

To: DSOs and PDSOs at SEVP-certified schools only (for F and M students)

Date: April 6, 2016

Re: SEVIS Workarounds and STEM OPT Transition

Number: 1604-02

General Information

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Release 6.26 deploys on May 13, 2016, three days after the new science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) optional practical training (OPT) regulations take effect. While SEVIS will not contain functionality for all of the new provisions of the rule, it will update the functionality that allows designated school officials (DSOs) to recommend STEM extensions for eligible students. SEVIS Release 6.26 will implement the following modifications:

- Change the length of STEM OPT from 17 months to 24 months.
- Display the link to recommend a STEM extension for anyone on post-completion OPT, making it possible to recommend STEM OPT based on a prior degree.
- Allow DSOs to convert 17-month STEM recommendations to 24-month recommendations. This will be based on a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) request for evidence (RFE) if the OPT request is in *Requested* or *Pending* status in SEVIS. DSOs will access this function from the same page where STEM extensions are recommended.
- Allow DSOs to recommend seven-month extensions of already approved 17-month STEM extensions for eligible students. DSOs will access this function from the same page where STEM extensions are recommended.

SEVIS Release 6.26 will not include separate fields to capture information about prior degrees or a DSO's receipt of a student's Form I-983, "Training Plan for STEM OPT Students." Over the coming months, SEVP will develop the additional functionality needed to fully implement the new regulations.

Currently, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has worked with USCIS to coordinate handling of transition cases. The chart below presents three distinct situations that apply to students affected by the rule, and outlines the actions DSOs and students should take.

| Student Scenario | Required Actions |
|--|--|
| <p>New 24-month STEM OPT requests</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSOs will be able to use the current functionality to recommend extensions of OPT. SEVIS will automatically calculate the 24-month OPT end date. • For cases where the filing deadline is close to May 10, 2016, DSOs can file the STEM extension under the existing 17-month rules. USCIS will send RFEs for STEM extensions that are pending on May 10, 2016. DSOs will be able to convert the case after USCIS issues the RFE. • DSOs must enter the following information into the “Explain how employment is related to student’s course of study” field: <i>I have reviewed the Form I-983. It is completed, signed, and addresses all program requirements.</i> • If the recommendation is based on a prior degree, DSOs must enter the following information into the “Explain how employment is related to student’s course of study” field: <i>Extension based on prior STEM degree: (Enter information on: qualifying major, qualifying degree level, Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code, date of degree, school awarding degree, school location, awarding school code and class of admission at time of degree.)</i> <p>Note: New applications received by USCIS on May 10, 2016, must meet the new requirements.</p> |
| <p>17-month STEM extensions pending on May 10, 2016</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USCIS will issue an RFE asking for a Form I-20, “Certificate for Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” with the 24-month STEM recommendation. • After receiving the RFE, the DSO should convert the OPT recommendation from a 17-month to a 24-month STEM recommendation using the functionality in the SEVIS Release 6.26 deployed on May 13, 2016. • DSOs must enter the following information into the “Explain how employment is related to student’s course of study” field: <i>I have reviewed the Form I-983. It is completed, signed, and addresses all program requirements.</i> <p>Note: A completed Form I-983 and a USCIS-issued RFE are required before converting the recommendation from a 17-month OPT extension to a 24-month OPT extension.</p> |

| Student Scenario | Required Actions |
|---|--|
| <p>17-month extensions of OPT approved before May 10, 2016</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The filing period is May 10, 2016, through Aug. 8, 2016. Some students do not have the full application period. Students must have at least 150 days of approved STEM OPT left on the day that USCIS receives their Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization.” Once the functionality is available, DSOs must recommend the seven-month extension in SEVIS. • DSOs must enter the following information into the “Explain how employment is related to student’s course of study” field: <i>I have reviewed the Form I-983. It is completed, signed, and addresses all program requirements.</i> <p>Special instructions for students whose filing deadline for the seven-month STEM extension is before May 23, 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should file the Form I-765 with USCIS without the Form I-20, but include a statement that indicates the following: <i>Due to new regulations, I must apply for the seven-month extension of my STEM OPT before SEVIS supports it. I will provide a Form I-20 with the extension recommendation after USCIS requests it.</i> <p>Note: These applications cannot arrive at USCIS before May 10, 2016.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should wait to send the Form I-20 to USCIS until after USCIS requests it. |

Available Resources

The following resources are available to assist with the transition:

- [STEM OPT Hub](#) on Study in the States
- USCIS’ [Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students \(STEM OPT\)](#) page
- [SEVIS Release 6.26 Planning Guide](#)
- [Planning Tool: 7-Month Extension of Approved STEM OPT](#)
- [Planning Tool: 24-Month Extension of OPT \(STEM\)](#)

Comments

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