Expansion Of DHS STEM Designated Degree Program List Helps Employers

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Maritza Heard
Paralegal

Nonimmigrant students studying in the U.S. are eligible for work authorization through two programs: 1) Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which is linked to coursework and granted to certain students currently studying in F-1 status, and 2) Optional Practical Training (OPT), which is most commonly leveraged for work authorization following the completion of a degree program.

Each F-1 student is eligible to utilize OPT for a 12-month period either before or after completion of their studies. F-1 students enrolled in STEM degree programs are eligible for an additional 24-month period of employment authorization, provided their employers are E-Verify participants.

On July 12, 2023, eight STEM fields of study were added to the STEM Designated Degree Program List by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The STEM Designated Degree Program List now includes the following degree fields:

1. Landscape Architecture (04.0601)
2. Institutional Research (13.0608)
3. Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering Technology/Technician (15.0407)
4. Composite Materials Technology/Technician (15.0617)

5. Linguistics and Computer Science (30.4801)
6. Developmental and Adolescent Psychology (42.2710)
7. Geospatial Intelligence (43.0407)
8. Demography and Population Studies (45.0501)

Nonimmigrant students studying in these areas are now eligible to apply for a 24-month extension of post-completion OPT.

Due to the tight timelines involved with employees in F-1 status, employers who act proactively are better positioned to ensure the retention of foreign national talent.

This article was co-authored by Tieranny Cutler, an independent contract attorney.