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17-Month Optional Practical Training Extension **For STEM-Designated Degree-holders**

This handout explains the seventeen (17) month extension period of Optional Practical Training (OPT) for which some students, with degrees in a designated-STEM program, are eligible.

Eligibility

1. Your most recent degree, the degree for which you were authorized 12 months of OPT, must be a bachelor's, master's or Ph.D. degree in a designated STEM field. A list of CMU STEM degrees can be found at: www.cmu.edu/oie/newsandevents/news/07-08/june/cipcode.html.
2. You must be authorized for your initial 12-month period of OPT and apply for the 17-month extension before your initial 12-month period of OPT ends.
3. You must have a job or job offer that is **directly related to your most recent major field of study**. The work must be a paid position for at least 20 hours per week.
4. Your employer must participate in the E-Verify program. You will have to obtain your employer's E-Verify Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number in order to apply for the 17-month extension. Should you change employer, you must complete and submit an updated STEM extension request to OIE including an updated I-765 (without fee) noting the new employer's e-verify number. Details about the E-Verify program can be found online at: www.dhs.gov/E-Verify. Questions about E-Verify should be directed to your employer.
5. **YOU MUST SUBMIT YOUR OPT APPLICATION TO USCIS WITHIN 30 DAYS OF AN OIE ADVISOR'S OPT RECOMMENDATION IN SEVIS**, and you must make a timely application before your 12-month OPT ends. It is recommended that you submit the request to USCIS 90 days prior to the end date of the initial OPT. If you do not file within 30 days of the OIE recommendation you will have to contact OIE for a new I-20. Your employer must agree to notify OIE within 48 hours if you lose your job or stop working.
6. You must comply with additional reporting requirements related to your name, address and employer information. (See page 3 of this handout for details.)
7. You remain on CMU's I-20 until the end of your 17-month extension OPT I-20 and 60 day grace period. If you travel, you may need to mail your I-20 to OIE for a travel signature (signatures are valid for 6 months).

Conditions and Limitations

1. The OPT extension will begin the day after the initial 12-month period of OPT ends and will end 17 months later.
2. Only one 17-month OPT extension is allowed in one's academic career in the US.
3. If the application has been timely filed, you can continue to work while the application is being processed, even if you do not receive your new EAD before the end of your initial 12-month period of OPT.
4. You must file for the 17-month OPT extension prior to the expiration of the 12 month period of OPT or you will forfeit the benefit.
5. Failure to comply with reporting requirements will result in the loss of your immigration status and employment authorization. **YOU MUST PAY ATTENTION TO AND COMPLY WITH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES.**
6. Unemployment is limited to 120 days (time accrued in the aggregate during the entire 29-month OPT period).

Application Process

You must submit a timely application to USCIS in order to continue working and obtain the 17-month OPT extension. Follow these steps:

STEP 1: Be Informed: Read this handout thoroughly and carefully. For more detailed information, consult the immigration policy guidance on OPT: http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_042010.pdf

STEP 2: Obtain the OIE Recommendation and new I-20

Complete the 17-Month STEM OPT Extension Request Form and submit it to OIE, ***with a copy of your EAD card***, no more than 100 days prior to the end of your initial OPT period. You, not your employer or company attorney, must submit this form. Carefully follow the instructions on the Request Form to avoid

processing delays. Allow one week (plus mailing time, if applicable) for OIE to process your request and prepare the new I-20.

STEP 3: Complete the USCIS Application Materials

You will need to gather the following application materials and submit them in this order to USCIS to apply for the 17-month OPT extension.

HERE IS WHAT YOU MUST SEND TO USCIS:

- I-765 filing fee of \$380. Check or money order payable to “US Department of Homeland Security.”
- G-1145. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application. Find the form at: www.uscis.gov.
- Original I-765 form completed by you with your original signature (in blue ink) – use the most current version available from the “Immigration Forms” section of the USCIS website since older versions are not acceptable (<http://www.uscis.gov>). Note that the address you use must be valid for at least 3 months from the time you send the application. The US Postal Service DOES NOT forward EAD cards.
- Check the third box: “I am applying for: Renewal of my permission to accept employment (attach previous employment authorization document).”
- Enter the correct code on number 16 of the I-765 form: **17-month OPT extension (c)(3)(C)**
- Cover letter/checklist explaining that you are applying for the 17-month OPT extension and listing the contents of the mailing.
- Photocopy (NOT original) of new SEVIS I-20 with the OPT recommendation from an OIE Advisor on page 3.** You must obtain your new I-20 from OIE with the 17-month OPT recommendation before you can proceed with this application. NOTE: sign the I-20 before copying it; all I-20 copies must be signed.
- Photocopies of all previously issued I-20 documents dating back to beginning of F-1 status. Proof of degree: official transcript, unofficial transcript or copy of the diploma showing the level and program of study.
- Photocopy of I-94 (front and back).
- Photocopy of the most recent I.D. page(s) of your passport (these are the page(s) which contain the picture, number, and expiration date).
- Photocopy of the most recent US visa stamp (in a page of your passport).
- Two “passport” photos. More details about can be found at: www.travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/index.html. In pencil, print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo. Passport photos can be obtained at many US Post Offices, FedEx/Kinkos offices, and many retailers such as Walmart and Target.
- Copy of a previously issued EAD card.

STEP 4: Mail the Application Pack to USCIS

- When you have completed the entire application, make a complete set of photocopies for your files, organize the materials in the order listed above and send the entire application to USCIS to complete the authorization procedure. **DO NOT USE THE e-FILING PROCEDURE..**
- Mail the application to one of two USCIS lockboxes below. YOU must mail the application to the Service Center that has jurisdiction over the address you have used on the I-765. We recommend that you send the application via an express mail carrier or via US registered mail “return-receipt requested” so that you have proof of delivery.
- Mail the application so USCIS receives it before the application deadlines:
 - Within 30 days of the OIE recommendation (the date in item 10 on the I-20) AND
 - Before the end of your current OPT period, ideally 90 days prior to the OPT end date.

If you live in:	Mail your application to:
Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Guam, or the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>USCIS Phoenix Lockbox</u> For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) deliveries: USCIS PO Box 21281 Phoenix, AZ 85036</p>

(states listed on page 2)	For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S Suite 100 Phoenix, AZ 85034
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, U.S. Virgin Islands, or West Virginia	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>USCIS Dallas Lockbox</u></p> For Express mail and courier deliveries: USCIS Attn: AOS 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business Suite 400 Lewisville, TX 75067 For U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Deliveries: USCIS PO Box 660867 Dallas, TX 75266

STEP 5: Wait For the EAD

Within one month of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard receipt notice. If you do not get this letter within 6 weeks contact an OIE advisor for more information. The “Receipt Number” in the top left corner of this receipt notice can be used to check the status of your case on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov or by calling the phone number indicated on the receipt. Keep in mind that this information is updated infrequently.

Other Important Information

A. Making a Decision Regarding Participation in OPT

- **Only one 17-month extension period of OPT is available during your US studies.** If you earn multiple STEM degrees or leave the US and re-enter as an F-1 student in the future, you will not be eligible for an additional 17-month extension. However, if you earn a higher degree, you would still be eligible for the initial 12 month period of OPT if you have not previously been authorized OPT for that degree level.

B. Reporting Requirements and Limitations on Unemployment

- **F-1 regulations REQUIRE you to report any change of your name, your address, your employer’s name or your employer’s address, as well as any interruption or loss of employment, within 10 days to OIE.** Report address changes, name changes and employment interruptions or changes to OIE by email at oie@andrew.cmu.edu, and this information will be reported to the Department of Homeland Security, as required in the immigration regulations.
- **Additionally you must report to OIE every 6 months, within 10 business days, to confirm that the employer information you submitted with this request is still correct.** The 6-month reports begin the day your 17-month OPT extension starts. After that, they continue every 6 months until your OPT ends, or you change status or depart the US.
- As regulations may change, **OIE must also have your current email address** in order to contact you quickly.
- **Periods of “unemployment” are limited to 120 days while on OPT.** It is unclear how this provision of the OPT regulations will be applied or enforced.
- **You must report status changes to OIE (oie@andrew.cmu.edu) while you are on OPT.** For instance, you must notify OIE if you:
 - Apply for and are granted a change of status from F-1 (OPT) to H-1B or any other status.
 - If you leave the US and make a new entry in another status.
 - If you leave the US permanently before the end date of your I-20.
 - If you plan to return to CMU as a student or continue studies elsewhere after OPT.

Report changes to OIE by email at oie@andrew.cmu.edu.

- C. Authorization may not be rescinded.** Once authorization to engage in OPT is granted, it may not be rescinded or canceled. This means that after OPT is authorized by the USCIS, it is impossible to have it canceled and restored at a later date.

D. Change of employer after OPT has been authorized: You must report any change of employer or employer address within 10 days. Address changes can be reported by email to oiie@andrew.cmu.edu. If you change your employer, you must submit a new 17-month STEM OPT Extension Request Form and Attestation to OIE as well as a new I-765 form. SEVIS will be updated and you will receive a new I-20 from OIE. Sign the I-20 and scan/send a copy back to OIE. OIE will submit the change to USCIS on your behalf.

E. Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the US fewer than five tax years are “non-residents for tax purposes” and are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes (see Internal Revenue Service Publication 519, “US Tax Guide for Aliens”). However, your earnings are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Beginning in the sixth tax year, most students in F-1 status become “residents for tax purposes” and employers should withhold Social Security and Medicare taxes. Tax returns must be filed on or before April 15 each year for the previous calendar year, for both “non-residents” and “residents.”

F. Traveling Outside of the US While on OPT

Reentry provisions of the regulations require students who have graduated and are on authorized OPT to present the following documents to reenter the US:

1. SEVIS I-20, signed on page 3 by the OIE advisor, within the last six months.
2. The Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
3. A valid passport.
4. A valid F-1 visa stamp (e.g. unless traveling to contiguous territory for less than 30 days—see travel handout).
5. A job offer letter/proof of employment. F-1 regulations allow for travel and reentry in order to “resume employment.”
6. **Dependent Travel:** Since dependents do not receive an EAD and the OPT recommendation is not noted on dependent I-20s, an F-2 dependent must carry copies of the F-1 student’s I-20 with OPT recommendation, EAD card and job offer letter, in addition to the F-2 I-20 when traveling.
7. **Note:** Travel during the “gap cap” period (see below) may not be possible if the EAD has expired; consult with an OIE advisor if you have plans to travel in that circumstance.

Travel at any time while in F-1 status carries some risk. This risk increases for individuals on OPT if the F-1 visa has expired and a new one is required in order to reenter the US or if the F-1 student has been unemployed for more than 120 days. **Be sure to consult with the OIE Advisor when contemplating travel outside the US and reentry to continue Optional Practical Training.**

G. Employment Authorization with a pending H-1B petition (“Cap Gap” employment authorization)

- All students on OPT who have an H-1B petition with a request for change of status will automatically have their F-1 status and OPT authorization automatically extended if:
 1. The employer has filed a timely H-1B petition and change of status request with a requested October 1 start date
 2. The application is either pending or has been approved.
- The OPT employment authorization automatically ends if the H-1B petition is denied, rejected or withdrawn (although the student can continue working until the end date indicated on the OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The F-1 would have a 60 day grace period with no work authorization after the end of OPT.

Receiving the I-20:

I will pick up the I-20 from OIE

I designate _____ to pick up the I-20 for me.

I request OIE to mail the I-20 to me by regular US mail UPS 2nd day air mail

If you choose express (2nd day air mail), you must send a check, payable to Carnegie Mellon University, in the amount of \$15.00 with this request form.

Mailing information Address:

Company or Name: _____

Contact/Ship to Name: _____

Address Line 1: _____

Address Line 2: _____

(Apartment, Suite, Building number, etc.)

Address Line 3: _____

(Department, c/o, etc.)

Other Address Information: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Country: _____

Zip Code/Postal Code: _____

Is this a residential address? Yes No

Telephone Number: _____ Email: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____



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17-Month STEM OPT Extension Attestation

Write your initials in each box to indicate that you have READ and UNDERSTOOD each item. **KEEP a copy of this form** for your records and provide a copy to your employer so they are aware of their requirements. **I certify that:**

My employer participates in the E-Verify program. The E-Verify Company Identification Number or E-Verify Client Company Identification Number is: _____ or I have attached a letter from my employer verifying their participation in the E-Verify program.

I will notify OIE within 10 days of any change in my name, my residential address, my employer's name or my employer's address.

I will provide my employer with a copy of this certification and advise my employer that they are required by law to contact OIE within 48 hours if my employment ends prior to the end of my OPT. OIE's contact information can be found at the top of this form.

If traveling, I will make timely requests for OIE signatures (at least a week before traveling outside the US) on my I-20. To request the signature, I will complete and print the OIE Request for Services on the OIE website (http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/document_request.pdf) and send it to OIE with my I-20.

I will verify my name, my address, my employer's name and my employer's address **every six months** beginning on the date my 12-month period of OPT expires. I realize that **I have a 10-business day period** to make this verification. Therefore, I must verify my name, my address, my employer's name and my employer's address within 10 business days of (insert dates):

- the date my current 12-month period of OPT expires _____
- 6 months after my 12-month period of OPT expires _____
- 12 months after my 12-month period of OPT expires _____
- AND at any time there is a change of information.

I realize that failure to verify the above information at these 6 month intervals is considered a violation of status and will result in the termination of my SEVIS record and loss of my legal status in the US and my employment authorization.

If my immigration status changes, I will notify OIE by providing OIE a copy of my I-94 showing my new status so that my F-1 SEVIS record can be properly updated.

I will always provide a current email address to OIE AND I will read OIE emails to insure that I am aware of any changes pertaining to my immigration status.

I will notify OIE if I lose my job or if I am considering changing employers. I must notify OIE of any change of employer within 10 days and submit a STEM OPT request to OIE to obtain a new I-20.

Signature _____

Name (printed) _____

Date _____