

# 17-Month OPT STEM Extension Packet

## What is the 17 month OPT Extension?

Effective April 8, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security published an interim final rule in the Federal Register/Vol. 73, No. 68 that allows F-1 students with a Bachelor's, Master's or Ph.D. in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) majors to apply for a 17 month extension of OPT, for a total of 29 months.

## Who is Eligible? F-1 Students:

- who have already been approved for 12 months of post-completion OPT based upon a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree; **and**
- who have earned a degree in a field included on the US Government's list of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (**STEM**) fields; **and**
- who are employed in a job directly related to his/her field of study; **and**
- who are working for or have a job offer from, an employer that is enrolled in the US Government's **E-Verify** program; **and**
- employer agrees to **report the termination or departure** of the student to OIS within 48 hours; **and**
- who submit their **validation reports**, using the IR-17 reporting form, as required (see additional requirements below)

***Please Note: All of the above criteria must be met in order for a student to be eligible for the 17-month OPT extension.***

**When should students apply for the 17 month extension?** *We recommend 90 – 120 days before the end of your current, 12-month OPT.* Students must apply for the 17-month OPT extension prior to the expiration date of the first OPT period. The application must be received by the US government on, or before the initial OPT end date. The start date will automatically be the day after the end date of the initial 12 month OPT authorization. **Apply early** so you receive the new EAD card before the end of the initial 12-month OPT period. The current processing time is approximately 3 - 4 months.

## What happens if there are *Periods of Unemployment*

Post completion OPT is dependent upon employment. Students may not accrue a total of more than **120 days** of unemployment during the initial 12-month OPT period and the 17-month extension combined. ***Beware - If you have had more than 90 days of unemployment during your initial OPT period, that may be used as cause to deny approval of the 17-month extension!!!***

## What happens while the application is pending?

If the application for the 17-month OPT extension is successfully received by the US government **prior to the expiration of the first OPT period**, students may continue employment until the application is processed or until 180 days have passed, whichever is sooner.

## Is my degree in a STEM field?

The 17-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) extension may be approved for students who have earned bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees in a **STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) field that is on the [DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List](#). That list consists of select STEM fields identified by CIP Code (Classification of Instructional Programs). *You can locate the CIP code of your program on page 3 of your I-20.*

### What is E-Verify?

E-Verify is a database system operated by the Department of Homeland Security in partnership with the Social Security Administration. It allows participating employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility of newly-hired employees. E-Verify is currently voluntary in most states. For more information see [www.dhs.gov/e-verify](http://www.dhs.gov/e-verify). **Please make sure you confirm that your employer participates in E-verify before filing your application.** Usually the Human Resources department of the company can give you this information.

### Additional Requirements & Limitations

*We have developed the **IR-17 Information Reporting Form** (on the OIS website) to be used for all reporting purposes.*

### \*\* 6 month Reporting Mandatory!!!!

*Students must submit a **validation report (IR-17)** to the EMU OIS **every six months**, confirming their name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due **within 10 days of the six-month reporting date.***

As usual, **Students** approved for the 17-month OPT extension have the standard reporting requirement to report to EMU OIS **within 10 days** if there is any change of:

- Legal name
- Residential or mailing address
- Employer name
- Employer address, and/or
- Loss of employment

### \*\* Employer Reporting Obligation

**Employers** must agree to **report within 48 hours** the **termination or departure** of the student from their employment. This agreement must be specified in the Employer Job Offer Letter as outlined in the requirements specified later in this packet.

### \*\*17-Month Extension Available Once

The special 17-month extension of OPT is only available to each student one time. A student who is approved for a 17-month OPT extension can never apply for it again. Please note that this rule is different from the application rules for the "initial" 12-month OPT, under which students could be approved for multiple OPT periods for each higher degree earned in the US (i.e. bachelor's, then master's, then doctoral).

## Things to Remember:

- Once your application for OPT has been approved, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be mailed to the address you put on the I-765 form. The post office **WILL NOT FORWARD** mail from USCIS if you change your address after you apply. USCIS will also not deliver your EAD to a PO Box.
- You **MUST** submit a **photocopy** of your EAD to OIS upon receipt.
- You **MUST** report **all changes of name, address, or employer** to OIS within 10 days. **ALL employers must participate in the E-verify program.**
- You **MUST** report all periods of **unemployment** to OIS within 10 days.
- You **MUST** submit a **validation report** to the EMU OIS **every six months** to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date.
- All Employers MUST** agree to **report** within 48 hours the termination or departure of the student from their employment.
- Remember, while on OPT **you are still an EMU F1 student**. Please review the attached handout "While you are on OPT" to learn about your responsibilities during this practical training period.
- While on OPT you may be exempt from Social Security & Medicare Tax (FICA)

## 17-month OPT Extension Application Procedure

- Step 1. Obtain & read the 17-month OPT Extension Packet**  
a. Available on the OIS website or in the OIS office
- Step 2. Gather & fill the documents** required for the application  
a. See *OPT 17 month STEM Extension – Application Instructions* for complete list
- Step 3.** Put your documents in the **specified order** found in the Application Instructions
- Step 4.** Make an **appointment** with Sue, if you live near or will be visiting Ypsilanti  
**OR**  
Scan all documents into **1 pdf file (please, no more than 2 pdf files!!!)** & Email to Sue (ssohn2@emich.edu)  
1. Do **NOT** scan each page separately

### OIS (Sue☺) will:

- Review your application materials
- Provide you with written **comments and corrections** for your application
  - **Processing** may take **5 – 7 business days**, depending upon the time of year and OIS workload. **Please apply early!**
- Upon receipt of **corrected documents**, OIS will issue your **OPT I-20**
  - **Processing** may take **3 – 5 business days**, depending upon the time of year and OIS workload.
- Provide **mailing instructions** for your application

- Step 5. Mail Application to USCIS – Get Receipt Notice – Track Status**
- a. USCIS **MUST** receive the OPT application **prior** to the expiration of the initial 12-month OPT
  - b. USCIS **MUST** receive the OPT application within 30 days of the new OPT I-20 issuance
  - c. You should receive a **text/email** from USCIS within 1 week of submitting your application
  - d. The text/email will include the **receipt number** you can use for tracking purposes
- Step 6. EAD – Submit Photocopy to OIS (fax, mail, scan, or deliver)**
- a. **Report** any **change** in name, address, or employer and Periods of Unemployment to OIS
  - b. **Mandatory** - Send periodic **reports** to OIS **every six months**
  - c. **IR17** Information Reporting Form found on the OIS website

## While you are on the 17-month OPT Extension ... ... you are still considered an EMU F1 student!!!

- You must submit a **copy of your new EAD** card to OIS upon its receipt
- **Name, Address, or Employer Changes** - You must **report all name, US address, and employer name/address changes** to OIS within 10 days. Your address must describe where you live; it cannot be a PO Box or an office address. You are also required to advise OIS of this information **every 6 months** (see below). Failure to keep this information current can jeopardize your immigration status!
- **Periods of Unemployment** – You must **report to OIS** all periods of unemployment. Failure to report can jeopardize your immigration status. You **cannot** have more than a **total of 120 days of unemployment**, including those while on your initial OPT period. During your **job search** you need to keep an accurate record of your efforts to find employment (company contacted, date, phone number, name of contact person etc.)
- **Validation Reporting** - Students must **submit** a validation report (**IR-17**) to the **EMU OIS every six months** to confirm name and address, employer name and address, and continuation of employment. The report is due within 10 days of the six-month reporting date. **It is your responsibility to submit the IR-17 in a timely manner!!**
- **Taxes** – Generally, if you've been in the United States less than 5 years, while on OPT you should be exempt from Social Security Tax & Medicare Tax (FICA) (See Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, "US Tax Guide for Aliens"). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state & local taxes unless your country has a tax treaty with the US exempting you from payment. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15<sup>th</sup> each year, for the previous calendar year.
- **Health Insurance** – It is very important that you have health insurance while in the USA. If it is not provided by your employer, you may be eligible to continue your student policy; contact the Snow Health Center for more information. For your own physical & financial wellbeing – **BE INSURED at all times!!!**
- **Travel while on OPT** – Before you travel, remember to:
  - Make sure your **passport** is valid at least 6 months into the future
  - Make sure your **I-20** has been signed for travel within the past 6 months. If you need a new travel signature, bring or send your I-20 to OIS with a copy of your EAD card
  - Make sure your **visa stamp** is valid. If your visa is expired, you may need to renew it while overseas. If this is the case, please speak to an OIS advisor **before** traveling.
    - If you have an expired visa stamp & plan a **short trip to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent Caribbean islands**, you may be qualified for Automatic Revalidation. Please contact an OIS advisor before traveling!
  - **Carry your EAD card and proof of employment** for the EAD time period with you. Proof of employment can include a letter from your employer and recent pay stubs.
  - **Dependent Travel** – Since OPT is not noted on dependent I-20's, an F2 dependent must carry copies of the F1 student's I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card & job offer letter in addition to their own F2 I-20 when traveling.
- **Change of Status** – If you change your immigration status during OPT, you are required to send us a copy of the approval document (i.e. H-1B). We recommend you begin this process before your OPT is expired.
- Your **OPT will automatically terminate** if you transfer to another school or begin to study at another educational level. Please **contact OIS** if you plan to apply for another degree program or transfer to another school.
- Remember to **depart the USA** within the 60 day grace period that follows your last day of OPT.

## OPT 17 month STEM Extension - Application Instructions

Please follow these instructions when **submitting** your **STEM** application for **OIS (Sue's) review**:

1. **Collect** the following documents
2. Put your documents in the **specified order**
3. Scan them all into **1 pdf file (please, no more than 2 pdf files!!!)** *Do NOT scan each page separately*
4. **Email** to Sue

### Required Documents

- Completed OIS 17-month OPT Extension **request form** - Please include employment information for the **entire** OPT timeframe, including any periods of **unemployment**.
- Completed **G-1145** form
- Check** for **\$380** made payable to the *US Department of Homeland Security* (do not abbreviate) and include your **SEVIS N#** in the memo field. Must be drawn on a US financial institution.
- 2** full, frontal passport size **photos** taken within 30 days of filing this application – gently print your name & SEVIS number on the back of each photo. Make sure they are **2" x 2"** square, have a white background, are clear and you are wearing a different shirt than in your Visa or Passport photo!
- Completed **I-765 Form** (Application for Employment Authorization); expiration 9/30/11 or later – **Typed** only, includes **major** and employer **E-verify** information, & must be signed in **blue ink!**
- Copy of **Diploma or transcript** showing **conferred** degree
- Copy of employer **E-verify profile screen**, with name and number indicated
- Original **offer of employment** letter from your E-verify employer; the letter **must include** all information indicated in the letter to the student's Human Resource Representative – see attached example.
- Proof of Employment** during the **entire first, 12-month OPT** period; Original letters from employers on official letterhead and copies of pay stubs will be accepted. Documents **MUST** show dates of employment, employee and employer contact information. Remember, your total unemployment days cannot exceed 90!
- Copy of front & back current, **valid EAD card**
- Copy (page 1 & 3) of last **I-20 with OPT** authorization on page 3
- Copy (page 1 & 3) of All **I-20's with CPT** authorization on page 3
- Copy (page 1 & 3) of **Initial I-20** used to enter USA for the first time
- Copy of Original **Passport, visa** and **I-94** (front and back)
- Copy of **Photo Identification** (drivers license or student ID, front and back)
- Copy of any other **previous EAD cards**, if applicable

### OIS will:

- Review your application materials
- Provide you with written comments and corrections for your application
- Upon receipt of corrected documents, OIS will issue your OPT I-20
- Provide mailing instructions for your application

**Processing** may take **5 – 7 business days**, depending upon the time of year and OIS workload. **Please apply early!**

## ***Employment Offer Letter Requirements***

### **OPT 17 month STEM Extension**

The STEM OPT application **must** include an original employment offer letter from the E-verify employer. This letter must be printed on **letterhead** and have an **original signature**.

In addition, the following information **MUST** be included in this letter:

- Student **name**
- Student date of **birth**
- Your **company name** as it appears on the E-Verify System
- Your company **E-Verify ID number**
- Your company **address**
- Your company **telephone** and fax number
- The student's **supervisor** name, telephone and Email address
- Student **job title**
- Start date** of employment with your company
- Proposed **duration** of extension request
- Current address of the student **worksite**
- Statement of notification** - In addition, **employers must agree** to report the termination or departure, of the OPT employee, to our office within 48 hours.  
***Please include a statement indicating this agreement in the letter.***
  - A student shall be considered departed if they have not reported for work for 5 consecutive business days without your consent, or if you know they have left your employment, whichever occurs earlier.

**To report** the termination or departure of the student, or if you have any questions, contact either *Sue Sohn* ([ssohn2@emich.edu](mailto:ssohn2@emich.edu)) or *Esther Gunel* ([egunel@emich.edu](mailto:egunel@emich.edu)) at the EMU Office of International Students.

# Sample Employer Offer Letter

## Company *ABC*, Inc.

214 Oakview Road, Suite 204 Mydream MI 44444

☎ (512) 444-4321 🌐 [www.abcinc.com](http://www.abcinc.com)

Esther Gunel, Director  
Eastern Michigan University  
Office of International Students  
244 Student Center  
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

July 27, 2011

Dear Esther,

Please consider this employment offer letter for your student Ravi Chandra, in his application for the OPT 17 month STEM extension.

Student <b>name</b>	Ravi Chandra
Student date of <b>birth</b>	05/04/1989
<b>Company name</b> as it appears on the E-Verify System	ABC Incorporated
Company <b>E-Verify ID number</b>	132564
Company <b>address</b>	214 Oakview Rd., Suite 204, Mydream MI 44444
Company <b>telephone</b> and fax number	T: (512)444-4321 F: (512)444-3221
The student's <b>supervisor</b> name, telephone and Email address	Joe Long T: (334) 453-9876 <a href="mailto:joelong@abcinc.com">joelong@abcinc.com</a>
Student <b>job title</b>	CATIA Designer
<b>Start date</b> of employment with your company	Feb. 3, 2011
Proposed <b>duration</b> of extension request	17 months following initial OPT authorization, ending Feb 2013
Current address of the student <b>worksite</b>	443 State Street, Surfcity FL 34532

As Mr. Chandra's employer, I agree to notify you of his termination or departure from our employ, within 48 hours of it's occurrence, or if he has not reported to work for more than 5 consecutive business days, without consent.

I am also including a computer screen shot of our company E-verify profile, as requested. Please contact me with any further questions or clarification required.

Sincerely,

Joe Long  
Enclosure (1)

## Final Checklist for mailing 17-month Extension Request to USCIS

Once you've gathered all the required documents & made the suggested revisions, you will be ready to submit your application to the US Government. Place the documents in this specified order:

- G-1145 Form**
- Personal check for \$380**
- 2 color photographs**
- I-765 Form - typed & signed w/blue ink**
- SEVIS Request OPT screen shot**
- Photocopy of new OPT I-20 (not the original)**
- Photocopy of both sides of your current or previous EAD card (s)**
- Original E-verify Employer Offer Letter**
- Photocopy of computer screen shot showing employer E-verify name and number**
- Proof of employment during the initial 12-month OPT period**
- Photocopy of Diploma or transcript showing conferred degree**
- SEVIS CPT Employment Authorizations screen shot**
- Photocopies of all I-20's showing previous CPT and/or OPT authorizations (include copies of previous EAD cards)**
- Photocopy of initial I-20 with original US entry stamp**
- Photocopy of any transfer pending I-20's**
- Photocopy of both sides of your current I-94**
- Photocopy of your US Visa**
- Photocopy of the picture page & expiration date of your Passport**
- Photocopy of 1 additional photo identification**

*I highly recommend making a photocopy of the entire packet before sealing the mailing envelope!*

**Mailing Address** – varies based upon state of residence and method of mailing. If you live in **Michigan** and use the US postal service express mail (USPS), submit application to:

USCIS  
PO Box 21281  
Phoenix, AZ 85036

- If you are using a **non-Michigan return address** on your I-765 or a delivery service other than the USPS, you will need to refer to page 10 of the USCIS I-765 instructions for the correct USCIS mailing address  
<http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765instr.pdf>.
- If you later decide **NOT to mail your OPT Extension application** to USCIS, you must notify OIS immediately so that we can cancel your OPT recommendation in SEVIS. Failure to inform OIS that you are not applying for OPT can cause future problems.

### Tracking your Application Status

Generally, within 1 week you should get an email and/or text message with your receipt number; Keep this information! Then in another 2 – 3 weeks of sending your application you should receive a “**Notice of Action;**” this is proof that you have an application pending with USCIS. You need to know your **receipt number** to check your **case status on-line** at <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>.