



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

OPT / STEM OPT Employment: Direct Relationship to Major Area of Study

The federal government's regulations require that ALL employment during the OPT and STEM OPT authorization periods must be directly related to the student's major area of study.

In 2019, the federal government issued more [specific guidance](#) about how students must explain the direct relationship between students' major area of study and their employment. When reporting their employment, students must:

- Explain the regular duties of their position (2 to 4 sentences)
- Make logical connections between their job duties and their degree program / coursework in their major area of study (1 to 2 sentences)

Reporting Employment to OIS

After USCIS approves the OPT application, students must provide an explanation about the direct relationship between their major area of study and employment via the online e-form in the "OPT Report Participation" section of [My OIS](#). OIS will review students' explanations and ask for more clarification, if necessary. After reviewing students' explanations, OIS will enter students' employment information directly into the SEVIS database.

Students may review their OPT information via the federal government's SEVP Portal.

The federal government has provided some [sample explanations](#):

- **Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering:**
 - "I work full time as an Electrical Engineer at ABC Corp., a government contractor. In my job, I analyze client requirements for electrical systems and provide them with cost estimates of such systems. My work requires understanding of electrical circuit theory, which I studied in-depth at the University of ABC."
- **PhD in Computer Science:**
 - "I am employed as a Computer and Information Research Scientist at ABC Research Institute. I work as part of a team of scientists and engineers that designs experiments to test the operation of various software systems. My work builds on research in complex algorithms and machine learning, which I studied as part of my dissertation."
- **Master's degree in Music:**
 - "I am working at a hospital playing the harp in patient rooms. I also conduct hands-on harp beginner workshops for long-term patients. On average, I work at the hospital 35 hours a week. My duties directly utilize the skills and knowledge I acquired from my coursework and degree in music therapy."

Unemployment during OPT / STEM OPT

Students can be unemployed for a maximum of 90 days while on post-completion OPT. The unemployment "clock" starts on the OPT start date that is listed on your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), after your OPT application is approved. You cannot begin working without the EAD, even if your OPT is approved. If you have on-campus employment, you cannot continue working after the end date on your I-20, unless you have your EAD.

With STEM OPT authorization, you are permitted an additional 60 days of unemployment, for a total of 150 days throughout the entire 36-month period of OPT and STEM OPT.

If you have more in-depth questions, contact your OIS [Immigration Specialist](#).