Whether you were or not following the history of this new regulation, please allow us to offer a re-cap. In March 2014, Washtech filed a lawsuit challenging DHS’ authority to provide OPT in any shape or form, especially the STEM extension. In November 2014, President Obama requested to extend OPT. In August 2015, a judge decided that DHS does have the authority to offer OPT, but the judge mandated that DHS must publish new STEM regulations and be “in place” by February 12, 2016. DHS published proposed regulations on October 19, 2015. Because DHS received over 50,000 responses/comments, the Service requested the Court to extend the deadline beyond February 12, which was granted. Therefore, the final regulations were published on March 11, 2016 which will be effective on May 10, 2016.

Highlights of this new regulation are:
- STEM extension was increased from 17 months to 24 months
- STEM extension could be considered of a previous degree
- Self-employment/volunteering experiences could not be used for STEM extensions
- Introduced a new and required form I-983 Training Plan – which does not exist at this moment

So, if you are on a “regular” OPT under a STEM discipline, or on STEM extension now, or you have a STEM extension pending, please read the article below and contact OIS if you have any further questions or concerns.

Please see the next page for comprehensive information the changes to STEM OPT

OPT Employment Reporting Requirements

Report OPT Employment! New OPT Reporting Procedure:

If you are currently under OPT, you no longer need to email OIS to provide your employment information. Instead, you can simply complete an OPT Employment Reporting Form. To access the OPT Employment Report Form, you can simply click on the “Report OPT Employment” link below. The link will be on the OIS website shortly under the OPT section. Report OPT Employment. You will receive a confirmation email from an OIS advisor once your OPT employment is reported to SEVIS. Students who report STEM OPT employment should not use this form.

Reminders:
- F-1 OPT regulations require students on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) to report change of employment within 10 days.
- OIS can only report your employment SEVIS if you work for more than 20 hours per week.
- If you have multiple employments which combined working hours are more than 20 hours per week, we can report these employments for you. However, you should also let OIS know when your combined employment hours are no longer more than 20 hours.

If you are currently unemployed under OPT and plan to travel outside of the U.S., you should consult with OIS before you travel.
STEM OPT Changes and Scenarios

With the STEM OPT changes, please see the below 3 scenarios to explain how the new regulations affect you and your situation.

Scenario #1: I currently have an APPROVED 17 month STEM OPT extension
If you have received your approved 17 month STEM OPT Extension you are allowed to file an application to receive an additional 7 months of STEM OPT that would meet the new 24 month maximum.

- If you do NOT want to add any additional time to your STEM OPT extension you do not need to file any new forms or pay any new fees. You are still authorized to keep working until your 17 month STEM period expires.
- If you WANT to request to add 7 months to your STEM OPT extension you need to make sure you qualify to apply. There are additional requirements and not everyone will qualify. You have to have at least 150 calendar days left on your OPT at the time you meet with an OIS and we generate the I-765. You must apply using the new procedures including Form I-983 (link). You may not apply until May 10th or after but must be received by immigration no later than August 8th.

Scenario #2: I currently have a PENDING 17 month STEM OPT application
If you have a STEM OPT Extension application pending with immigration, starting May 10th under the new rules, pending STEM OPT applications will be sent a request for further evidence (RFE) by immigration asking applicants to comply with the new rule. You will need to:

- Download the form I-983 and begin discussions with your employer. The form I-983 is a training plan you and your STEM employer will sign. It’s a good idea for you and your employer to begin working on the training plan now to have time to prepare it. Once the I-983 form is completed, send it to an OIS advisor for review. Starting from May 10th on, OIS will be able to issue a new I-20 recommending you for the 24 month STEM extension. NO additional filing fees will be required when responding to this request for evidence.

Please NOTE: If your STEM OPT is approved before May 10 you will be granted 17 months and you can send an additional application for the additional 7 months remaining with an additional filing fee and completed form I-983 before August 8th.

Scenario #3: I currently am eligible to apply for my first STEM OPT extension NOW
If you are now working on post-completion OPT in a STEM-eligible field of study and will apply for the new 24 month STEM OPT extension on or after May 10th, 2016 you must:

- Apply for STEM OPT 90 days prior to the expiration of your current OPT (on or after May 10)
- Download the form I-983 (link) and begin discussions with your employer. The form I-983 (link) is a training plan you and your STEM employer will sign. It’s a good idea for you and your employer to begin working on the training plan now to have time to prepare it. Include form with OIS STEM application.
- Gather all the forms required as part of the STEM application (past I-20s, copy of your degree, E-verify # of employer, employer offer letter)

Please NOTE: If you apply before May 10th you will be sent a request for further evidence asking for an updated I-20 and other documents as mentioned in Scenario #2 above.

I-20/DS-2019 Completion Date Info

Please look at section 5 of your I-20 (or section 3 of your DS-2019). What is the completion date? If that date is NOT the date that you plan to complete your studies, you must contact us immediately. If your completion date is at the end of this term, but you will need more time, OR if your completion date is for a future term, but you will complete your studies this term, you must let us know. If for any reason the completion date on your I-20 is not accurate, you must inform us so that we can help you maintain your F-1/J-1 status.

Remember that reality is always more important than what is written on your I-20/DS-2019! You should NEVER try to re-enter the US with an I-20/DS-2019 just because the date is still valid. If you have already completed your studies, the I-20 is no longer valid regardless of the date.

Please note that the graduation date and the completion date are not necessarily the same. The completion date on your I-20/DS-2019 should reflect the date that you intend to complete all degree requirements, not the date of your graduation ceremony.

International Student Newsletter
Traveling Outside the US?

Make sure your travel documents are properly prepared and endorsed! Remember that a valid I-20 must have a completion date which is in the future, and it must also have a valid travel signature. For F-1 students who are continuing their studies, the travel signature is good for 1 year. For F-1s on OPT, the travel signature is good for 6 months. To re-enter the US, you will need:

- valid passport
- Valid visa (if your visa will be expired on the day that you will re-enter the US, you must first renew your visa
- Your I-20/DS-2019 with valid (less than 1 year old) travel signature
- If you are on OPT and will be traveling outside the US, you should also bring your EAD card and proof of your employment (such as an offer letter) or proof of your efforts to find a job. If you have applied for OPT but have not yet received your EAD card, you should bring your Approval Notice and/or Receipt Notice.

When you re-enter the US, if you do not have your I-20/DS-2019, or if the signature is not valid, you can ask the officer to issue you a Form I-515. This will allow you to enter the US. Once you are in the US, you must make an appointment with us immediately so we can fix your I-515 status.

The OIS does not require you to submit your I-94 to us whenever you travel, but we do recommend that you obtain your I-94 record online from www.cbp.gov/i94 each time you re-enter the US. Your “Admit Until” date should always say “D/S”.

You will not be able to retrieve your I-94 if you are outside the US, because the I-94 is an entry document.

Make Sure You Get Your New-Version I-20

As you may have heard, SEVIS (the system that your I-20s are created in) had a major upgrade in June 2015. Part of that upgrade included a new version of the I-20.

Please look at the images below to determine whether you have an old I-20 (first image) or a new I-20 (second image).

All students will be required to have a new version of the I-20 by June 2016. If you will travel and re-enter the US before June, you will not have a problem using your current I-20. If you ALREADY HAVE a new version I-20, then you do NOT need a new I-20. If you still have the old version of the I-20, please complete this form to request a new I-20 https://docs.google.com/a/fordham.edu/forms/d/1z3kvpBDSz0-G_BV7brHHeE0LJKl-eXg51I0qqROo/viewform

We will check the responses to this form, and will print out new I-20s as quickly as possible based on your request. Then, we will email your Fordham email address to inform you that your new I-20 is ready for pick up at the office location you requested.

For more information about travel, please see the Travel page of our website.

Grace Period

F-1 students have a 60 day grace period and J-1 students have a 30 day grace period. During this time, you may stay in the US. However, if you leave the US during the grace period, you will NOT be able to re-enter.

Important Travel Updates

Though it is not required, we advise you to bring proof of your SEVIS Fee (I-901) payment, such as the payment receipt, when you travel. Recently, some students have been stopped because the officer could not locate that proof of payment.

Make sure you have a new-version I-20 to enter the US after June, 2016

Impact Initiative

Are you interested in the United Nations? Would you like the opportunity to attend UN NGO high-level briefings and hear about events/opportunities at the UN? Sign up on our facebook page - Fordham University Impact Initiative and read our blog here: http://fordhamimpactinitiative.wordpress.com/

Reminder for J-1 Exchange Students

Please don't forget to request an official transcript from the Office of Enrollment Services before you leave for the semester. If possible, please pick-up this transcript before leaving New York City and deliver it to your home university's study abroad office.