



## OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies  
University of Pittsburgh

### CIP Codes and STEM OPT

Pursuant to an international student's F-1 visa status, employment authorization is granted for 12 months following graduation for "Practical Training." Since this training is optional, it is known as "[Optional Practical Training](#)" or "OPT." In 2008, the Department of Homeland Security announced an extension of the period of Optional Practical Training by 17 months for students who were enrolled in certain STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) degrees. This information was codified in the [Federal Register](#) on April 8, 2008. Later the period of time was extended to 24 months, again published in the [Federal Register](#) on March 11, 2016.

#### ISSUE:

Not all STEM Codes qualify an international student for the 24-month [STEM OPT extension](#). Last updated on January 21, 2022, the qualifying codes can be found at [DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List](#). In order to qualify for STEM OPT, one of the approved codes must be listed as a MAJOR on the student's Form I-20. The codes that are entered on the I-20 must align with the official [CIP](#) (Classification of Instructional Programs) codes listed in the student's PeopleSoft account.

Since it is advantageous for an international student to qualify for STEM OPT, there have been occasions when a Pitt academic unit has reviewed its CIP codes to determine whether there is a STEM-approved CIP code that would fit their program. Changing a CIP code is a process that involves academic department leadership, the Provost's Office, and the Office of the University Registrar. If an academic unit's recommended CIP code change is approved through all necessary channels, and the department officially changes its CIP code to a STEM-approved code in PeopleSoft, the students with that major can have their Form I-20 edited to reflect the correct/current CIP code.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

There are several options available to the student if the student's major CIP code is not on the approved list.

1. The student could apply for 12 months of OPT and plan to either leave the country, enroll in a different academic program, or change to a different visa type following that year.
2. The student may speak with their department to see if the department has considered whether an already-approved STEM-approved code would be applicable to their degree, or if they are willing to nominate the current CIP for addition to the government's approval.

Each of these processes is outlined on the following page.

3. If the department is unable/unwilling to make changes to the CIP code, or have it included in DHS' STEM approved list, the student will only be approved for 12 months of OPT.



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### INSTRUCTIONS FOR ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS:

If an academic department believes that one or more of their non-approved majors should be included in the list of STEM OPT approved codes, the Department can take two possible actions:

1. If there is a *different* CIP code that reflects the academic curriculum, and that CIP code already appears on the government's STEM-approved codes, the department can submit a request to University leadership to change the CIP code to match an approved code.

Instructions for taking this step at Pitt can be found in the [CIP Code Modification Process](#).

2. Submit a request to the federal government to *add* the major's CIP code to the list of STEM-approved codes.

The Department of Homeland Security reviews their approved codes annually, and the process for nominating a new code is found below:

Nominations to add a Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code to the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List may be submitted by email to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Response Center at [SEVP@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:SEVP@ice.dhs.gov), with the subject line "Attention: STEM CIP Code Nomination."

Nominations should include the following information:

- Title and six-digit code of the CIP code being nominated.
- The name, email address and telephone number of the nominator, which must be a representative of the academic department who will serve as the contact person for the request
- A description of how the field of study under this CIP code engages students in research, innovation or development of new technologies using engineering, mathematics, computer science or natural sciences (including physical, biological and agricultural sciences).

More information is available at <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/schools> (see the "DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List and CIP Code Nomination Process" tab under the "Resources" section). SEVP announced in May 2022 that August 1 will be an annual, recurring deadline for stakeholders to nominate CIP codes for potential inclusion on or removal from the DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List.

The program will announce any changes to the STEM list via a Federal Register Notice and through its communication channels, including Broadcast Messages, Study in the States blog posts and social media. Nominations submitted after August 1 will be considered in the next nomination cycle for a potential future update to the list.

### Final Notes:

This process is completely out of the hands of OIS staff. OIS is unable to make arguments for, or against, a CIP code change – this is an academic decision that can only be made at the appropriate state/university levels.

OIS will always work with any student to apply for the appropriate number of months of OPT pursuant to the CIP code that is reflected on the student's official school record.