STEM OPT Extension 101

About STEM OPT

- STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

- STEM OPT Extension:

  - Temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major

  - Students in eligible STEM majors may apply for a 24-month extension during Post-Completion OPT upon meeting qualifications

  - STEM field must appear on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) STEM-Designated Degree Program List

About STEM OPT

- "Who decides if the job is related to my major?"
  - Students must justify how the job is related to their major
  - The training plan will document how your job is related to your major

- Ask "Is there a clear connection between the job and my major?"

About STEM OPT

- Available to students who have completed an undergraduate or graduate degree in a STEM eligible field from a SEVP-certified and accredited school

- Students may apply during a current period of Post-OPT
  - Students may apply up to 90 days before the end of Post-OPT
  - USCIS must have your STEM OPT application **before** your Post-OPT expires

- Allowed twice in a lifetime
  - Students may be eligible for a second extension after earning another qualifying STEM degree at a higher level or obtaining a new initial period of standard 12-month Post-OPT

STEM Eligibility for a Previous Degree

- Students may apply for STEM OPT based on a previously obtained and directly related STEM degree
  - Must be a valid period of 12-month Post-OPT
  - Previous STEM degree must be fully conferred and awarded from an accredited and SEVP-certified institution
  - Previous STEM degree must have been awarded within 10 years preceding the date the DSO recommends the student for STEM OPT
  - Position must be directly related to the Previous STEM degree
  - STEM degree needs to be listed on DHS's STEM-Designated Degree Program List at the time the student applies

Employer Requirements

- Employer must be enrolled in USCIS's E-verify employment eligibility verification program

- Form I-983 must clearly describe how the employment is directly related to the student's STEM degree

- F-1 students must be fully employed by the employer signing Form I-983

Employer Requirements

- Must assist with and sign the student's Training Plan (Form I-983)
- By signing the form, the employer verifies
  - They have sufficient resources and trained personnel available to provide appropriate training in connection with the student's major
  - The STEM OPT student will not replace a full-time, part-time, temporary or permanent U.S. employee
  - The opportunity will help the student attain their training objectives

- In the event of termination or departure of a student on STEM OPT, the employer must report the change to ISSS within **5 business days** with a letterhead from their HR department

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Training Plan (Form I-983)

- Complete Form I-983 with your employer's assistance
- Submit the form to UNT's International Student and Scholar Services Office (ISSS) in Marquis 110
- Students are responsible for completing this form and submitting it to ISSS with their STEM OPT request
  - The I-983 form must be submitted to ISSS before applying for STEM Extension
- Form Overview

Training Plan (Form I-983)

- If there are any "material" or employer changes (different job), an updated I-983 form must be submitted to ISSS **within 10 days** during the 24-month extension

- "Material" changes include:
  - EIN changes
  - Salary reduction
  - Hours significantly decrease
  - Site change
  - A change renders the training plan or employer attestation inaccurate

- Students and employers must both sign the modified training plan

- The modified form must be submitted to the DSO

Training Plan (Form I-983)

- Some supervisor/job/assignment changes do not require modification to the I-983 form
  - Supervisor change alone does not represent a "material" change
  - Changes are not "material" unless they render inaccurate to the information originally listed on the training plan:
    - Nature
    - Purpose
    - Oversight
    - Assessment of the OPT
- Contact ISSS if you have questions about "material" changes
  - internationaladvising@unt.edu
  - 940-565-2195

Student Requirements

- No more than 150 days of unemployment are allowed between OPT and STEM OPT
  - 90 days on OPT, 60 days on STEM

- Students must work a minimum of 20 hours per week with **each employer**

- **Volunteer work is not allowed**
  - STEM Extension requires full employment by your employer

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Student Requirements

- 6-Month Validation Reports
  - You must report to ISSS every 6 months with:
    - Legal Name
    - Residential and Mailing addresses
    - Employer name and address
    - Status of current employment/OPT experience
  - ISSS Validation Report Form

Student Evaluations

- 12-month Self-Evaluation
  - Must be signed by the student and employer
  - Submit to ISSS no more than 10 days after the 12-month mark

- 24-month Self-Evaluation
  - Must be signed by the student and employer
  - Submit to ISSS no more than 10 days after the completion of STEM OPT

When to Apply

Note: It can take USCIS about 90 days to process OPT applications- apply early!

USCIS must receive your application before this day

SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION DURING THIS TIME

90 days before Post-OPT expiration

Post-OPT Expiration Date

After STEM OPT

24 months of STEM OPT

60-day grace period
(Choose from 4 options)

Change Levels: You must apply, be admitted and get a new I-20 before the end of the grace period

Transfer Schools: Receive your I-20 from the new school before the grace period ends! If you transfer while your OPT is valid, the rest of your OPT will be cancelled when the SEVIS is "released"

Change Status: OPT is often a transition to an H-1B visa

- Contact ISSS if your employer files an H-1B application for you

Return Home

How to Apply

- At the end of this presentation take a quiz (must score 100%) and fill out application documents.

- Bring quiz score to ISSS Office (Marquis 110) and apply for a STEM OPT I-20
  - You must submit Form I-983 with the request for the STEM OPT I-20
  - You are required to send your application to USCIS within 60 days of your I-20 being issued

- Pay OPT Case Management Fee online (link in application)
  - This is separate from the USCIS application fee
  - Must be paid before picking up new I-20

- Send all required documents to address listed on application

How to Apply

Document Checklist
- $410 check or money order payable to *Department of Homeland Security*
- 2 color passport-style photos
  - *Lightly* write your name on the back of both
- Completed I-765 form
- Signed copy of pages 1 & 2 of the I-20 showing STEM OPT recommendation
- Copy of I-94 card (both sides) or electronic record
- Copy of passport, expiration and visa pages
- Copy of your diploma or official transcript showing date degree was conferred

Assembling your Packet

- You will be emailed with your OPT I-20 is ready to be picked up
  - The *OPT Case Management Fee* must be paid before you can receive your I-20

- Bring all required STEM OPT packet documentation when you pick up your I-20
  - An advisor will review the packet to ensure accuracy before you mail it

Mailing your Packet

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- Copy the entire packet for your records
- If you listed an address in Texas on the I-765, mail the packet through one of the following methods:

USPS Deliveries (Post Office)

- USCIS
  P.O. Box 660867
  Dallas, TX 75266
- Mail "Certified mail,
  return receipt requested"

Courier Service (FedEx, DHL, UPS, etc.)

- USCIS Attn: AOS
  2501 S. State Highway 121,
  Business Suite 400
  Lewisville, TX 75067

- If your address on the I-765 is not in Texas, click here to find the nearest USCIS office and mail accordingly
- If you have any questions, contact ISSS

Next Steps

- Immigration will cash your check and send a receipt which helps in 2 ways:
  - Check your case status at uscis.gov (use the YSC number)
  - Confirms they received the application and are working on it
    - Normal processing time is 60-90 days

- Once processed, USCIS will send the EAD

The receipt and card will be mailed to the address you listed on the I-765

Frequently Asked Questions

"Can I work while waiting on my STEM Extension EAD?"

- You may work up to 180 days after the end date of your Post-OPT as long as you have filed your STEM OPT application with USCIS timely and it's pending

"How do I maintain status for STEM OPT?"

- Do not go to school or pursue a new degree while on Post-OPT
  - New degrees require a new I-20 and full-time enrollment
- Do not accrue more than 150 days of unemployment during Post-Opt & STEM OPT combined
- You must report any changes in name, local address or employment **within 10 days** of the change
  - Report Changes here
- **Keep records of all employment**
  - Employer, dates of employment, title, hours worked, relation to your degree, etc.
  - You will need this information when applying for future benefits through USCIS

Frequently Asked Questions

"What is my status while on STEM OPT?"
- F-1 status

"Do I still need to get my I-20 signed for travel after my program completion?"
- Yes, if you plan to travel outside the U.S. and the I-20 has not been signed within the last 6 months
- You may request a reprint from ISSS at least 3 weeks prior to your departure

"Can I travel while on STEM OPT?"
- Applied for STEM OPT, but no EAD: No. You cannot travel while the application is pending.
- After approval with STEM OPT EAD: Yes. Travel with valid I-20 endorsed for travel within the last 6 months, passport, visa, EAD and letter from employer.

Frequently Asked Questions

"What if my visa is expired?"

- Visas do not impact your status while in the U.S.
- If traveling outside the U.S., you must renew your visa before returning
- Do not attempt to renew your visa without a job while on STEM OPT
- To renew your visa you will need:
    1. Valid I-20 endorsed for travel within the last 6 months
    2. Valid passport
    3. EAD
    4. Letter from employer

"What if I decide to return home permanently?"

- Notify ISSS by filling out an Ending Studies Form

Thank You and Good Luck!

- Review all the information in this presentation carefully before taking the quiz

- You can find the quiz and all application documents here
  - Remember, you must score a 100% on the quiz for it to be accepted!