

FAQ's about the 17-month OPT STEM extension

Who is eligible for the 17-month extension?

An F-1 student who has completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in a STEM CIP that is approved by DHS for the 17-month extension and is currently engaged in post-completion OPT may apply for the 17-month extension if he or she has a job or job offer from an [E-Verify employer](#).

How does a student or DSO know which CIPS are designated as STEM CIPs approved by DHS for the 17-month extension?

The list of [STEM CIPS](#) accepted for the 17-month extension by DHS was in the preamble to the IFR (see 73 CFR 18948). Updates to the list have been posted on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Web site at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/>.

When does the student need to file for the extension?

The student must ensure that the Form I-765, supporting evidence and fee payment reach the proper USCIS Service Center before his or her current OPT expires. USCIS recommends that students file within 90 and 120 days of the expiration date of the current OPT.

How many hours does a student need to work per week during post-completion OPT (including the 17-month extension) to be considered employed?

A student must work at least 20 hours per week in a qualifying position to be considered employed. If a student has a variable schedule, within a month, it should average out to at least 20 hours per week.

What counts as time unemployed?

Each day (including weekends) during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment. OPT authorization begins on the employment start date shown on the student's EAD.

How does travel outside the United States impact the period of unemployment?

Time spent outside the United States during an approved period of post-completion OPT counts as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits, unless the student is either:

- Employed during a period of leave authorized by an employer; or
- Traveling as part of his or her employment.

What types of employment are allowed for students during a 17-month extension of OPT?

A student authorized for a 17-month extension must work at least 20 hours per week for an E-Verify employer in a position directly related to his or her DHS-approved STEM CIP. For a student who is on a 17-month extension, this employment may include

- Multiple employers. A student may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to his or her degree program and all employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.
- Work for hire. This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment, where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. The company for whom the student is providing services must be registered with E-Verify. If requested by DHS, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name and address of the contracting company.
- Self-employed business owner. A student on a 17-month extension can start a business and be self-employed. In this situation, the student must register his or her business with E-Verify and work full time. The student must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm. A student on a 17-month extension may be employed by an employment agency or consulting firm. The employment agency or consulting firm must be registered with E-Verify, but the third parties contracting with the agency or firm (for which the student is providing services) need not be.

Can a student work multiple jobs during a 17-month extension of OPT?

Yes, but all the employers must be enrolled in E-Verify.

How does a student show that employment is directly related to his or her degree program?

SEVP recommends that the student maintain evidence for each job documenting the position held, proof of the duration of that position, the job title, contact information for the student's supervisor or manager, and a description of the work.

If it is not clear from the job description that the work is related to the student's degree, SEVP recommends that the student obtain a signed letter from his or her hiring official, supervisor, or manager stating how the student's degree is related to the work performed.

What should a student report to ensure that his or her status does not expire due to excessive unemployment time?

The student should report changes in employment to his or her DSO as soon as possible. SEVP recommends that the student report any change within 10 business days of the change to avoid situations where a DHS official may determine the student is out of status.

Can a student with a dual major qualify for the 17-month extension based on one of the degree programs?

Yes, if the student's course of study is listed as one of the approved CIP codes on the [STEM Designated CIP List](#) approved by DHS for the 17-month extension and any job worked while on the 17-month extension is related to the student's STEM CIP. However, the CIP Code for the student's secondary major will not print on the Form I-20 recommending the 17-month extension. The DSO must annotate the Form I-20 with the proper [CIP Code](#) of the secondary major. The post-completion OPT that the student seeks to extend must be based on a bachelor's, master's or doctorate degree that is on the STEM CIP List approved by DHS for the 17-month extension and which is documented on the student's current Form I-20 with an appropriate CIP code. If a student has a double major and obtained regular post-completion OPT on the non-STEM CIP or a STEM CIP that is not approved by DHS, the student is ineligible for the 17-month extension.

Can a student qualify for the 17-month extension based on the student's minor?

No.

Can a student who has previously earned a degree in a STEM CIP approved by DHS for the 17-month extension and has now earned a non-STEM CIP or a STEM CIP not approved by DHS for the 17-month extension apply for the extension?

No, the 17-month extension must be based on the same degree as the post-completion OPT.

How can someone suggest a change to the STEM CIPS approved by DHS for the 17-month extension?

To suggest a change to the list of STEM CIPS approved by DHS for 17-month extension, write to sevis.source@dhs.gov, with STEM Code Change Request in the subject line. Please include your name, phone number, organizational affiliation, the code(s) you would like to see added and the rationale for the addition. Change requests will be reviewed by DHS in conjunction with the Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and other interested government agencies.

Can a student apply for the 17-month extension when he or she is within a period of cap gap extension?

Yes, a student can apply for the 17-month extension during the cap gap extension of OPT. The student will need to have his or her employer request the withdrawal of the approved or pending H-1B petition in time for USCIS to effectively accept the withdrawal prior to the October 1 start date in order to avoid changing status to H-1B on that date.

To avoid a denial based on the scheduled expiration of post-completion OPT, the student should include mention (and supporting evidence) of his or her cap gap 17-month extension when filing during the cap gap period.

How and where does the student for file the extension?

The student should follow the directions published on the USCIS Web site for [filing a Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#). The student should file with the USCIS Service Center serving the area of the student's current residence.

What is the fee for the application for the 17-month extension?

The fee is the current amount for [filing a Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization](#), as listed on the USCIS Web site. At the time this guidance was published, the fee was \$380.

What documents will meet the USCIS requirements on the Form I-765 for a copy of the student's degree?

The student may provide one of the following documents in order to meet these requirements:

- Official transcripts
- Unofficial transcripts
- Copy of the diploma showing the education level and course of study

In Item 17 of the Form I-765, what should the student list as the degree?

The student should list degree type as it is shown on his or her Form I-20. In addition, the [CIP Code](#) for the student's course of study will be printed on page 3 of the Form I-20. The USCIS adjudicator will verify that the student's course of study is on the STEM CIP List approved by DHS for the 17-month extension.

If a student with a dual major has the DHS-approved STEM CIP listed as the secondary major in SEVIS, the DSO must annotate this on the Form I-20 that the student will submit to USCIS. The student should provide the CIP Code for the secondary major on the Form I-765.

Is there a resource list of employers who are enrolled in the E-Verify program?

No, there is no public list of employers enrolled in E-Verify.

How do employers enroll in E-Verify?

The USCIS Web site has information on E-Verify and the enrollment procedures at www.uscis.gov/everify.

What does the student need to know about the employer in order to complete the Form I-765 when applying for the 17-month extension?

The student must have the employer's name as listed in E-Verify and the employer's E-Verify company identification number or a valid E-Verify client company identification number. This information must be listed in item 17 of the Form I-765.

When does the student's period of 17-month extension start?

If the student has properly filed, the student's period of 17-month extension starts the day after the expiration of the student's original period of OPT.

Can the student work with an expired employment authorization document while a 17-month extension of OPT is pending?

Yes. 8 CFR 214.2(f)(11)(i)(C) and 8 CFR 247a.12(c)(6)(iv) automatically extend the student's work authorization for up to 180 days while the student's 17-month extension application is pending.

Can the student change employers while the 17-month extension application is pending?

Yes. However, if the 17-month extension period has started, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must [report the change in employment](#) to his or her DSO. The DSO must update the student's employer information in SEVIS and the student should submit an amended Form I-765 to the appropriate USCIS Service Center, providing the new employer's E-Verify number and a copy of the USCIS receipt notice for the first Form I-765. A brief letter explaining the submission should also be included. There is no fee associated with submitting the amended Form I-765.

Can the student travel outside of the United States if his or her employment authorization document expires and the 17-month extension request is pending?

No, the student must wait to receive the new employment authorization document.

Can a student change employers during the 17-month extension?

Yes, however, the employer must also be an E-Verify employer. The student must [report the change in employment](#) to his or her DSO.

Student responsibilities while on 17-month extension

A student pursuing a period of 17-month extension must:

- Work in a paid position for an E-Verify employer at least 20 hours per week
- Work in a position related to the STEM CIP approved by DHS for the 17-month extension
- Report to his or her DSO within 10 days of:
 - legal name changes
 - change in residential or mailing address
 - changes in employer, (giving the employer name and employer address)
 - loss of employment
- Send the DSO a validation report every six months, starting from the date the 17-month extension starts and ending when the student's F-1 status ends or the 17-month extension ends, whichever is first. The validation report must include the student's
- Full legal name
- SEVIS identification number (if requested by the school)
- Current mailing and residential address
- Name and address of the current employer
- Date the student began working for the current employer

A student pursuing a period of 17-month extension must not:

- Work in a paid position for any employer that is not an E-Verify employer
- Have more than 120 days of unemployment time during the entire period of post-completion OPT (regular post-completion OPT and 17-month extension).