

## STEM OPT Application Instructions for Kenyon College F-1 Alumni

This packet contains information for Kenyon College F-1 alumni about how to apply for the STEM OPT extension at the end of OPT authorization. Please review this carefully for guidance about who is eligible for the STEM OPT extension, application instructions, and additional responsibilities upon STEM OPT approval.

### What is STEM OPT?

The [STEM OPT extension](#) is a benefit of F-1 status, and allows an additional 24-months of work authorization immediately following OPT for students with a [DHS designated STEM major](#).

### Eligibility Requirements for STEM OPT Extension:

- Your work must relate to your STEM major. As of March 2023, the following Kenyon majors are eligible: Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Studies, Mathematics, Molecular Biology, Neuroscience, Physics
- You must have an employer or job offer to apply for the extension. Work must be paid, at least 21 hours/week with each employer, and you must have an employer/employee relationship with your company or organization.
- Employer must be registered in [E-Verify](#) (no cost to employers to use E-Verify)
- Student must complete [Form I-983](#) (with the help of the employer) and submit this form to the CGE before the CGE can issue the STEM OPT I-20

Interested students must submit an application to USCIS; application instructions follow.

**When to Apply:** You can apply for STEM OPT beginning 90 days prior to the end of your OPT authorization as listed on your Employment Authorization Document (EAD); your application must reach USCIS before your OPT expires and within 60 days of your STEM OPT I-20 being issued by the CGE. Applications received outside of those timeframes will be denied and you will lose the opportunity to participate in STEM OPT. We encourage you to contact the CGE early (no later than 60 days before your OPT will expire) to ensure you have enough time to file your STEM OPT application within the filing window.

## **Instructions for STEM OPT Application:**

1. **Complete pages 1 – 4 of [Form I-983](#) with your employer** and email a copy of the entire form to an international student advisor in the CGE. The reflections on page 5 are to be completed during the STEM OPT extension.
  
1. **Prepare digital files of application materials listed below.** Accepted file types are: JPG, JPEG, PNG, PDF, TIF, or TIFF. Foreign language documents must have an English translation. Maximum file size is 6MB. . Name the files something that indicates who they belong to and what the document is (for example, Last Name\_First Name\_Document type)
  - Front and back of previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
  - Kenyon transcript with your degree level (bachelor) and STEM major listed
  - [I-94](#): Click “Get Most Recent I-94”. This number changes every time you enter the U.S., so make sure you have the most recent copy.
  - Digital passport style photo: this should be 2x2 inches (at least 600x600 pixels) taken within the last 6 months. Refer to [State Department guidance](#) for passport photos; you can use their [Photo Tool](#) to upload a photo and crop it to the right size.
  - I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation (you will receive this after your advising meeting)
  
2. **Create or log into your [online USCIS account](#)**; there are step-by-step instructions [here](#). **Proceed with starting your [online application](#)** for the I-765. Be careful that you select option (c)(3)(C), 24-Month Extension for STEM Students. Once you have completed all responses, save a preview of the Form I-765. **DO NOT SUBMIT AND PAY UNTIL AFTER YOU MEET WITH AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR.**
  
3. **[Schedule an advising meeting](#)** with an international student advisor in the CGE to review your STEM OPT application. At least full 1 business day before this meeting, email the advisor a preview of your completed I-765 form to review. After this meeting, you will receive a new I-20 with a STEM OPT recommendation—you will need to sign and upload this to your online application.
  
4. **Upload your I-20 with STEM OPT recommendation** to your I-765 application, and if necessary, make any recommended corrections to the I-765. The final step is to **pay the I-765 filing fee** via U.S. bank account or debit/credit card within the STEM OPT filing period (within 60 days of your STEM OPT I-20 being issued and before your OPT expires). Please note that once you make the payment, your application is submitted instantly and cannot be edited. Do not submit your payment until you are sure your application is complete.

**Note: Your application must be filed before your OPT expires and within 60 days of Kenyon issuing your STEM OPT I-20.** Late applications will be denied. You will receive an I-797 receipt in your USCIS online account as soon as you file your application online. USCIS will also mail you an I-797 Notice of Action receipt after receiving your application. Please start your application early to ensure you have enough time to file before your OPT ends.

### **General Tips (USCIS online account):**

- **Inactivity on your application:** The USCIS online filing system will save your application as you work on it. Be aware that before your application is filed, your application draft will be deleted after 30 days of inactivity.
- **A-number or USCIS online account number:** The online application will ask if you have these numbers. You should have received an A-number from USCIS during your OPT application; this will be listed on your OPT EAD as the USCIS #.
- **Previously issued CPT:** As you prepare documents for your application, make sure to locate any I-20s that have previously issued CPT.
- **Different SEVIS numbers:** If you took a leave of absence at some point during college and therefore have had multiple SEVIS numbers, explain this in the “Additional information” section. List the program dates and number of your previous SEVIS record.
- **Multiple documents:** If you have multiple documents to upload in a single area, you can either include multiple documents in a single file, or upload multiple files.

### **Completing the I-765 online:**

- **Form type:** In your online USCIS account, select “file a form online”. Select Form I-765, and when asked for the eligibility category, select (c)(3)(C) for STEM OPT.
- **U.S. mailing address:** Enter an address where you are able to receive mail.
- **Physical address:** If different than your mailing address, enter the address of your residence.
- **I-94 Number:** You can find this [online](#). Be sure to use the most recent record, as this number changes every time you enter the U.S.
- **SEVIS Number:** You can find this on the top left corner of your most recent I-20. The number starts with NoO.
- **Social Security Number (SSN):** The I-765 will ask you if you want the Social Security Administration (SSA) to issue you a SSN. If you do not already have a SSN, you should choose

“yes” for this question. If you have had a SSN issued previously but lost your SSN card, you can also choose “yes” and the SSA will send you a replacement card.

- **Form I-20:** This section asks you to upload the I-20 that has your STEM OPT recommendation. This I-20 will be issued in your STEM OPT advising meeting, after everything else with your application is complete. You can upload this I-20 in or after your advising meeting. This should be the final document you upload prior to submitting/paying for your application.
- **Application Summary:** In the “Review and Submit” section, when you get to the “Your application summary” page, please click “View draft snapshot” to download a draft copy of your I-765. Please send this to Rebecca at least one business day before your STEM OPT advising meeting. Rebecca will review this and recommend any necessary edits during the advising meeting. Do not proceed any further with the online application until after you meet with an international student advisor.

### **After you apply:**

**Address changes:** If you move or change your address while your STEM OPT application is pending, you must [change your address information with USCIS](#). Mail from USCIS will not be forwarded to a new address, even if you have set up address forwarding with USPS, unless you also notify USCIS of your new address. Please also remember to update your SEVIS record within 10 days of an address change, either by emailing your new address to the CGE or making the update through your SEVP Portal account.

**Check your case status:** You can [check the status of your STEM OPT application through USCIS online](#). You can find your case number on your I-797 receipt (mailed to you after USCIS receives your application), or through electronic notification if you file Form G-1145 with your application.

**OPT Extension for timely filed STEM OPT Applications:** If your OPT EAD expires while your STEM OPT application is pending, your OPT work authorization will be automatically extended while the application is pending for up to 180 days, as long as you filed a complete STEM OPT application on time. Your I-797 receipt from USCIS along with your I-20 recommending you for the STEM OPT Extension is evidence of work authorization for individuals in this scenario. Source: 8 CFR 274a.12(b)(6)(iv).

### **Responsibilities after STEM OPT is approved:**

- **Work within the scope of employment authorized under STEM OPT:** You should only work in jobs related to your STEM major, for employers who are registered in E-Verify. Your work must be paid, at least 21 hours/week with each employer, and you must have an employer/employee relationship with the company or organization.

- **Update your SEVIS record with changes to employer or address** within 10 days (new employers must be added by a Kenyon DSO; all other changes can be added by a Kenyon DSO or reported through the SEVP Portal).
- **Keep your Form I-983 up-to-date with any changes.** Always retain a copy for yourself and your employer, and send a copy to Kenyon. If you start a new job after STEM OPT is approved, submit Form I-983 to Kenyon within 10 days of starting.
- **Form I-983 has two reflections on page 5.** The top reflection is due before the end of the first year of STEM OPT; the second is due before the end of the second year. Retain copies for yourself and your employer and send a copy to Kenyon.
- **6 month reporting:** Every 6 months, individuals on STEM OPT are required to confirm their address/employment information with their school. Changes to addresses/employment should be reported within 10 days, so generally at the 6-month reporting period, an email to the Kenyon CGE confirming your address/employment is the same is sufficient. If there have been changes, make sure you make those updates (including updating your Form I-983 if necessary). At the 12-month and 24-month check-in, you also need to submit the appropriate reflection on page 5 of Form I-983.
- **Unemployment allowance:** You can accrue up to 150 days of unemployment total over the course of your OPT and STEM OPT authorizations.

### **Tips for Completing Form I-983**

- ICE instructions for Form I-983 can be found [here](#). [Study in the States](#) also has information for students about completing this form.
- Some common areas we see mistakes on this form are:
  - Page 1, STEM OPT Requested Period: List the day after your OPT ends until two years later. For example, if your OPT ends on June 15, 2023, list your STEM Requested Period as 06/16/2023 – 06/15/2025.
  - Page 1, Qualifying Major and CIP code: List your STEM major as written on your I-20. This should include the 6-digit numerical code and the name of the major.
  - Page 2, Start Date of Employment: This should be the first day of your STEM OPT employment with the employer.
- Page 5, Evaluation on Student Progress: The top reflection is to be completed at the end of your first year of STEM OPT. The bottom reflection is due at the end of your second OPT year. When you finish the reflections at their respective due dates, please send a copy of the entire I-983 form to an international student advisor in the CGE.