

## STEM OPT Considerations

- USCIS must receipt your STEM OPT application no later than 60-days from the issuance of your STEM OPT I-20 form AND before your 12-month OPT expires. If your application is returned to you, consult with an ISSS advisor to determine if you need a new I-20.
- STEM OPT applications generally take 3-5 months to approve. You are eligible to work for 180 days when your STEM is pending from the 12-month OPT expiration date as long your application was received by the 12-month OPT expiration date.
- If your STEM OPT application is still pending after 180 days, you must stop working until you EAD is approved. There is no option to expedite your application
- .Unemployment on STEM OPT is limited to an aggregate of 150 days. This means that while on 12-month OPT, if you used any of the 90 days allowed for unemployment, this is deducted from the 150 days. For example, while on 12-month OPT you use 45 days of unemployment. For STEM OPT, you have only 105 days of unemployment allowed.
- Unpaid employment is NOT allowed.
- Self-employment is NOT permitted. If you are currently on 12-month OPT and self-employed, you must establish that there is a bona-fide (real) relationship between you and your employer.
- You are allowed to work at start-ups as long as all regulatory requirements are met—there is a bona fide relationship between the employer and you as the employee: the employer adheres to the training plan requirements, remains in good standing with E-Verify, will provide compensation to the STEM OPT student commensurate to that provided to similarly situated U.S. workers, and has the resources to comply with the proposed training plan.
- You are allowed to have multiple employers as long as each employment meets the regulatory requirements and you have reported the information. See STEM OPT Reporting Requirements below for the ISSS's process.