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 U.S. 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 F-1 student must be currently participating in a 12-month period of OPT, working for a U.S. employer in a job directly related to the student’s major area of study.
• 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 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 ISSS 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 Florida Institute of Technology International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) via e-mail (isss@fit.edu) 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 five 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 (M.S., Ph.D.). CIP Code 51.1401

A full list of CIP Codes is available online at Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP 2000). 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 ISSS within 10 days of any change of:

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

Students are also required to make a validation report to the ISSS 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 ISSS within 10 business days of each reporting date. Changes and validation reports should be made via e-mail to isss@fit.edu.

Limited Periods of Unemployment to Maintain Status
During post-completion OPT, F-1 status is dependent upon employment. STEM degree holder 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 holders 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 ISSS issues an OPT I-20.

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.

Application Process

Step One: Request an I-20 recommending OPT from ISSS. You may request an OPT I-20 by seeing an ISSS adviser with the following items:

- OPT Extension Request for STEM Degree Holders
- Copy of current OPT/EAD card if you have not already provided to ISSS

If you are no longer in the Melbourne area, you may scan and e-mail (isss@fit.edu), or fax (321) 728-4570 your STEM OPT Extension Request to ISSS. Please put “ATTN: STEM OPT Extension” on the subject line of your e-mail 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, an ISSS adviser will prepare an I-20 recommending OPT on the employment page.

Step Two: Pick up the OPT I-20 at the ISSS office after three business days or request it be sent via mail.

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

  - For post-completion OPT, enter “c 3 C” under Item 16.
  - Type or print legibly.
- Photocopy of the qualifying STEM degree
- Photocopy of all previous and current I-20s, including the original new OPT I-20
- Photocopy of Form I-94 (front and back)
- Photocopy of passport (biographical data, photo and expiration date)
- Two U.S. passport-style photos (lightly print your name on the back of each photo with a pencil)
- Copy of previously issued EAD(s)
- F1 Student Visa
Check all documents for completeness and accuracy. Be sure to sign Forms I-20 and I-765. Make a complete copy of your application for your records. ISSS does not maintain copies of OPT applications.

Your OPT application and all required documentation must be sent to the USCIS Service Center Lockbox Facility. Those with addresses in AL, AR, CT, DE, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MS, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, PA, PR, RI, SC, OK, TN, TX, VT, VA, VI, and WV will send their applications to:

USCIS
PO Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

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.

For Express mail and courier service deliveries:

USCIS
Attention: AOS 2501
S. State Hwy. 121
Business Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Those with addresses in other states can read the I-765 instructions (http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-765_instructions.pdf) on where to mail their applications.

Travel Information

It is prudent to consult an ISSS adviser prior to leaving the U.S. as immigration regulations can change at any time. Currently the following are required to return to the U.S.:

- 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 ISSS adviser 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 U.S. while your OPT application is pending with USCIS, you should consult an ISSS adviser before traveling abroad. For more information, see: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm.

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

H-1B Cap-Gap Extension of Duration of Status (D/S) and OPT Work Authorization until October 1

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 through 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.

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 an ISSS adviser immediately so that we may timely cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS as well. Failure to inform an ISSS adviser that you are not applying for OPT can cause problems in the future.
- Please e-mail (isss@fit.edu) or fax (321) 728-4570 a copy of your OPT card to ISSS 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 U.S. Postal Service will not forward USCIS mail.
- If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE), please inform ISSS 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 ISSS immediately.
- Immediately inform ISSS of any immigration status change.

Revised April 8, 2008
TO BE COMPLETED BY STEM DEGREE HOLDER WHO IS CURRENTLY ON A 12-MONTH PERIOD OF OPT

Student’s Name ____________________________________________________________ Student ID# _________________________________

Major __________________________________________ Degree ______________________________________________________

Date of STEM Degree Completion ______________________________

Current OPT End Date ________________________________  (recommendation will be for 17 months from this date)

E-mail __________________________________________ Phone ______________________________________________________

Residential Address ______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Mailing Address if different ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Statement of Understanding:

• I have thoroughly read and understood the 17-month OPT Extension for STEM degree holders information provided.
• I have not previously received a 17-month OPT extension after earning a STEM degree.
• I have maintained valid F-1 status since I began my study at Florida Institute of Technology.
• I understand that I must report to ISSS (using the OPT Reporting Form) any change to the following within 10 days:
  o legal name
  o residential or mailing address
  o employer name
  o employer address
  o loss of employment
• I understand that I am required to make a validation report to the ISSS every six months starting from the date the extension begins and ending when my F-1 status ends; I change educational levels within Florida Tech; I wish to transfer to another school; or the 17-month OPT extension ends, whichever is first. I understand that the validation is a confirmation that my 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 ISSS within 10 business days of each reporting date. Such validation reporting should be made using the OPT Reporting Form.
• I understand that accruing an aggregate of more than 120 days of unemployment during the total of 29-month OPT period will result in a violation of the requirements for remaining in valid F-1 status.

Signature of Student ______________________________________________________________________  Date ________________________