s from ALL institutions attended. If you do not have copes of all your I-20s, please write a letter stating this.

l. Any previous employment authorization documents (EAD).

**Note:** If you include the G-1145 form with your application, USCIS will send you an e-notification within 1-2 weeks from the date they receive your I-765 EAD (OPT) application. They will also mail you a paper receipt notice within 2-4 weeks. Make sure all copies are single-sided and not stapled together. And make a copy of the entire application for your records before mailing.

Once you have received your receipt number, you can track the status of your individual case using the [case status search feature of the USCIS web site](https://www.uscis.gov). You may elect to receive email alerts about your case status from this web site.

5. Send your application to USCIS.

It is highly recommended that you use FedEx, or UPS so that you can track your package. DO NOT send by regular mail. The address you use on the I-765 determines where you should send your application (see Form I-765 instructions).

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**Student Responsibilities while on STEM Extension OPT**

Students approved for the 24-month OPT extension have additional reporting requirements in order to maintain their status and work authorization. Students must report to the IC within 10 days if there is any change of:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name
- Employer address, and/or
- Loss of employment

Students must make a validation report to International Services every six months to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date. Use the [STEM OPT Validation Report](https://www.montclair.edu/international) to submit your validation report.

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**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
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.

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.