



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

Office of International Education
International Student and Scholar Services

Travel during Optional Practical Training After Completion of Studies

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 you leave the U.S.!

- **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.