

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR 24-MONTH STEM EXTENSION OF OPT

NAME: _____ **UNC PID:** _____

F-1 students must follow several important procedures and federal regulations while applying for and participating in the 24-month STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) extension of Optional Practical Training (OPT). Compliance with these rules and procedures is necessary to maintain lawful F-1 immigration status. Please carefully review each item below and then sign this form to confirm that you understand and will abide by the rules and procedures set forth in this memorandum. A full description of eligibility for STEM OPT and the application process can be found on the [ISSS website](#).

1. Filing deadlines: I understand the following:

- My application for the 24-month STEM extension must be received at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) no later than the end date on my post-completion OPT EAD.
- I am allowed to submit my STEM OPT application up to 90 days prior to the end date on my post-completion OPT EAD.
- ISSS requires 2-3 weeks to review the request and process the Form I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension.
- My STEM OPT application must reach USCIS no later than 60 days after my Form I-20 recommending the STEM OPT extension has been issued.

2. Reporting requirements: I understand that in order to maintain my immigration status while on the STEM Extension, I must:

- Submit a copy of my STEM OPT EAD to the ISSS office once I receive it from USCIS.
- Submit a validation report to ISSS every 6 months from the beginning of the STEM OPT Period.
- Submit a new Form I-983 when there are substantive changes to the training plan, within 10 days of the change(s).
- Submit a new Form I-983 completed and signed by the new employer within 10 days of starting work with a new employer.
- Submit a completed/signed self-evaluation (located on the Form I-983) to ISSS at the 12- and 24- month mark of my STEM OPT period.
- Submit a completed/signed self-evaluation (located on the Form I-983) to ISSS within 10 days of ending employment with any STEM OPT employer.
- Update my address, phone #, and email in ConnectCarolina (<http://connectcarolina.unc.edu>) within 10 days of any change.

3. STEM majors: I understand that to be eligible for the 24-month STEM extension, the CIP code for my major/program of study must be on the STEM designated degree program list and my level of education must be listed as Bachelor's, Masters or Doctorate. I understand that any employment or activity in which I participate must be directly related to my major field of study and must be commensurate with my current level of education. If I am basing my STEM extension on a degree at another institution, I understand I will have to obtain proof of that degree in order for UNC-CH to recommend me for the extension. I will keep records verifying this information.

4. Periods of unemployment during the 24-month STEM extension: I understand I should not accrue an aggregate of more than 150 days of unemployment during my 12-month Post-Completion OPT and 24-month STEM extension periods combined. I will keep thorough and accurate records of my employment or other OPT activities in order to verify compliance with immigration regulations. I also understand that *if I accrue more than 150 days of unemployment (for the entire 36 month period) **OR** if I fail to properly report my employment to ISSS, I will immediately fall out of status and this will invalidate my employment authorization. I understand that in order to continue to maintain F-1 status, before accruing 150 days of unemployment I must either depart the U.S., begin a new program at UNC, or transfer to another program/school.*

5. Limits on STEM OPT periods: I understand that I am only allowed 2 STEM OPT extensions. I can only receive a second STEM OPT extension based on a higher degree level than the previous extension.

6. Traveling outside the U.S.: I understand that if I travel outside of the U.S. during the STEM OPT period, I should review the travel information on the [ISSS website](#) and bring all required documents with me. I understand that it is not recommended for me to travel after my post-completion OPT end date, while my STEM extension application is pending with USCIS and prior to receiving my STEM OPT EAD.

7. Employer registration in E-Verify: I understand that my employer or employers must be registered participants in good standing in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) E-Verify program.

8. **Form I-983:** I understand that I must complete the Form I-983 with my employer and submit this to ISSS to receive the new Form I-20 recommending the STEM Extension of OPT. If there are any material changes to the information that has been provided on the Form I-983 or if I begin employment at a new employer, I must submit an updated/new Form I-983 to ISSS.
9. **Invalidating OPT:** I understand that if I commence a new program of study and/or transfer my SEVIS record to a new school, any remaining time in my OPT period will be cancelled. I understand that if I engage in unauthorized employment or otherwise violate my F-1 immigration status, my OPT will be invalidated.
10. **Sixty-day “grace” period after OPT:** I understand that I am permitted a period of 60 days to remain in the U.S. following the end of my STEM OPT. I may **NOT** work during this period unless my immigration status is changed to one that permits employment. I understand that by the end of the 60-day grace period I must do one of the following: transfer my F-1 status to another school and/or process a change of education level to begin a new program of study, depart the U.S., or change my immigration status.
11. **Withdrawing my application:** I understand that I can attempt to withdraw my STEM OPT application, only if the application has not yet been adjudicated by the USCIS Service Center. I will notify ISSS immediately if withdrawal becomes necessary.
12. **OPT extension start and end dates:** I understand that the 24-month extension of OPT will begin the day after my current post-completion EAD card expires and will be valid for exactly 24 months from that date.
13. **Employment before receipt of extended EAD:** I understand that I may continue working for up to 180 days with an expired post-completion EAD while the timely filed STEM extension application is pending. If the STEM extension is denied by USCIS, employment must immediately end.

OPT RECOMMENDATION REQUEST AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

In order to apply for the OPT STEM Extension, I am attaching the following forms to this request:

- Form I-983
- OPT Employment Reporting Form
- STEM OPT Prior Degree Verification Form and final transcript from my previous institution (if you are basing your extension on a previous degree from another institution)

Acknowledgement: *I have read and understand the rules and procedures outlined above and those in the OPT section of the ISSS website and I will abide by them. I verify I have not used any period of STEM OPT at my current educational level or a higher educational level that would disqualify me from the STEM OPT authorization I now seek.*

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: _____ **DATE:** _____

****Students should keep a copy of this signed memorandum for their own records. A copy will also be kept on file at ISSS.****