



International Travel FAQ for Students on OPT

As an F-1 student using the OPT benefit, can I exit and re-enter the U.S. during the OPT period?

Yes, the [U.S. government guidance](#) states, "If USCIS has approved your OPT you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States, in addition to your Form I-20, valid passport and visa, and a letter of employment if you have one. If you exceed the limits on unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status."

- Despite carrying the recommended documentation, Customs and Border Protection officers have the [right to deny entry](#) if they do not think one meets all admissibility criteria.

As an F-1 student using the OPT benefit, what do I need to re-enter the U.S. after traveling abroad?

- Your current I-20, signed in the last **six** months by an ISSS advisor.
 - Your re-entry to the U.S. must be within six months from the last time the I-20 was signed.
- A passport that is valid six months beyond the date of re-entry to the U.S.
- A valid F-1 student visa (Citizens of Canada do not need a visa)
 - If you need to renew your F-1 student visa while on OPT, ISSS recommends you speak with an ISSS advisor to discuss the possible risks involved.
 - If you are traveling to Canada, Mexico, and the adjacent islands and you have an expired visa, contact ISSS to see if you are eligible for [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#) (AVR).
- Your valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD card)
 - Because you must have a valid EAD in order to re-enter the U.S., you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. after your original OPT EAD has expired if you have a pending OPT STEM Extension application.
- Proof of employment in your major field of study, either pending or ongoing

If my F-1 visa has expired, can I re-enter the U.S. in a different status?

If you re-enter the U.S. in any status other than F-1 while on OPT, your F-1 status will be invalidated and you will lose the OPT benefit.

Can I renew my F-1 student visa while on OPT or the OPT STEM Extension?

Yes. Students who are on OPT or the OPT STEM Extension may apply for an F-1 student visa. You will need a valid EAD as well as evidence that you already have a job or will have a job in the U.S. in your major field of study, along with the other required visa renewal documents.

When you apply for your F-1 student visa, you should have the following:

- A valid passport
- An I-20 signed in the last six months
- You do not need to pay the SEVIS fee again. Please be sure you take your [I-901 SEVIS fee receipt](#).
- A valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD card)
- An official job offer letter.
 - ISSS recommends the offer letter show your salary, location of employment, whether or not the job is full-time or part-time, job duties, etc. You should be prepared to clearly explain how the job is related to your field of study.

If you need to renew your F1 student visa while on OPT, ISSS recommends you speak with an ISSS advisor to discuss the possible risks involved.

- OPT is a benefit of the non-immigrant F-1 status which means if you indicate immigrant intent to the U.S. consular official, your F-1 visa could be denied. Now that you are finished with your academic program and are on OPT, you must be prepared to clearly [demonstrate non-immigrant intent](#).

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

This is a grey area. You must have proof of *employment* or pending *employment* when you re-enter the U.S. It is unclear whether or not the United States Customs and Border Protection officer at the U.S. port-of-entry will consider your volunteer employment sufficient enough to grant re-entry to the U.S. as an F-1 student on OPT. ISSS advises students to take this into consideration before they travel internationally.

Can I re-enter the U.S. after I have completed my OPT?

Students who were in F-1 status cannot re-enter the U.S. during their grace period using their F-1 visa/status.

Can I travel internationally after my employer has filed an H-1B petition for me?

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.

- Travel while the H-1B petition is pending will result in the denial of the change of status part of the H-1B petition.
- Travel after the H-1B has been approved is highly problematic.

ISSS will not advise F-1 students regarding international travel once an H-1B petition has been filed.

Can I travel during the OPT cap-gap period?

In order to re-enter the U.S. while on OPT you need to present a valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Because most students will not have a valid EAD during the cap-gap period, international travel is not recommended. International travel at this time could also negatively impact the H-1B petition. Please discuss any international travel plans with the official who filed the H-1B petition.

Will international travel while on OPT count as unemployment?

The U.S. government guidance states, "Time spent outside the United States during an approved period of post-completion OPT counts as unemployment against the 90/120-day limits, unless the student is either:

- Employed during a period of leave authorized by an employer; or
- Traveling as part of his or her employment. ([SEVP Policy Guidance 1004-03](#))

Will I get an I-94 when I re-enter the U.S.?

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has automated the Form I-94 at air and sea ports of entry. The paper form will no longer be provided to an international traveler upon arrival, except in limited circumstances. A paper I-94 is still issued at the land border ports of entry.

Where can I get a copy of my I-94?

A copy of your I-94 (record of admission) can be obtained from the [Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\) website](#). Please print your I-94 upon return and confirm the status is correct (F1) and that you are admitted for D/S (Duration of Status).

- If you encounter difficulty retrieving your I-94, please review the [ISSS handout](#) for tips.

Should the Port of Entry Officer stamp my passport?

Yes! The Port of Entry Officer should stamp your passport. The stamp should be a date stamp reflecting the date of entry and the correct port of entry. Please make sure the Port of Entry Officer also notates your status (F1), and writes D/S, which means you are admitted to the U.S. for Duration of Status.

I am currently outside the U.S. and I forgot my I-20 or the signature is more than a 6 months old! What do I do?

Please submit the [I-20 Reprint Request Form](#) and indicate “Travel” as the reason for the reprint. In the “Additional Comments” section, please indicate the date you intend to re-enter the U.S. so ISSS can determine if there is enough time to send the document.

If ISSS cannot provide you with a new I-20 prior to your re-entry, then you may be provisionally admitted for a period of only 30 days with a form I-515. You will have 30 days to mail in Form I-515 with whatever missing documents you had at the time of entry. If you receive an I-515, contact ISSS immediately.