

17-MONTH OPT EXTENSION GUIDELINES

What is OPT?

Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 29 months (12 months of “regular” OPT with a 17-month extension possible).

What is the 17-month OPT Extension?

Students who graduate with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) degree and whose employer is enrolled in E-Verify program may qualify for an additional 17 month OPT extension. The extension option is available only **ONE** time (use it wisely).

Who is eligible for the 17-month OPT extension?

F-1 students with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees in the following fields will be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension. All of the following criteria must be met in order to qualify for the 17-month extension:

- Student is already approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT
- Earned a degree in a field included on the US Government’s list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields
- Employed in a job directly related to field of study
- Working for an employer that is enrolled in the US Government’s E-Verify program

The STEM Designated Degree Program List is based on the “Classification of Instructional Programs” (CIP) developed by the U.S. Department of Education.

- Actuarial Science - CIP Code 52.1304
- Computer Science Applications - CIP Codes 11.xxxx (except Data Entry / Microcomputer Applications, which are CIP Codes 11.06xx)
- Engineering - CIP Codes 14.xxxx
- Engineering Technologies - CIP Codes 15.xxxx
- Biological and Biomedical Sciences - CIP Codes 26.xxxx
- Mathematics and Statistics - CIP Codes 27.xxxx
- Military Technologies - CIP Codes 29.xxxx
- Physical Sciences - CIP Codes 40.xxxx
- Science Technologies - CIP Codes 41.xxxx
- Medical Scientist (MS, PhD) CIP Code 51.1401

Note: All CIP codes ending in “xx99” are excluded (they are “catch-all” categories usually designated by “Other” in the CIP lists). DHS is accepting recommendations for additional degrees to be considered for inclusion on the list.

What is E-Verify?

E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly-hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information visit www.dhs.gov/e-verify

When to apply for the 17-month OPT extension?

Students must apply for the special 17-month OPT extension **prior** to the expiration of the first 12 months of “regular” OPT. The application must be **received** by USCIS **prior** to the expiration date of the first OPT in order to be properly (timely) filed.

Employment while OPT extension application is pending?

If the application for the 17-month OPT extension is successfully received prior to the expiration of the first OPT period, **students may continue employment** until the application is processed **or** until 180 days have passed, whichever is sooner.

Limitations on Unemployment:

Students approved for the 17-month OPT extension may not accrue more than 120 days of unemployment during the total 29-month period of OPT. Employment must be **paid** and must be related to the field of study in order to qualify. Self-employment and volunteer positions will not qualify as valid employment for OPT purposes during the special 17-month OPT extension.

Application Process for 17-month OPT Extension:

- a. Consult with the International Services Office
- b. Assemble the following documents and schedule an appointment with the International Services Office for processing. Your application packet will include the following:
 1. Completed **I-765 form** (blank form attached; may also be downloaded at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765.pdf>)
 - i. The answer to Section 16 on the I-765 is: **(c) (3) (C)**
 - ii. The answer for #17 under “Degree” should be the major description as it appears on line # 5 of your I-20.
 2. Photocopy of your **new I-20 endorsed for the 17-month OPT extension**. Sign the I-20 before you make the photocopy.
 1. Please obtain E-Verify information from your employer.
 2. Photocopy of the front and back of your **current Employment Authorization Document** (EAD card; also known as OPT card).
 3. Photocopy of your **FGCU diploma or official FGCU transcript showing the degree awarded**.
 4. Photocopy of the front and back of your **I-94 card**
 5. Photocopy of the passport page showing biographical data and expiration date

6. Two (2) full frontal/passport **photos** (see below for an example). Gently print your name and SEVIS number on the back of each photo.
 7. **\$340.00** check or money order made payable to: “**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**” (do not abbreviate).
- c. The International Services Office DSO will prepare a new I-20 for you.
 - d. International Services Office will send out your application packet to the USCIS
 - e. Within approximately two weeks of sending your application ISO will receive a Notice of Action. This is proof that you have an application pending with USCIS. The Notice of Action (I-797C form) will contain your Receipt Number (“SRC number”). You can use this number to check your case status online at www.uscis.gov (in the lower right corner).

Reporting requirements during the 17-month extension:

Students approved for the 17-month OPT extension have additional reporting requirements in order to maintain their status and work authorization.

- Report to International Services Office to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date.
- Students must report to the International Services Office within 10 days if there is any change of:
 - Legal name
 - Residential or mailing address
 - Employer name
 - Employer address, and/or
 - Loss of employment

Sources:

ICE Immigration Law Code on OPT: 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(A) (ii)

<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/opt.htm>

USCIS Announcement: 29 month OPT

http://www.nafsa.org/Document/ /opt_29_month_rule.pdf

NAFSA Regulatory Announcement on OPT Extension

http://www.nafsa.org/regulatory_information.sec/29_month_opt_rule_updates