

American University • Building a Global University • International Student and Scholar Services

F-1 students approved for standard, post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) who have earned a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) field that appears on the DHS STEM-Designated Degree Program List can apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for an extension of post-completion OPT.

ELIGIBILITY

- Must be currently on post-completion OPT and in valid F-1 status.
- Must have received a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree* in a STEM field that appears on the DHS STEM-Designated Degree Program List.
(<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf>).
- Must be employed by an E-Verify employer.
- The employer that signs the Form I-983 must be the same entity that provides the practical training experience. Your employer cannot be a staffing/temporary agency or consulting firm unless they will be the entity that provides your practical training experience.
- Must be a paid position for at least 20 hours per week.

**May apply based on a prior STEM degree received from a US institution at the bachelor's level or higher within the last 10 years*

APPLICATION PROCESS

Before emailing your application documents to ISSS, please discuss your eligibility and timeline for applying with an ISSS advisor.

STEP 1: Know when to apply

- USCIS must receive your STEM OPT extension application before the expiration of your current Post-completion OPT but no sooner than 90 days before that date.

STEP 2: Email ISSS at isssemployment@american.edu to discuss your eligibility and timeline for applying.

STEP 3: Email the required application materials to isssemployment@american.edu. Students must be physically in the U.S. to apply.

- Form I-983 Training Plan (<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf>)
 - Use the I-983 Guide to complete this form.
- Proof of STEM Degree (copy of diploma)
 - An official transcript is only required for the online filing.
- Current I-94 (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/>)
- Unexpired passport
- Previous EAD card(s), including current Post-completion OPT
- All previous CPT or OPT I-20s, from any institution you have attended

Once you provide these documents, ISSS will issue you a new I-20 with the STEM OPT recommendation within 3-5 business days. You will download this new I-20 and receive an online filing handout with tips on how to file to your official AU email address.



STEP 4: File your STEM OPT application packet with USCIS (<https://my.uscis.gov/>) including the following:

- 1 color passport photo taken within the last 30 days (new and not previously used). The online filing will require a clear scan of this photo.
- \$410 filing fee, payable at the time of filing.

Note: Your application must be received by USCIS before your current Post-completion OPT end date and within 60 days of the new STEM OPT I-20 issue date, whichever comes first. Otherwise, your application will be denied by USCIS!

STEM OPT Processing Time:

USCIS typically processes STEM OPT requests within 2-4 months of the date of receipt. Save your USCIS receipt notice with your case number to track the status of your application: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. You may contact the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283 or via their online “Emma” bot to inquire about the status of your pending STEM OPT application if 80 days has passed and you have not heard back from USCIS.

DURING STEM EXTENSION

- Students with a STEM OPT extension must validate their employment with ISSS every 6 months and submit the Evaluation of Student Program portion of the I-983 to ISSS at the end of each year of the extension.
- The SEVP Portal will send reminder emails to students 30 days before the 6-month validation report and annual evaluations are due. Reporting deadlines are available on the Profile page of the SEVP Portal.

Photo Composition Checklist

7 Steps for Successful Photos

- ✓ Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- ✓ Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1-3/8 inches (25 mm to 35 mm)
- ✓ Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below)
- ✓ Make sure eye height is between 1-1/8 inches to 1-3/8 inches (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
- ✓ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
- ✓ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- ✓ Encourage subject to have a natural expression

Photos must not have been taken more than 30 days prior to the submission of your application and not previously used!

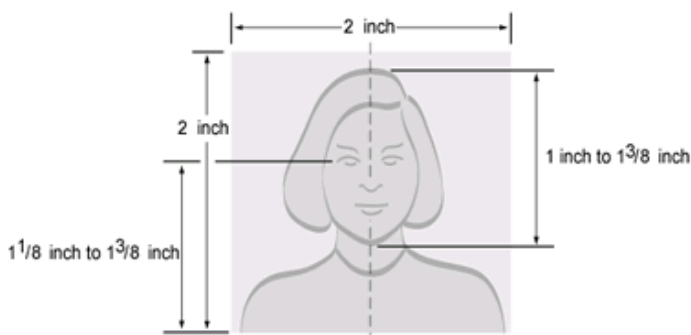


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-composed Photos



