

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Information for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors and graduates

Please check this page periodically for updates as they become available.

On Tuesday, April 8, a new immigration rule became effective. This rule extends the period of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for some F-1 students from 12 months to 29 months. Students who have completed degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields will be eligible for this "extra" 17 months of OPT time. Sadly, it is not available for all F-1 students. In addition, OPT employers will need to be approved to use the Government's "E-Verify" employment eligibility verification system in order to employ eligible F-1 graduates for this additional 17 month period.

This new rule will also eliminate the gap that currently exists between the H-1B fiscal year and the end of may F-1 students' periods of OPT, particularly those who graduate at the end of the traditional academic year in May.

Ross Schupbach will not be able to answer many questions because DHS has not yet provided guidance for advisors about how the step-by-step process to apply for this extension will work, nor have they provided detailed guidance about determining eligible fields of study. He will pass along this information as soon as it is made available to him and he has had a chance to complete a proper review of the material. Until then, more detailed information is not available.

As provided by the Department of Homeland Security, here is a general list of the eligible fields of study:

- Actuarial Science
- Computer Science Applications
- Engineering
- Engineering Technologies
- Life Sciences
- Mathematics
- Military Technologies
- Physical Sciences

Please remember that this benefit is not for students in any other fields of study. It is also important to note that this is for F-1 students only, J-1 students are not eligible for this and J-1 Academic Training (<http://www.uni.edu/intladm/iso/j1studemployment.shtml#acadt>) has not been changed. It remains at 18 months of total employment eligibility time.

To read the DHS news release and find a link to the text of the proposed rule, look here: http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1207334008610.shtm

For more information about E-Verify, you should look here:

http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/programs/gc_1185221678150.shtm

Please watch your inbox for updates as they become available.

Other requirements for 17-month extension. Additional requirements for the 17-month extension include:

- Student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to the student's major area of study.
- Student must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List, from a SEVIS-certified college or university.
- Student must have a job offer from an employer registered with the [E-Verify](#) employment verification system.
- The student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- The DSO must recommend the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS, after verifying the student's eligibility, certifying that the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, and ensuring that the student is aware of his or her responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- Student will have to apply for the 17-month extension on Form I-765 with fee.
- Students who timely file an application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.
- The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of the student to the DSO or through "any other means or process identified by DHS." An employer must consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of five consecutive business days without the employer's consent.