



International Travel FAQs for Students on OPT and STEM OPT

You can travel internationally during your OPT period and can be granted reentry in F-1 status if you have the appropriate documentation.

Things to consider prior to traveling internationally

- During the post-completion OPT and STEM OPT periods, employment in your major field of study is the basis for maintaining F-1 status. If you do not have a job, travel outside of the U.S. is *not* recommended.
- Exceeding unemployment limits while outside the U.S. will make you ineligible for admission in F-1 status.
- [Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\)](#) officers have the right to deny entry if they do not think you meet all admissibility criteria.

Documents needed for re-entry

- Your current **I-20, signed for travel** by an ISSS advisor (p. 2) within the last six months. If you are employed, ISSS recommends your OPT I-20 reflect your most recent employment.
- **Passport** valid for at least six months beyond re-entry date.
- **Valid F-1 student visa** (except for Canadian citizens).
- **Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD)**.
- **Documentation of current OPT/STEM OPT employment** or pending employment (e.g., offer letter, pay statements, W-2).

FAQs

Q: Can I travel with a pending OPT or STEM OPT extension?

A: If you are reentering *before* your F-1 program end date or current EAD expiration date, then reentry is not an issue. However, if you are reentering *after* your F-1 program end date or current EAD expiration date, then travel is not recommended due to these associated risks.

Risks

1. If USCIS approves your OPT application while you are traveling, you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to reenter the United States.
2. USCIS may mail you a Request for Evidence (RFE) while you are away.
3. If your post-completion OPT or STEM OPT application is denied while you are outside of the U.S., you won't be permitted to reenter the U.S. in F-1 status and you will lose the option of apply for the post-completion or the OPT STEM extension benefit.

If you need to travel either after your F-1 program end date but before your OPT has been approved, or after your post-completion OPT end date but before your STEM extension has been approved, make sure to carry your I-20 recommending OPT or STEM OPT, along with the receipt notice from USCIS as evidence that you have filed for the OPT/STEM OPT benefit (and your expired post-completion OPT EAD, if applicable).

Q: My travel signature has expired. How do I get another one?

A: If you lost your I-20 or need a new I-20 with a valid travel signature, submit the *I-20 Reprint Request* e-form in the [MyISSS Portal](#) (see [Immigration & Academic-Related Forms](#)). Then, print your new I-20 and sign page 1 with wet ink. Keep all past I-20s for your records.

Q: My F-1 visa has expired. Can I renew it while on OPT?

A: Yes, you can apply for a new F-1 student visa while on OPT, provided you have a valid EAD and evidence of current or pending employment. Demonstrating non-immigrant intent is crucial during OPT. See page 2 of the handout [Visa Renewal Information for Students and Scholars](#).

Q: How long can I stay outside the U.S. on OPT or STEM OPT?

A: Even with a job offer and valid EAD, an absence greater than 5 months may not be considered temporary and you may be denied reentry. Remember that you may be asked to submit proof that you have not exceeded the unemployment limits prior to being granted admission to the U.S.

Q: Can I leave the U.S. if I have applied for another status (e.g. H-1B)?

A: Do NOT leave the U.S. if you have a pending change of status application as it will likely be considered abandoned. Consult an immigration attorney if you have questions about this. ISSS advises students in F-1 status with pending or approved H-1B petitions to discuss any international travel plans with the official who filed the H-1B petition. It is advisable to exercise caution when deciding whether to travel abroad after an H-1B has been filed.

Q: Can I travel during the Cap-Gap Period?

A: International travel during the cap-gap period is not recommended due to the lack of a valid EAD and potential impacts to your H-1B petition. Discuss any international travel plans with the official who filed the H-1B petition.

Q: Can I re-enter the U.S. after I have completed my post-completion OPT or STEM OPT?

A: You cannot re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status during the grace period that follows the completion of your post-completion OPT or STEM OPT period.

Q: Does time spent abroad during OPT count as unemployment?

A: If you are currently employed on OPT and have reported your employment in the [SEVP Portal/SEVIS](#), then you will not accrue unemployment abroad. If you have not reported employment, your days outside the country will count towards unemployment on OPT.

Q: Do I need to pull my I-94 Arrival Record after reentering?

A: Review your [I-94 arrival record](#) every time you re-enter the U.S. to ensure that your entry was recorded properly. Check your biographical information and your Class of Admission (**F-1**) and Admit until Date (**D/S**).

Q: Can I travel to third-country destinations (e.g., not home or the U.S.)?

A: Depending on the country you are traveling to and/or through, you may require a transit or tourist visa. Consult the appropriate embassy or foreign consular office to determine if an

additional visa is necessary. ISSS cannot give advice on visa procedures for other countries.

Q: Can I reenter the U.S. if I am maintaining my F-1 status while on post completion OPT by volunteering at least 20 hours a week in my field of study?

A: [This is a grey area](#). You must have proof of employment or pending employment when you reenter the U.S. It is unclear whether the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at the U.S. port-of-entry will consider your volunteer employment sufficient to grant reentry to the U.S.

Q: Can I reenter in another status (e.g., B visitor)?

A: Do NOT reenter the U.S. in another status (e.g., B) if you intend to work on OPT. You must be admitted in F-1 status to work on OPT.

Additional Travel Resources

- [ICE Travel FAQ](#)
- [Visa Renewal](#)
- [Printing a Copy of Your I-94](#)

For further guidance, consult with ISSS [advisors](#).