



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

Office of International Education
International Student and Scholar Services

International Travel during Optional Practical Training (including the 17-Month OPT STEM Extension)

While your OPT application is PENDING with USCIS

- **I have sent my OPT application to the USCIS Service Center. Can I travel outside the U.S. while I wait for my EAD card to arrive?**

If you travel outside the U.S. and your request for Post-Completion OPT is still **pending** at the USCIS Service Center, you may re-enter the U.S. to search for employment **BEFORE your I-20 expires** (Refer to #5 on your I-20).

If your request for a 17-month OPT STEM Extension is pending at the USCIS Service Center and your Post-Completion OPT EAD card has expired, then you may NOT re-enter the U.S.

- **I have a tourist visa (B-1/2) that is valid for 10 years. Can I re-enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while waiting for the EAD card and then start to work once I receive my EAD card?**

NO!! If you leave the U.S. and re-enter on a tourist visa (B-1/2), you will not be in F-1 student status or eligible for F-1 benefits. Therefore, your OPT application and EAD card will no longer be valid, and you will not be eligible to work.

After your OPT application has been APPROVED

- **My OPT application has been approved by the USCIS Service Center. Can I travel and then re-enter the U.S.?**

If your OPT has been approved, you may only travel outside the U.S. if you have a written job offer AND your valid EAD card.

- **What documents do I need to re-enter the U.S.?**

- A **letter from your employer** on official letterhead verifying that you are employed under OPT or a letter from an employer offering you a job
- Your **I-20 with OPT recommendation and a valid signature on page 3**. The signature must not be more than six months old when you re-enter the U.S.
- Your valid **Employment Authorization Document (EAD card)**
- Your **valid passport**
- A **valid F-1 visa stamp** (except for re-entry from Canada, Mexico and contiguous territories after short trips of less than 30 days). *NOTE: Please read the “Travel to Canada/Mexico and Re-Entry to the U.S.” handout (available at www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/traveltocanada.html) to be sure you meet all conditions for re-entry.*
- **Note: If you have dependents, they must also carry a copy of your EAD card and employment letter.**

- **My EAD card says “Not Valid for Re-entry to the U.S.” What does that mean?**

It only means that your EAD card is not a U.S. visa stamp.

- **The completion date in Section 5 (page 1) of my I-20 is my graduation date and that date has passed. Is this a problem for me if I have a valid EAD Card?**

NO. When you have an EAD card, the validity of your I-20 is automatically extended until the ending date of your OPT. Therefore, with proof of employment and your EAD card, you can travel with your I-20 even if the completion date in Section 5 (page 1) has passed.

- **Do I still need to get my I-20 signed by ISSS during my OPT?**

YES! During OPT, you need to have your I-20 signed every six months for travel outside the U.S. For more information on how to get your I-20 signed, please read the handout “Maintaining F-1 Status While on OPT”:

www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/documents/MaintainingStatusWhileonOPT-LH-5-10.pdf

- **The F-1 visa stamp in my passport has expired, but I want to travel outside the U.S. while on OPT. Do I need to get a new visa stamp to return to the U.S.?**

- If you are visiting Canada, Mexico or some Caribbean Islands and staying less than 30 days (and you are not a citizen of Cuba, Iran, Sudan or Syria): NO. You do not need a new F-1 visa stamp. You may re-enter the U.S. with your expired F-1 visa stamp, letter from your employer verifying your employment, valid passport, valid EAD card and valid I-20 (which must have a DSO signature on page 3 signed within the past 6 months).
- If you will travel elsewhere: YES. You will need a new F-1 visa stamp. You should go to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and apply for a new F-1 visa stamp so that you can re-enter the U.S. to resume your OPT.

- **In what ways is my application for a new F-1 visa stamp affected by being on OPT?**

While on OPT, you are still considered to be in F-1 student status and can apply for an F-1 visa stamp. However, while on OPT, the risk of denial of your application may be higher than when you were a student. This is because the Consular Officer may think that your OPT is an avenue for you to immigrate to the U.S. You must prove non-immigrant intent to qualify for an F-1 visa. If the Consular Officer is not convinced of your intent to return home after your OPT ends, your F-1 visa application may be denied.

- **What documents do I need to apply for a new F-1 visa stamp at the U.S. Consulate while on OPT?**

- Your employment letter (Note: It must include salary, location, job duties and beginning date.)
 - Your valid passport
 - Your I-20 with OPT recommendation and unexpired signature on page 3
 - Your EAD card
- Note: You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will help you find a job in your home country.

We also recommend that you review the “Applying for a U.S. Visa” handout on our website at www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/visa2.html

- **Does travel outside the U.S. affect the way periods of unemployment during OPT are counted?**

Time spent outside the U.S. while on OPT still counts as unemployment if you do not have a job. If you have a job, time spent outside the U.S. does not count as unemployment.

- **Can I travel outside the U.S. if my EAD card has expired and I am waiting for my new EAD card showing the 17-Month OPT STEM Extension?**

NO! You must wait for your new EAD card before you travel outside the U.S.

- **Can I travel outside the U.S. if my EAD card has expired, but I am eligible for the Cap Gap Extension because my H-1B is pending or has been approved?**

Since your EAD card has expired, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student during the Cap Gap Extension. Therefore, you will need to apply for an H-1B visa stamp and enter the U.S. as an H-1B Temporary Worker.