

## **F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Extension for STEM Degree Holders: Information & Request**

NOTE: This information is for certain science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree holders who are about to finish their regular 12 months of OPT and wish to request additional 17 months of OPT.

### General Information

On April 8, 2008, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published the interim final rule that changes several key aspects of F-1 optional practical training. One of the key changes impacts **certain** STEM degree holders. Effective April 8, 2008, the 12-month limit on F-1 OPT may be extended by 17 months, for a total of 29 months, for certain STEM degree holders.

### Eligibility Requirements

- The student must have successfully completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a field on the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.
- The F-1 student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a US employer in a job directly related to the student's STEM major area of study.
- The student must have a job offer from an employer registered with the E-Verify employment verification system at the time of application for the 17-month OPT extension. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her employer is registered with E-Verify.
- The student has not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
- The Designated School Official (DSO) at IPS must recommend the 17-month OPT extension in SEVIS, after verifying the student's eligibility, certifying that the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program List, and ensuring that the student is aware of his or her responsibilities for maintaining status while on OPT.
- The student who timely files a non-frivolous application for the 17-month OPT extension will be able to continue employment while the extension application is pending, until a final decision on the I-765 or for 180 days, whichever comes first.

### Employer's Responsibility

The employer must agree to report the termination or departure of an STEM OPT employee to the Indiana State University Office of International Programs and Services (IPS) via email ([maria.chagra@indstate.edu](mailto:maria.chagra@indstate.edu) with the subject line, "STEM OPT Employer Update") or through any other means or process identified by DHS if the termination or departure is prior to the end of the authorized period of OPT. Such reporting must be made within 48 hours of the event. An employer shall consider a worker to have departed when the employer knows the student has left the employment, or if the student has not reported for work for a period of 5 consecutive business days without the consent of the employer, whichever occurs earlier.

### Qualifying STEM Fields

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

A full list of CIP Codes is available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/browse.aspx?y=55> DHS will announce any future changes to the list at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis>.

### Reporting Requirements While on OPT

STEM degree holders on the 17-month OPT extension are required to report to the IPS within 10 days of any change of:

- legal name
- residential or mailing address
- employer name
- employer address
- change or loss of employment

Students are also required to make a validation report to IPS **every six months** starting from the date the extension begins and ending when the student's F-1 status ends, the student changes educational levels at the same school, the student transfers to another school, or the 17-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. The validation is a confirmation that the student's name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment are current and accurate. This six-month validation report is due to the IPS within 10 business days of each reporting date. Changes and validation reports should be made via email to [maria.chaqra@indstate.edu](mailto:maria.chaqra@indstate.edu)

### Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status

During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. STEM degree holders granted a 17-month OPT extension may not accrue an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total of 29-month OPT period.

### OPT Filing Window

A qualifying STEM degree holder will be able to file the OPT application up to 90 days before the current OPT end date. However, the OPT application must be submitted to the USCIS within 30 days of the date on which IPS issues an OPT I-20. In general, expect that the OPT application will take three months to be approved.

### Duration of OPT Employment Authorization

The employment authorization period for the 17-month OPT extension begins on the day after the expiration of the initial post-completion OPT employment authorization, and ends 17 months later, regardless of the date the actual extension is approved. For the 17-month STEM extension, employment must be traditional paid employment.

### Application Process

#### Step One

**Request an I-20 recommending OPT from the IPS.** You may request an OPT I-20 by seeing an IPS advisor with the following items, or by dropping off the following at the IPS reception desk:

- OPT Extension Request for STEM Degree Holders
- Copies of current and previous I-20(s)
- Copies of passport pages (biographic data, photo, and expiration date)
- Copy of current I-94 card (front and back)
- Copy of current OPT/EAD card if you have not already provided it to IPS
- Copy of your diploma or transcripts showing degree awarded

If you are no longer in Terre Haute, you may scan and email ([mchaqra@indstate.edu](mailto:mchaqra@indstate.edu)), or fax (812-237-3602) your STEM OPT Extension Request to the IPS. Please put "ATTN: STEM OPT Extension" on the subject line of your email or on the fax cover sheet.

Upon verifying the student's eligibility and determining whether the student's degree is on the STEM Designated Degree Program list, a DSO will prepare an I-20 recommending OPT on the employment page.

#### Step Two

We will contact you to pick up the OPT I-20 at the IPS reception desk.

#### Step Three

Mail the following OPT application to USCIS which has jurisdiction over the address listed on Form I-765:

- Completed Form I-765 including your employer's E-Verify information
  - For extension of OPT, enter "c 3 C" under Item 16.
  - Type or print legibly.
- I-765 Application Fee, payable to the US Department of Homeland Security (\$340)
  - Photocopy of the qualifying STEM degree transcripts showing degree awarded or diploma (if it states the major)
  - Photocopy of all previous and current I-20s, including a copy of the new OPT I-20
  - Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back)
  - Photocopy of passport (biographical data, photo, and expiration date)
  - Two US passport-style photos (*lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil*)

Check all documents for completeness and accuracy. Be sure sign Forms I-20 and I-765. Make a complete copy of your application for your records. The Nebraska Service Center has jurisdiction over the following states: *Alaska, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, Wisconsin*. **If the state you put on form I-765 in item 3 is not in this list, refer to the I-765 Instructions on pages 10 and 11.**

US Postal Service deliveries: Nebraska Service Center, P.O. Box 87765, Lincoln, NE 68501-7765

For courier/express deliveries: USCIS Nebraska Service Center, 850 S. Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-1225

We recommend that you mail your application by Federal Express Mail or by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, so you will have a record of its delivery

### Travel Information

It is prudent to consult an IPS advisor prior to leaving the US as immigration regulations can change at any time. Currently the following are required to return to the US:

- A valid passport
- A valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except Canadian and Bermudian citizens)
- Your OPT I-20 endorsed for reentry by an IPS advisor within the last six months
- Your valid EAD for OPT
- Evidence of employment such as a job offer or employment verification letter

If you do **not** have all of these documents listed above or plan to leave the US while your OPT application is pending with USCIS, you should consult an IPS advisor before traveling abroad.

Please note: Your EAD will have a notation "not valid for reentry to US." This is printed on all EAD cards issued for OPT and simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for reentry to the US.

### H-1B Cap-Gap Extension

Duration of F-1 status and work authorization will be extended for a student on OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed, non-frivolous H-1B petition requesting an employment start date of October 1 of the following federal fiscal year (October thru September). The extension of duration of status and work authorization would automatically terminate upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-1B petition filed on the student's behalf. To request an updated I-20 for cap-gap extension, please provide the following evidence to the IPS via fax at 812-237-3602 along with a cover sheet stating, "**Cap-Gap Extension I-20 Request:**"

- For a properly filed H-1B petition: A statement from the employer that the student is the beneficiary listed on a properly filed H-1B petition and proof of delivery to a USCIS Service Center showing the date of receipt
- For a wait-listed H-1B petition: A copy of the wait list letter from USCIS to the employer
- For a receipted or approved H-1B petition: A copy of the Form I-797 and/or the I-797 receipt number

Students on cap-gap extensions must continue to report all changes of name and address, and interruptions of employment, just like other students on OPT. **Students will not automatically receive notification when they have a cap gap extension. Students must request an I-20 from their DSO showing the period of the extension.**

### Special Notes

If you later decide **not** to mail your OPT application (Form I-765 plus supporting documentation) to USCIS for any reason, you must notify the IPS immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS as well. Failure to inform that you are not applying for OPT can cause problems in the future.

Please email (maria.chaqra@indstate.edu) or fax (812-237-3602) a copy of your OPT card to the IPS immediately upon receipt.

- While OPT is pending, we strongly advise you against changing the address listed on Form I-765 as USCIS has not been able to process change of address notifications properly. Changing your address while OPT is still pending may result in filing a new OPT application with a new fee. We suggest to use the address of someone who can receive mail on your behalf – remember to put "c/o", followed by the person's name and address, on Line 3 of Form I-765. The US Postal Service will not forward USCIS mail.
- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please inform the IPS immediately.
- Your OPT will be automatically terminated when you begin study at another educational level or transfer to another school.
- If you find any errors by USCIS on your OPT/EAD card, please inform IPS immediately.

**F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)  
Extension Request for STEM Degree Holders**

**Send needed documentation to International Programs and Services:**

- Copy of Current EAD card
- Copy of completed I-765 form
- OPT Extension application (this form)
- Copy of diploma or transcripts showing degree awarded
- Copies of ALL I-20 forms, pages 1 & 3
- Copy of passport ID page and any extensions
- Copy of your F-1 visa
- Copy of I-94 card (front and back)

**Send application materials to USCIS:**

- Completed I-765
- Copy of current EAD card
- Copy of diploma or transcripts showing degree awarded
- Copy of passport ID page and any extensions
- Copy of I-94 card (front and back)
- Newly issued I-20 for Extension of OPT
- Copy of your F-1 visa
- Copies of ALL I-20 forms, pages 1 & 3
- Two US passport-style photos
- \$340 (check payable to U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security)

A new I-20 for OPT extension will be issued after above documents are submitted to the Office of International Programs and Services.

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ SEVIS #: N \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address in U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's name and contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Current Employer (name and address) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Location Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer E-Verify Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give the following information about your dependents. Attach additional page if necessary.

Name (SURNAME, Given name)	Date of Birth	Country of Birth	Gender (M/F)	Relationship

I understand that my degree must be in an approved STEM field; my employer must be registered in E-VERIFY; and I must report information to the DSO every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when the F-1 status ends. The reporting requirement is to verify that my name and address, employer name and address, and/or loss of employment are current and accurate. The report is due to the DSO within 10 business days of each change of information. I understand that, if I am unemployed for 120 days during the OPT extension period, my eligibility for OPT terminates.

**I have read all the information regarding the extension of Optional Practical Training and reporting requirements.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this form:** Indiana State University  
Office of International Programs and Services  
Erickson Hall Room 611  
Terre Haute, IN 47809



## U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

# USCIS Is Making Photos Simpler



**Old Three-Quarter  
Style Photo**



**New Passport  
Style Photo**

**Photos Must Be in Color**

Washington, DC — In accordance with language specified in the Border Security Act of 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced a change in the photo requirements for all applicants from a three-quarter face position to a standard, full-frontal face position to take effect August 2, 2004.

USCIS will accept both three-quarter and full-frontal color photographs until September 1, 2004, after which only full-frontal color will be accepted.

The application process of customers who have already submitted materials that include color photos with the three-quarter standard **will not** be affected by this change.

All photos must be of just the person. Where more than one photo is required, all photos of the person must be identical. All photos must meet the specifications for full-frontal/passport photos.

For more information on photo standards, visit the Department of State website at <http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html>, or contact the USCIS National Customer Service Center at 1 800 375 5283.

List of forms that require photos is on the back

Tuesday May 30, 2006

## Composition Checklist

### 7 Steps to 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

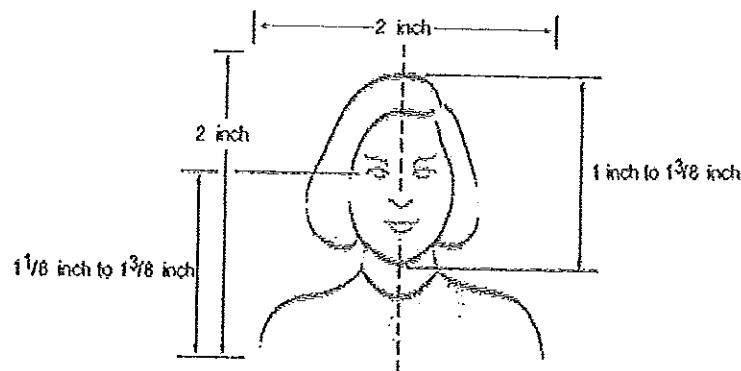


Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

### Well-Composed Photos



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Signature

Place  
Print  
Here

Form I-765 CARD (1-23-01)

*F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)  
Application Checklist*

- Copies of all I-20s issued to the student (return originals to student)
- Copy of F-1 visa
- Valid Passport: photocopy of photo page, renewal page if original has expired, and pages showing amendments such as name changes, corrections, etc.
- I-94
- Advisor's Recommendation Form
- Any previous EAD cards
- Form I-765 completed and signed
- Form I-538 with top completed
- Valid Proof of Medical Insurance (if available)