

STEM OPT Employment Types

In order to qualify for [STEM OPT Extension](#), employment details for each job you plan to begin must be outlined on a Form I-983 Training Plan. Since the I-983 Training Plan requires a structured employment relationship, supervision, and evaluation, this means employment conditions allowed under STEM OPT are significantly less flexible than employment permitted under standard post-completion OPT. If working for more than one employer, each position requires a completed I-983 and must meet the criteria below. For more information on the process to change or add employers during STEM OPT, please see ISS CCA Portal [Reporting Requirements on STEM OPT](#).

Understanding US government rules and regulations to maintain legal F1 non-immigrant status while participating in OPT/STEM OPT is your responsibility.

General Comparison of Employment Permitted on Standard OPT and STEM OPT Extension:

Employment Permitted under 12 month standard Post-Completion OPT	Employment Permitted under 24 month STEM OPT Extension
Allows for unpaid and paid positions	Must be a paid position
All jobs combined must total 20 hours per week or more	Each position must be for 20 hours per week or more
Employer does not have to be registered with E-Verify	Each employer must be registered with E-Verify
Must be a position related to the major listed under “Program of Study” on the I-20.	Must be a position related to the STEM eligible degree program listed under “Program of Study” on the I-20. You are responsible for drawing a connection between your position and the skills or knowledge learned in your STEM degree. If you applied for STEM OPT based on a previously earned degree, the employment on STEM OPT must be related to that degree’s major field of study.
Allows for employment with a temp agency, contract employment, short-term employment, and gigging	You must be paid a salary, and be supervised, directly by your employer. You cannot be paid by a third party or staffing agency. For more information, please see “The Employer’s Training Obligation: Staffing and Temporary Agencies” on the USCIS Website .

You must report any employment changes through the SEVP Portal within 10 days of the change	A new Form I-983 Training Plan is required within 10 days of starting any new job. Submit through the ISS Portal .
Allows maximum of 90 days of unemployment over the 12 months of OPT	Allows a maximum of 150 days of unemployment over the COMBINED periods of OPT and STEM OPT
Allows for self-employment and/or freelance work	Does NOT allow for self-employment or freelance work
May volunteer or work in an unpaid position	Cannot volunteer or work in an unpaid position

ISS provides general guidance on your OPT/STEM OPT Extension application based on information obtained from reliable sources and years of experience working with F1 students. We do our best to provide the most up to date information available. However, Any advice from our office does not constitute legal advice.

The OPT/STEM OPT application is a personal application for which you are responsible; application preparation and USCIS case decision will vary depending on the facts present in your particular case. ISS does its best to provide the most current guidance, but please be aware USCIS may change its interpretation of these policies, procedures, regulations, and eligibility requirements at any time. ISS is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or for the results obtained from USCIS.