F-1 STEM OPT Extension:
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Disclaimer: KGI has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice. KGI staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult. Due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, individuals must understand that the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office may change its interpretation of established immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits at any time.

Who is eligible for the STEM extension?
In order to be eligible for this extension, you must:
- Currently be engaged in a period of OPT; *and*
- Be filing based on a STEM-eligible degree: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension (KGI degrees are all eligible; certificate programs are ineligible for the STEM Extension); *and*
- Have had fewer than 90 total days of unemployment while on OPT; *and*
- Be employed full-time by an employer who is registered in the E-Verify employment verification system, or have a full-time job offer with an E-Verified employer

You may file for the STEM extension as early as 90 days before the end date of your current OPT authorization (as listed on your EAD). Your application must be **received** by USCIS by the end date of your current OPT authorization *and* no later than 60 days after KGI issues the STEM OPT I-20. Please see the F-1 STEM OPT Application Checklist found on our Current Students page under Informational Guides and Checklists to begin preparing your application.

What is E-Verify?
E-Verify is an internet-based system operated by USCIS in partnership with the Social Security Administration to help employers determine the employment eligibility of their employees. You can find more information about E-Verify at http://www.uscis.gov/everify. You can check if your company is listed with E-Verify at https://www.e-verify.gov/about-e-verify/e-verify-data/how-to-find-participating-employers. Instructions on how your employer can enroll in E-Verify can be found at https://www.e-verify.gov/employers.

What is the Form I-983? How do I complete it and who do I send it to?
This form should be completed by your employer and you. It should be submitted to your international student advisor. The goal of the formal training plan is to articulate your learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to helping you achieve those objectives.

If your employer has questions about the I-983, please direct them to this resource page: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/employers-and-the-form-i-983.

How Often Do I Need to Update the I-983?
At the 12 and 24-month marks of your STEM OPT Period, you are required to complete the in-progress evaluation and final evaluation, respectively, *regardless of the length of time you have been with that employer*. Additionally, if you change employers, you must complete the OPT Reporting Form found on our Current Students page, under Forms, submit a new I-983 for the new employer, and complete the final evaluation page of the former I-983 within 10 days of changing positions.

In addition, if you have a *material change* to your job, you must submit an updated I-983. A material change refers to major changes: change in job location, supervisor, company name, or job duties, etc. If your title changes (but your job duties do not) you can report this via email to the international student advisor at KGI. Salary changes alone do not need to be reported.

My OPT expires soon and I am worried I will not get my new EAD card before my current one expires. What can I show my employer to prove I can continue working?
If your post-completion OPT expires while your STEM OPT application is pending, you will receive an automatic extension of employment authorization of up to 180 days upon the expiration of the current employment authorization. This will be listed on the application receipt you will receive from USCIS (provide a copy to your employer). You may wish to direct your Human Resources office to the F-1 OPT STEM Extension section on page 21 of M-274, the Employer Guide to the I-9 if they have additional questions or need further verification of this rule.

How many days of unemployment can I have while on a STEM extension?
You are granted an additional 60 days of unemployment, bringing the total count of unemployment days for the entire length of your OPT period up to 150 days. This limit includes any unemployment time you accrued during your initial year of OPT. For example, if you were unemployed a total of 30 days during your first year of OPT, you may accrue a maximum total of 120 days of unemployment while on your STEM Extension.

How many STEM extensions can I have?
There is a lifetime limit of **two** periods of 24-month STEM OPT; each occurring after a *higher* degree level has been obtained. You cannot go backwards (i.e. if you did not use it at the bachelor's level you cannot apply for a second bachelor's after completing your KGI degree and get another STEM period at that level).

Where can I find more information?
You can find detailed information on the STEM Hub: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub. Ready to apply? View the F-1 STEM OPT Application Checklist found on our Current Students page under Informational Guides and Checklists to begin preparing your application.