STEM OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) EXTENSION

What Is STEM OPT Extension?

Recipients of a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a field listed on the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) STEM-Designated Degree Program List and who are currently on post-completion F-1 OPT may be eligible to apply for a STEM OPT extension. The DHS STEM-Designated Degree Program List is organized based on CIP codes. F-1 students can find their current program CIP code at www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf.

Students must currently be authorized for 12-month post-completion OPT and may be eligible for up to two STEM OPT extensions based on two STEM degrees at different degree levels. Students may also apply for STEM OPT extension based on a previously-earned STEM degree from an accredited US institution within 10 years for which the student has not previously applied for STEM OPT extension.

NEW Form I-983 Training Plan Requirement

Students and employers must complete a Training Plan (Form I-983) to begin the STEM OPT extension process. The Form I-983 is required for all students working on a STEM OPT extension, whether UAB is their home institution or they have come from another university. An individual familiar with the student's proposed work and/or job duties must provide a job description and certify that the STEM OPT job duties are related to the student’s degree field. The student is required to complete two self-evaluations during the work, including a final evaluation. DHS is looking for confirmation both that STEM OPT work is truly for the student’s benefit and that the department is committed to helping the STEM OPT student achieve his/her educational objectives.

If the STEM OPT student is a UAB student, the department must notify ISSS of any material changes in the student’s work duties or pay during the STEM OPT employment, or if the nature of the work changes such that it is no longer related to the student’s degree field. The department must also notify ISSS within 5 days of the termination of employment. If the STEM OPT student is not a UAB student, UAB has an obligation to notify the home institution’s DSO of any changes and/or termination. ISSS has worked with UAB Human Resources to craft a process that complies with these employer requirements.

The new regulations require signature from an individual with "signatory authority" on the Form I-983. UAB has identified Alesia Jones, Chief HR Officer (or her designee), as the official signatory for these forms. Please deliver the completed form (and the employer’s letter) to Ms. Jones in Human Resources, AB 210. Ms. Jones will forward the Form I-983 to the student’s DSO of record (ISSS, in the case of UAB students). Her signature indicates that all information on the form is true to the best of her knowledge. However, individual STEM OPT students’ supervisors in each department are ultimately responsible for ensuring compliance with the I-983 requirements.
See here for Form I-983 training and here for employer reporting requirements. Immigration & Customs Enforcement has posted a helpful PowerPoint with guidance on completing the Form I-983 here, in addition to instructions.

**STEM OPT Restrictions**

- Volunteering and self-employment are **not** permitted during STEM OPT extension
- Students must work at least 20 hours per week
- Students are permitted **60 days** of unemployment during the STEM OPT extension, in addition to the **90 days** of unemployment allowed under the initial post-completion OPT period, for a total **150 days** of unemployment

**Required Documents**

- [Form I-983](#), Training Plan for STEM OPT Students
- Signed [Form I-765](#)
- Check or money order payable to “US Department of Homeland Security” for $410 (either the employer or the student can pay this fee)
- Printout of most recent Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Document
- Copy of biographical page of passport and visa stamp
- Copy of diploma
- Copy of transcript showing proof of degree
- Letter from employer following the required format
- 2 passport-style photographs taken within the last 30 days (the passport office in the OneStop in the Hill Student Center will take passport photos for less than local pharmacies)
- Copy of previous OPT EAD (if applicable)