



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

Office of International Education
International Student and Scholar Services

Travel during 17-Month Extension of Optional Practical Training

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?**

YES. If you travel outside the U.S. and your request for OPT is still **pending** at the USCIS Service Center, you may re-enter the U.S. to search for employment. To avoid problems at the border, be sure to return to the U.S. before your I-20 expires.

- **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, we recommend that you only travel outside the U.S. if you have a written job offer. If you have a job or a job offer and EAD card, you may travel and re-enter the U.S. to continue working at the same job.

- **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 an ISSS Advisor's 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 < 30 days). PLEASE NOTE: *Citizens of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria may not re-enter the U.S. with an*

expired F-1 visa. Also, individuals who have a U.S. visa application pending at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate will not be able to re-enter the U.S. Last, individuals whose U.S. visa application was denied will not be able to re-enter the U.S.

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.

- **How can I get my I-20 signed by ISSS if I am not in Buffalo during my OPT?**

- ✓ Send the following documents to ISSS via U.S. mail or any express courier:
 - Your EAD Card
 - Pages 1 and 3 of your current I-20
 - Completed International Student Data Form (available at www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/pdf_files/StudentDataFormOPT.pdf)
- ✓ Include a prepaid return envelope, express courier label or the name of a friend whom you authorize to collect your I-20 for you.

- **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 or Mexico and staying less than 30 days (and you are *not* a citizen of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, 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. Note: Make an appointment before your trip!

- **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?**

- ✓ An official letter offering employment and showing salary, location, job duties and beginning date.
- ✓ Your valid passport
- ✓ Your I-20 with OPT recommendation and unexpired ISSS Advisor's signature on page 3
- ✓ Financial documents
- ✓ 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.

- **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, 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.

- **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 Extension?**

NO! You must wait for your new EAD card before you travel outside the U.S. 10/08

