

17-Month STEM OPT Extension Handout & Checklist for F-1 International Students

The following information pertains to the 17-month STEM OPT Extension. For students interested in learning about the general 12-month OPT, please refer to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) Handout for F-1 Students.

General Information

Certain graduates from science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) programs who are currently participating in post-completion OPT for a period of 12 months, are eligible to apply for a one-time 17-month extension prior to the end date of their current OPT. This extension, if approved, allows F-1 visa holders to engage in post-completion OPT for a maximum of 29 months.

Eligibility Requirements

- Student must currently be engaging in post-completion OPT after completing a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral program in a (STEM) program approved by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Designated Degree Program. See site for more Information: <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/stem-list-2011.pdf>
- Student must have accepted employment with an employer registered and in good standing with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration • Services (USCIS) E-Verify employment verification program.
- Employment must be related to their degree program.
- Student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.

How to apply:

Schedule an appointment with the Designated School Official (DSO) at the FGCU International Services Office (ISO) and have all items below prepared BEFORE the appointment (incomplete OPT Packets may be delayed).

- New Form I-20 (issued by the Designated School Official at the FGCU International Services Office during OPT application)
- I-765 Form (Please visit www.uscis.gov Click on FORMS and Locate I-765 in the list)
- Your mailing address in I-765 form should be: **Intl. Svcs. 10501 FGCU BLVD South, Fort Myers, FL 33965**
- The Employment Category for STEM OPT is **C-3-C** as listed on the I-765 application instructions. Your Designated School Officer at the FGCU International Services Office can assist.
- Letter from Employer (on Company Letterhead, indicating: Your Employer's name, your current position, date of hire, employment status (full/part-time, brief description of your position and your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or E-Verify Client Company Identification #)
- All immigration documents (latest I-94 record from www.cbp.gov/i94 valid passport, and F-1 student visa)
- Any previous correspondence with the Department of Homeland Security
- All previous I-20 forms
- Previous and current Employment Authorization Documents (EAD Cards)
- Two recent 2 in x 2 in full frontal color passport photos with your name and I-94 card number written in pencil on the back (see the U.S. Department of Homeland Security specifications at www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html)
- Personal check/Money Order/Bank Check for \$380** made out to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and indicate I-94 record number for identification reasons (**USCIS fees are subject to change. To verify, please visit www.uscis.gov and click Immigration Forms, Fees and Fingerprints)
- Official Transcripts and Copy of Degree Certificate(s)
- Apply in a timely manner –your application packet must reach USCIS well before the expiration of your current EAD card (FGCU ISO recommends to apply between **90 and 120 days** before the EAD card expires).
- Make an appointment with the Designated School Officer at the FGCU International Services Office. Student must initiate the OPT extension application process by requesting a new I-20 from his or her DSO. The student must then submit to ISO Form I-765, applicable fees and supporting documents and ISO will assist by sending the STEM OPT packet to the USCIS Texas Service Center.
- Review the 17-month **STEM OPT Extension Checklist** and **bring all items** to your appointment.
- E-filing your STEM OPT Extension application is **NOT** recommended at this time.
- Your application packet may be mailed for you via certified mail to the USCIS Service Center.

- **After applying for 17-month STEM OPT Extension:**
- Employment authorization is automatically extended for qualified F-1 visa holders who have timely and properly submitted a 17-month STEM OPT Extension application. The automatic extension is valid until a decision is made on the application or 180 days, whichever comes first.
- USCIS will cash your application fee. When your check has cleared your bank, you will know that USCIS has begun processing your application.
- Once you have received your Receipt Notice from USCIS, you may check the status of your case online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard/CaseStatus.do>
- If you have not received your card within 90 days of your receipt notice date contact the FGCU International Services Office for further assistance with your application.
- Once the new EAD card is made, it will be mailed to the FGCU International Services Office address listed on your application (I-765). Please note the U.S. Postal Service will not forward mail from the federal government to a different address.
- Review your card for errors. If there are any errors, please make an appointment with the ISO, who will then determine whether or not you should send your card back for correction.

While on 17-month STEM OPT Extension:

- You may only work within the dates authorized on your EAD card
- You cannot accrue an aggregate of 120 days of unemployment during the entire 29-month period of post-completion OPT.
- Travel outside the U.S. is permitted if you are employed. You will need your I-20 (endorsed for travel by a Designated School Official at ISO which is valid for 6 months), your EAD card and a letter from your employer, as well as a valid passport and valid F-1 entry visa. If you are renewing your visa while on 17-month STEM OPT Extension, you may be subject to more scrutiny, as you will need to establish that your purpose in the U.S. is still temporary even though you have completed your studies. To obtain additional information on travel during OPT please visit: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#_Toc81222043 or consult with an ISO staff member.
- You are required to report changes of address, legal name, employer's name and address, and/or interruption of unemployment within • 10 days of the change. To report these changes please contact the International Services via e-mail at Internationalservices@fgcu.edu and also update your current address with the FGCU Office of the Registrar by submitting this form http://www.fgcu.edu/Registrar/files/Address-Name_Change_Form_04032008.pdf.
- Employer must agree to report termination or departure of the OPT employee to the International Services Office (ISO) within 48 hours.
- You must make a "validation report" to ISO every six months from the date of the OPT extension to verify your full legal name, current address, current employer's name and address as well as the date you began working for the current employer.
- You may enroll at FGCU as degree-/or non-degree seeking student for up to 6 credits per semester.

Options after 17-month STEM OPT Extension:

- You will have 60 days after your EAD card expires to make departure plans or other arrangements within the U.S. You may elect to do one of the following:
- Return to your home country
- Request a new I-20 for a new program at FGCU (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Transfer to another institution within the U.S. (student must be able to begin classes within 5 months)
- Apply for a nonimmigrant/immigrant status change

Note: Students who properly file for an H1-B petition AND whose regular post-completion OPT or extended STEM OPT expires prior to October 1 (H1-B start date), are eligible for cap-gap extension. Please note that although the extension is automatic for employment and F-1 status, students must verify with their Designated School Official at the International Services Office (ISO) that their SEVIS record and I-20 is updated

17-Month STEM OPT Extension Document Checklist & Agreement Form

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- All immigration documents (latest I-94 record from www.cbp.gov/i94 valid passport, and F-1 student visa)
- Any previous correspondence with the Department of Homeland Security
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- Official Transcripts and Copy of Degree Certificate(s)

Submitting your Application

A student must apply for the 17-month STEM OPT extension before the expiration of the prior post-completion OPT EAD. ISO recommends applying between 90 and 120 days before your EAD card expires. **Note:** A student who has applied for a STEM extension can continue working for up to 180 days beyond the expiration of the prior post-completion OPT EAD, while the STEM extension application is pending, as long as that employment conforms to STEM conditions.

Agreement: I, _____, understand that while on the 17-month STEM OPT Extension I will be required to abide by all immigration regulations governing the F-1 visa. I also understand, agree and accept the following specific items:

- I read and understand the "ISO 17-month STEM OPT Handout for F-1 Student" found under the Forms Section at www.fgcu.edu/international
- I will have all correspondence and filing regarding this case with the USCIS processed through the FGCU International Services Office
- Should I choose to change employers during the 17-month period, I must remain employed with an employer who is registered in the **E-Verify** program.
- I cannot accrue an aggregate of 120 days of unemployment during the entire 29-month period of post-completion OPT
- I will report any changes of address, legal name, employer's name and address within 10 days of the change. To report these changes please visit with the International Services Office at also the FGCU Office of the Registrar.
- I will report to the Designated School Officer at FGCU International Services Office (ISO) every 6 months starting from the 17- month extension start date until the 17-month OPT Extension ends by using the **OPT Status Form** found at www.fgcu.edu/international

Signature: _____ **FGCU UIN: 815** _____ **Date:** _____