

Travel Guidelines for F-1 Students

Disclaimer: The Undergraduate Admissions – Immigration Office has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice. Our staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult.

Travel within the United States:

If you are traveling within the United States, make sure you carry the documents listed below. If you are crossing state borders, take the original documents with you. Otherwise, if you are traveling within Texas, it is advised that you leave the originals at home but have copies with you to minimize risk of losing original documents.

- Passport
- Valid F-1 visa (not required for Canadian students)
- I-94 (printed from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/>)
- I-20

Traveling to Home Country:

If you are traveling to your home country, you will need the following documents:

- Passport (valid for at least 6 months after you return to the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa (not required for Canadian students)
- Valid I-20 with travel signature. Travel signatures are good for 12 months while you are a student and 6 months while on OPT.
- Financial documents
- Students currently on OPT will need additional items (see pages 3 and 4)

Reminder: If you have been outside the U.S. for 5 months or longer, you will need a new I-20 to reenter the U.S.

Tip: Keep your original documents with you at all times but carry copies with you on your phone in case of an emergency.

Traveling to Another Country:

If you are traveling to a country other than your home country, [check to see if you need a visa](#) to enter that country. PLAN AHEAD: It often takes several weeks to process a visa application.

Traveling While on Optional Practical Training:

Travel recommendations are based on your stage in the OPT process. See pages 3 and 4 for a detailed guide.

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Can I travel outside and reenter the US if my SEVIS record is in terminated status?

Possibly, but first discuss your travel plans with the Undergraduate Admissions – Immigration Office before leaving the U.S. If we have requested a correction request or data fix to reactivate your SEVIS record, we can add the correction request or help desk ticket number to your I-20 and report your pending travel to the Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). However, there is no guarantee that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection will allow you to reenter the U.S. even with this notation on your I-20. They may require you to go through secondary screening to determine whether you are eligible to return to the U.S.

If your SEVIS record is terminated and your visa is expired, SEVP recommends that you do not travel outside the U.S. until your SEVIS record returns to active status. You may be unable to renew your visa and, therefore, reenter the U.S. if your SEVIS record is terminated.

What should I do if my visa is about to expire or has expired?

If your visa will soon expire or has expired, you must renew your visa before returning to the U.S. We recommend renewing your visa in your home country. If you cannot renew your visa in your home country, you may contact another country's [embassy/consulate](#) and find out if they will review your application. Please keep in mind processing time and possible delays. You will need the following documents with you:

- Passport (valid for at least 6 months after you will return to the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa (not required for Canadian students)
- Valid I-20 with travel signature. Travel signatures are good for 12 months while you are a student and 6 months while on OPT.
- Financial documents
- Proof of full-time enrollment (enrollment verification from Registrar' Office or copy of transcripts)
- Any other items required by your specific embassy

Automatic Revalidation: The **only** exception to traveling on an expired visa might be if you visit Mexico, Canada, or an [adjacent island](#) where you may be able to take advantage of a process called [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#). You must have a valid travel signature before you leave the U.S. Automatic revalidation requires you to **retain your I-94 number/card** for exit and entry to the U.S. **DO NOT** surrender the I-94 card when you leave the U.S. You will be ineligible if you do. Please also note that you cannot be a citizen of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, or Syria. Citizens of these listed countries must have a valid visa to enter the U.S.

It is highly recommended that you print the information on [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#) to show to a border patrol officer if needed.

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Travel While on OPT: Decision Guide

Please refer to the chart below for travel suggestions and documentation needed.

Scenario	Travel Recommended?	Travel Risk Level	What You Need
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and <u>you are still a student</u> (I-20 end date has not passed).	Yes	None, as long as you reenter the U.S. at least two weeks before your I-20 end date	-Valid I-20 travel signature -Valid passport & visa (if applicable)
Applied for OPT. Application is pending and <u>you are no longer a student</u> (I-20 end date has passed).	Yes	Low – immigration officials do not have to let you back into the US solely for the purpose of OPT. It is <u>critical</u> that you arrange to continue receiving mail at the address listed on your I-765 application and that someone can forward you the EAD card when it is received. <i>If it is close to the time your EAD should be approved, do no travel. Consult the Undergraduate Admissions – Immigration Office before making travel plans.</i>	-Valid I-20 travel signature -Valid passport & visa (if applicable) -Proof that you have applied for OPT (i.e., your receipt notice) - EAD card if approved while outside the US
OPT application is approved and you have received your EAD, but you do not have a job offer.	Perhaps	Moderate – if you decide to travel, you should take proof that you are actively looking for a position (e.g., proof that you have submitted resumes or upcoming interviews). Even if you have this proof, you may be denied reentry into the US as immigration officials do not have to let you back into the US solely for the purpose of looking for a job.	-Valid I-20 travel signature -Valid passport & visa (if applicable) -EAD card -Proof that you are actively looking for a job
OPT application is approved, you have received your EAD and a job offer, but the position has not started.	Yes	Low – if you decide to travel, make sure that you take a job offer letter on official letterhead that includes your expected start date with you	-Valid I-20 travel signature -Valid passport & visa (if applicable) -EAD card -Job offer letter

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Scenario	Travel Recommended?	Travel Risk Level	What You Need
OPT application is approved, you have received your EAD, and you have begun work.	Yes	None – request a letter from your employer indicating that they approve your travel and listing your expected return date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Valid I-20 travel signature -Valid passport & visa (if applicable) -EAD card -Letter from employer
Original OPT period has ended, and you are in a period of H-1B cap gap.	Generally, no	High – your F-1 status has technically ended. Customs and Border Protection routinely denies entry on these cases. However, depending on the timing of your change of status, you may be able to travel. You must consult your filing attorney on this option. Undergraduate Admissions – Immigration cannot advise on these situations.	As required