DePaul University

24-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) STEM Extension Application Guide & Tutorial for F-1 International Students

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Who is Eligible to Apply for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

F-1 student with a **STEM-qualifying bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree** from an accredited, SEVIS-certified U.S. educational institution, who is in a **valid period** of standard post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT), and has an offer of **paid employment for at least 20 hours** per week from an **employer that is enrolled in the E-Verify program** and has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN). **Note, if you change/add employers during the 24-month OPT STEM period, your new employer(s) must be enrolled in the E-Verify program and you must work at least 20 hours per week for each employer.**

F-1 student may not be self-employed (there must be an **employer-employee relationship**). For more information on this subject, including employer responsibilities, please visit this USCIS link: https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment/stem-optas well as the STEM OPT Hub: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub. The student and the employer **must also agree to comply with all reporting, training, supervision, evaluation, wage, documentation, and other obligations** specified in the regulations and on Form I-983 during the OPT STEM extension period. **Note, these employment/reporting conditions must remain true if you change employers during the 24-month OPT STEM period.**

To determine if you qualify for the 24-month OPT STEM extension, please do the following:

- Check if your **CIP code** showing on your I-20 form is on the DHS STEM-designated degree program list: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdf.
- Check with your supervisor or HR representative if your employer is enrolled in the E-verify program: https://www.uscis.gov/e-verifyand is in good standing. You will need the **E-verify number** (typically 5 or 6 digits long, showing at the top of the employer's E-Verify Memorandum of Understanding) and the IRS **Employer Identification Number (EIN)** for your OPT STEM application. Note, the E-verify number and the EIN number are not the same.
- Review your employment records to verify that you have not exceeded **90 days of unemployment** during your current period of post-completion OPT, and check if your **job (offer) directly relates** to the level and (STEM) field of study showing on your I-20 form.

Who Qualifies for a Second Period of the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

The government allows qualified F-1 students a maximum of two 24-month OPT STEM extensions in their lifetime based on two separate STEM eligible degrees. For example, if you receive an OPT STEM extension for a bachelor's degree, and then complete a higher degree in a STEM field, you will qualify for a new STEM extension.

If you never applied for the STEM extension based on the lower STEM degree, you can still qualify for a STEM extension as long as you are eligible for post-completion OPT based on the new non-STEM degree. For example, if you are currently participating in post-completion OPT based on a master's degree in Business and Management, but you previously received a bachelor's degree in Mathematics, you may be able to apply for a STEM OPT extension based on your bachelor's degree in Mathematics as long as you meet the following criteria:

- You have received both degrees from **currently** accredited and SEVP-certified institutions.
- Your previous degree **cannot** have been conferred **more than 10 years ago** at the time of application.
- Your previous degree is assigned a **STEM eligible code** found on the STEM Designated Degree Program List: https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/stem-list.pdfat the time of application.
- You have **not** already received an OPT STEM extension from the USICS based on this previous degree.
- Your practical training opportunity **(job offer) is directly related** to the previously obtained STEM degree.
- Your **employer** is registered in the E-verify program, has an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN),and agrees to comply with all reporting, training, supervision, evaluation, wage, documentation, and other obligations specified in the regulations and on Form I-983 during the STEM OPT extension period.

When Can I Apply for the 24-month OPT STEM Extension?

- You can apply for a 24-month OPT STEM extension as early as 90 days before your current post-completion OPT Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card expires.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must receive your 24-month OPT STEM extension application **before** your current post-completion OPT EAD card expires. There is no grace period to apply for STEM OPT once regular OPT expires.
- USCIS must also receive your 24-month OPT STEM extension application within 60 days of when the ISS advisor makes the (electronic) OPT STEM recommendation in SEVIS (the government database).

If you miss the above timeline/deadline, USCIS will reject/deny your OPT STEM application!

How do I apply?

How to Request an OPT STEM I-20 Form

Complete the STEM OPT Recommendation I-20 request on the ISS Portal (https://intlportal.depaul.edu) under Student Requests including the following information/documentation:

- Copy of Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan: https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i983.pdf completed/signed by you and your employer (**you and your employer should keep the original**);
- Your employer's E-verify number (showing at the top of the employer's E-Verify Memorandum of Understanding);
- Confirmation if you previously obtained OPT STEM authorization from USCIS (the government allows a maximum of two OPT STEM extensions);
- Confirmation if you have any international travel plans in the next 3-4 months; and
- Confirmation if you have any plans to move (change your U.S. residential address) in the next 3-4 months.

Please allow **1-2 weeks** for review/processing of new OPT and OPT STEM I-20 form(s). If your request is incomplete, it will require more time.

Frequently Asked Questions about Form I-983

This information refers to frequently asked questions on **Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan**. For complete instructions on **Form I-983 Mentoring and Training Plan**, please visit this link: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/form-i-983-overview

- **What is the SEVIS School Code of School Recommending STEM OPT (including 3-digit suffix)?** Found on page 1 of your current I-20 form under the "School Information" section. It will begin with the letters "CHI".
- **Who is my Designated School Official (DSO)?** This is your ISS advisor. Enter the full name and contact information, including official address, phone, and email, of the DSO (ISS advisor) who will process your Form I-983 and who is recommending the STEM OPT extension for you.
- **Where can I find my SEVIS ID number?** Found in the top left corner on page 1 of your current I-20 form. It will begin with the letter "N".
- **Where can I find my Qualifying Major and Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code?** Available on page 1 of your current I-20 form under the "Major 1" heading of the "Program of Study" section. Your CIP code will be 6 digits and your qualifying major will be written immediately before your CIP code. **Please note that some students' qualifying majors on their I-20 forms will read differently than what is listed on their diplomas. Be sure to copy the qualifying major and CIP code exactly as they read on your current I-20 form into the correct Form I-983 field.** If you are applying for the 24-month STEM OPT extension based on a prior degree (i.e. not your most recently completed degree), please speak with your ISS advisor to confirm your qualifying major and CIP code.
- Note that responses on page 3 of the I-983 are limited to a maximum of 1000 characters (letters, spaces, punctuation marks) each.
- **Should I complete the last page 5 of Form I-983?** The last page of Form I-983 is for you to provide an initial 12-month and final 24-month self-evaluation of your employment performance during your OPT STEM extension. If you terminate your employment with an OPT STEM employer early, you will also use this page to provide your end-of-employment self-evaluation. Therefore, please leave this page blank until it's time for you to submit the self-evaluation to ISS. Note, this evaluation for your OPT STEM work period (not your post-completion OPT period).

Please remember to type or clearly hand-write the content of Form I-983, print the completed form for you and your employer's hand-written signatures, and then scan and email it to your ISS advisor for review. You and your employer should keep the original I-983 form.

How to Apply with USCIS

Items to prepare:

- Scan of your signed I-20 form showing the OPT STEM recommendation that is less than 60 days old;
- Scan of your signed I-20 form showing your current OPT authorization and employer details;
- Scans of your current and any previously issued EAD cards (front and back) and corresponding I-20 forms, if applicable;
- Scan of your biographical passport page(s) showing the validity date;
- Scan of your current/latest visa page in your passport showing your last entry-date stamp into the U.S.;
- Scan of your current I-94 record: https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions showing your latest entry;
- Scan of your I-797 approval notice (and I-94 card), **only if you previously obtained a "change of status" to F-1 from USCIS**;
- Passport-style photograph –see https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/photos.html for full guidance
- Official transcripts showing your STEM degree conferral: https://offices.depaul.edu/depaul-central/records/transcripts/Pages/default.aspx

How to Use USCIS Online System

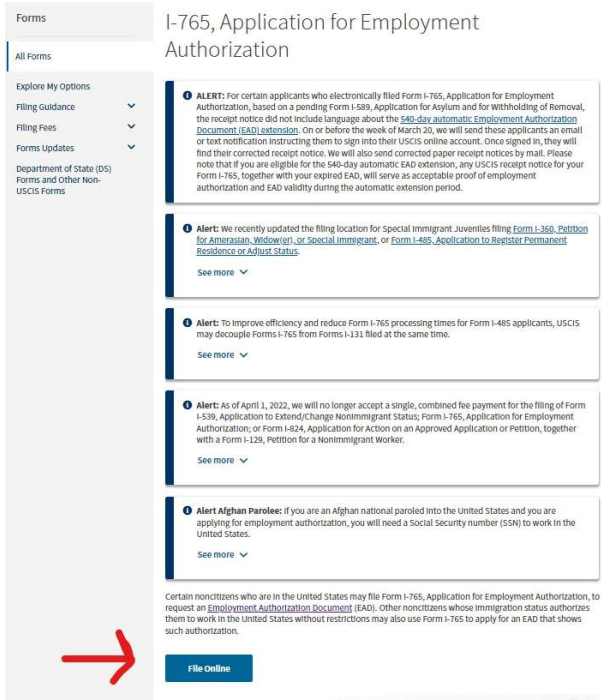
For full instructions regarding the USCIS Online System, please view USCIS 'How to File a Form Online' page here:
https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/tips-for-filing-forms-online

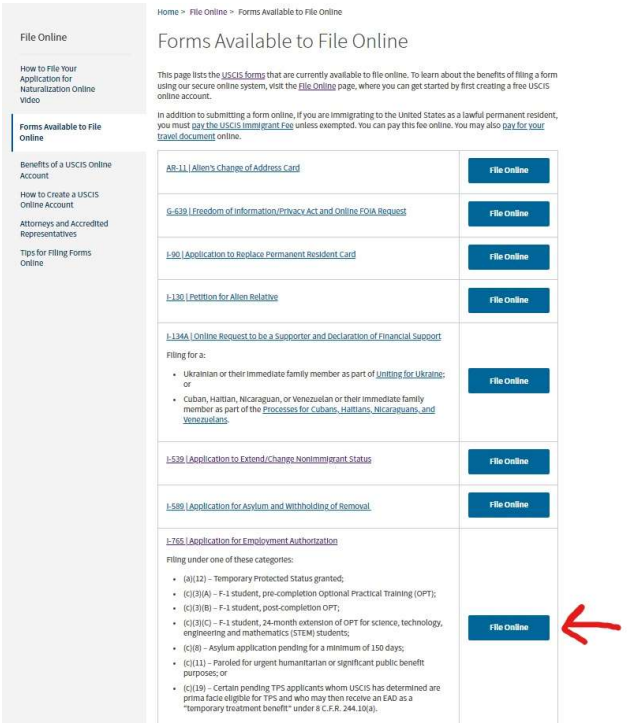
This page includes how to:

- Create a USCIS online account
- Upload evidence and evidence file requirements
- Digitally sign your form
- Pay the filing fee
- Respond to Requests for Evidence
- Check the status of your case
- Receive a decision
- Troubleshoot browser errors
- Reset/change password

Completing the I-765: Starting the Online Form

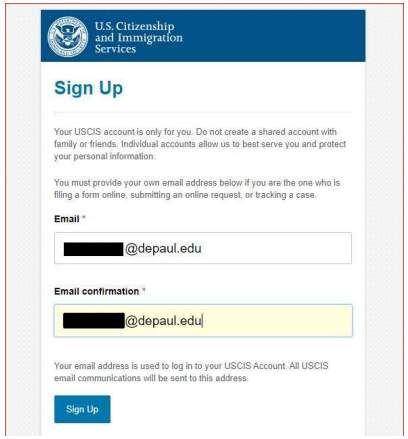
Navigate to https://www.uscis.gov/i-765 and select "File Online." On the next page, find "I-765 | Application for Employment Authorization" and select "File Online."

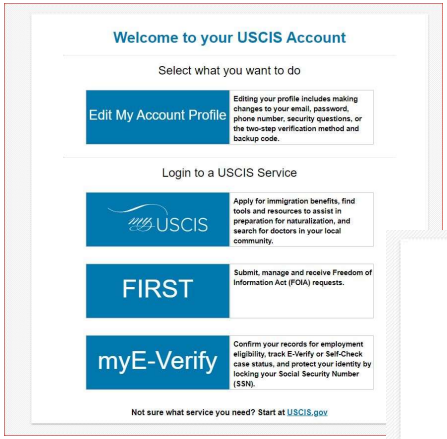


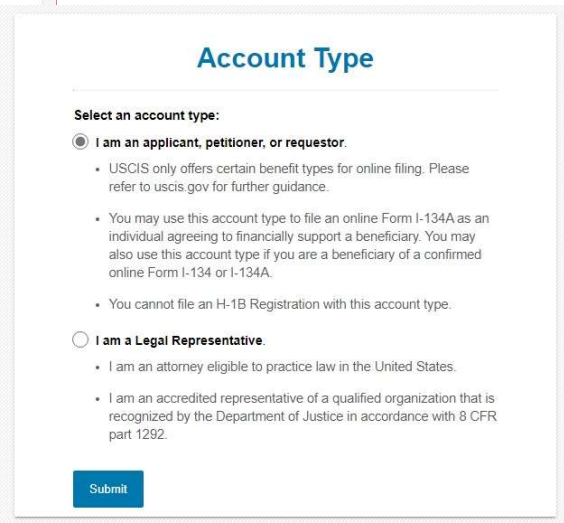


Completing the I-765: USCIS Account Setup

If you do not yet have an account, select "Create an Account" on the Sign In page and follow the steps to create a USCIS account. At the welcome screen, select "My USCIS" and select "I am an applicant, petitioner, or requestor" as your account type. Finally, select "File a form online" and use the drop-down menu to select the I-765 as the form; click "Start form."







Completing the I-765: Getting Started and About You Sections

Basis of eligibility: Select (c)(3)(c) STEM Extension in the drop-down menu. Answer the questions about your degree, your employer's E-Verify information, and premium processing.

Reason for applying: Select "Renewal of permission to accept employment."

Preparer and interpreter information: A preparer is an attorney who can help you with the I-765 application. An interpreter is someone who helps translate the form into a language you understand better than English. If you used a preparer or interpreter, answer "yes" and include their information; otherwise answer "no."

Your Name: Please list your full legal name as it appears on your passport (the spelling and order should match). It's best to list your family (last) name in ALL CAPS. If you have several given names and do not have space to list all of them, that is okay.

Other Names Used: You only need to complete this item if you have had a legal name change while studying in the U.S.

Phone Number and Email: Enter a U.S. phone number and email address that you check often. If the email you use here is different from the email(s) listed in Campus Connect, please add it to your Campus Connect profile.

Mailing address: The U.S. mailing address you list here is where your new EAD card will be mailed. This address needs to be valid for at least the next 3 months. If you think you may move in the months after you mail the application, use a reliable friend or family member's address to receive your EAD. You may also rent and use a P.O. Box (see USPS.com for more information). **Do not use the ISS address**. If you are using an address other than your own, use "c/o" to indicate that your mail is being delivered "in care of" the resident of that address. For example, c/o Friend's Street Name, Apt #, Chicago, IL, 60604. Otherwise , USCIS will think that is your new address, and it will conflict with the address showing in SEVIS (database).

Note, USCIS does not forward mail when applicants move. USPS will simply return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable. If your name does not appear on the c/o address you list, USPS may also return your mail to USCIS as undeliverable. Starting April 2, 2018, USCIS will destroy EAD cards returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service after 60 business days if USCIS is not contacted by the document's intended recipient to provide the correct address.

U.S. Physical Address: If your mailing address is different from your physical address (the address where you currently reside/sleep), select "no" and list your physical address. This address should also match your U.S. home address in Campus Connect (so ISS can link it to your SEVIS record). If the U.S. mailing address you listed is the same as your U.S. physical address, then answer "yes."

Completing the I-765: Getting Started and About You Sections

Gender and marital status: Answer according to what best describes you.

Birth information: Answer according to what best describes you.

Country of citizenship: Select the country or countries of which you are a citizen. If you are a citizen of multiple countries, use the "+Add Country" button.

Form I-94 Arrival/ Departure Record Number: Use your current I-94 number. This is the 11- digit number found on the top left corner of your paper I-94 card or on your electronic I-94 record: https:// i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search

Date of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the date of your most recent entry into the U.S. This entry date can be found stamped on your paper I-94 card, noted in your electronic I-94 record, and in your passport admission stamp (if you have one).

Place of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the name of the city where you landed in the U.S. This information is found on your passport admission stamp (usually as a code like "CHI" for Chicago). If you drove across from Canada or Mexico, enter the name and the city where you entered the U.S.

Status of Last Arrival in the United States: This is the status you held when you last entered the U.S. Most students entered in F 1 status, however, you may have initially entered the U.S. with a different visa/status e.g. as a B 1 visitor or H 1B work visa and later changed your status to F 1 student with USCIS.

Passport and Travel Document Information: Enter your passport number and expiration date when prompted. Leave the travel document number and travel document expiration fields blank.

Country that issued your passport: The country that issued your passport is the same as the country that issued your citizenship. Note, if you happened to renew your passport at a Consulate/Embassy in a different country, this does not change the country of issuance.

Current Immigration Status: Your current immigration status should be F1 student. **If not, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.**

A-Number: Provide the USCIS number on the front of your Employment Authorization Document (OPT card).

USCIS Online Account Number: If this is your first time completing a USCIS form using the e-File format, check the box for "I do not have or know my USCIS Online Account Number." If you have filed a USCIS form using the e-File format, find your account number on your USCIS profile page.

Completing the I-765: Evidence and Additional Information Sections

Social Security Number (SSN) Related Questions: If you do not have an SSN, then this is your opportunity to request it. If, however, you already have an SSN, then it is yours for life and you should inform USCIS that you do not want the SSA to issue you the SS card.

2 x 2 photo of you: Carefully read the detailed instructions provided on this page before uploading your photo. Be sure to follow the link provided to the Department of State's photo composition tools if you need to edit the photo in any way (i.e. cropping, rotating, resizing, etc.). **Do not skip this section.**

Form I-94 or Passport: Carefully follow the detailed instructions provided on this page.

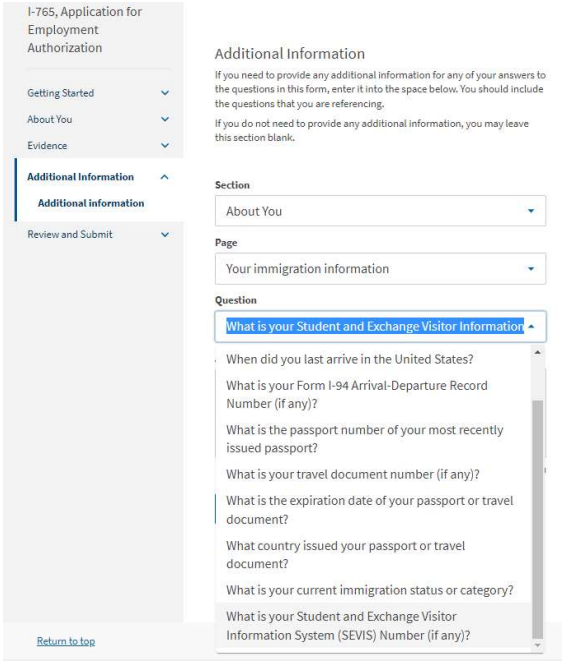
Employment Authorization Document AND Government ID: If you already have an employment authorization document (also called an EAD card), upload it AND your passport on this page. If you do not have an EAD card yet, simply upload your passport. As stated on this page, your picture, name, and date of birth must be clearly visible.

Form I-20: Carefully follow the detailed instructions on this page to properly upload your I-20. **The I-20 MUST be signed by you and your advisor on the first page and have a STEM OPT endorsement on the second page. If you do not have a STEM OPT endorsement on the second page, talk to your ISS advisor immediately.**

College Degree: Upload your official transcripts showing your STEM degree conferral. Your official transcript must be requested from DePaul Central here: https://offices.depaul.edu/depaul-central/records/transcripts/Pages/default.aspx

Institution Accreditation: You only need to complete this part if you are applying for STEM OPT based on a previous degree you received. This is very rare-- please consult your ISS advisor immediately if this applies to you.

Additional Information: You only need to complete this section if you have had other SEVIS ID numbers before. If this applies to you, click "add a response" and select the below drop-down options.



In the additional information text box, type the following with information that is relevant to you:
"Previous SEVIS ID:
SEVIS ID: NXXXXXXXXXX
Program Start Date –
Program End Date
Degree level (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD, etc.)"

Completing the I-765: Review and Submit

- **Review your application:** You will not be able to proceed past this page if there are alerts or warnings under the “alerts and warnings” section.
- **Your application summary:** All the information you provided will be displayed on this page. **Review all your answers for accuracy, even if you do not have an alert for them.**
- **Applicant’s statement:** Check the box to proceed.
- **Your signature:** Read the applicant’s declaration and certification. Check the box and type in your digital signature.
- **Pay and submit:** Follow the steps to pay the application fee. Once you pay, the application will be submitted and any edit can no longer be made. **Do not proceed if you would still like to review your answers.**

Important Reminders –Student Responsibilities

OPT STEM Application Filing:

- USCIS must receive your OPT STEM extension application **within** 60 days of when ISS makes the OPT STEM recommendation in SEVIS and **before the post-completion OPT expiration date.**
- If USCIS has any questions about your OPT STEM application or requires additional documentation, you will receive a **Request for Evidence (RFE) notice** from USCIS. If that happens, please contact your ISS advisor immediately for assistance.

OPT STEM Employment:

- If USCIS timely receives your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you can continue working **for up to 180 days beyond** the expiration of your original post-completion OPT authorization while your application is pending with USCIS. You must work **at least 20 hours per week for an E-verify employer in a paid position that directly relates** to the STEM field/degree showing on your I-20 form during the OPT STEM extension period, including the 180-day period referenced above. And if you work for more than one employer (concurrently) during the 24-month OPT STEM period, you must work at least 20 hours per week for each employer.
- If you **change employers** during your 24-month OPT STEM extension period, your **new employer(s)** must be registered in the e-verify program, have an IRS Employer Identification Number (EIN), and agree to comply with all reporting, training, supervision, evaluation, wage, documentation, and other obligations specified in the regulations and on Form I-983. **Even one day of employment with a non-E-Verify employer while on OPT STEM, including the 180-day interim period, would be unauthorized and be viewed as a status violation.**
- In addition to the 90 days of **unemployment** that you are eligible for during your initial period of post-completion OPT authorization, if USCIS approves your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you will be granted 60 more days of unemployment for the duration of your 24-month OPT STEM extension authorization (for a total of 150 days of unemployment).
- If you transfer to another school/college or start a new degree program during OPT STEM period, **your OPT STEM work authorization will end on the day that you transfer your SEVIS record**. **You must stop working at least one day before your SEVIS record is transferred and have proof that you stopped working.**

Reporting "Material" Changes in Employment

What do I need to report/submit to ISS during OPT STEM period? And how often do I need to report to ISS during OPT STEM period?

- If you change employers while your 24-month OPT STEM extension application is pending or after it is approved by USCIS, you must notify ISS within 10 days of the change and submit a Final Self-Evaluation (bottom section of page 5 of form I-983 form) for your previous employer as well as a new I-983 form Mentoring and Training Plan for your new employer. Note, if your OPT STEM application is still pending with USCIS at the time you change employers, you will be required to interfile an updated application with USCIS.
- The employer address should be the address the student reports to for work. If your site of activity and/or supervisor information changes, please remember to report to ISS within 10 days of the change. Note, DHS may conduct a site visit to ensure compliance with OPT STEM regulations, including but not limited to assessment of wage requirements. For more information about the rules and regulations regarding employer site visits, please visit the Employer Site Visits page on the STEM OPT Hub on Study in the States. For case specific questions, students should reach out to their DSO or they can contact the SEVP Response Center.
- You must also confirm your contact and employment information at the 6-month, 12-month, 18-month, and 24-month intervals (after the STEM OPT start date). **ISS will contact you via email at those intervals to request an update on employment, address, and contact information**. You will also need to submit a self-evaluation (last page of I-983 form) to ISS at the 12-month and 24-month stage or earlier, if you terminate employment. **Failure to report your employment information to ISS or to comply with unemployment restrictions will result in the automatic termination of your SEVIS record and F-1 immigration status by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.**
- If your address, legal name, or contact information changes, please **update your Campus Connect account with this information within 10 days of the change**.
- Keep your own complete records of all periods of employment and unemployment during your OPT STEM period, including the original signed and finalized I-983 form for each employer. If USCIS approves your 24-month OPT STEM extension application, you will receive a new EAD card from USCIS. Please send a copy of your new EAD card (front and back) to your ISS advisor.
- For any changes to your employment, please contact your ISS advisor by emailing iss@depaul.edu.