



University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

Office of International Education
International Student and Scholar Services

FAQs Regarding Travel During Optional Practical Training After Completion of Studies

While your OPT application is PENDING at the 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 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-2) that is valid for 10 years. Can't I just re-enter the U.S. on my tourist visa while waiting for the EAD card and then start to work with the card once I get it?**
NO!! If you leave the U.S. and re-enter on a tourist visa, you will not be in F-1 student status or eligible for F-1 benefits. Therefore, if you re-enter the U.S. in B-2 status, your OPT application and EAD card will not be valid for work authorization.

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.?**
ONLY IF YOU HAVE A JOB OR A JOB OFFER!!!
 - If your OPT has been approved and you depart the U.S. **before you get a job, your OPT ends and you cannot re-enter the U.S.**
 - If your OPT has been approved and you have a job or a job offer, 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 **SEVIS I-20 for OPT with 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**

(continued on next page)

- ✓ 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, Iraq, Libya, 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.*

- **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 period. Therefore, with proof of employment, **and** your EAD card, you may 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 year of OPT?**
YES. During your OPT year, you need to have your I-20 signed every six months for travel outside the U.S.

- **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, Iraq, Libya, 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 your 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 will need to go to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and obtain a new F-1 visa stamp to be eligible to re-enter the U.S.

- **In what ways is my application for a new F-1 visa 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 official is not convinced of your intention to return home, your F-1 visa application may be denied.

- **What documents do I need to show at the U.S. Consulate for a new F-1 visa stamp while on OPT?**
 - ✓ An official letter offering employment and showing salary, location, job duties and beginning date. The letter should indicate that you will be working only during your OPT period and that you will stop working on your OPT ending date.
 - ✓ Your valid passport
 - ✓ Your SEVIS I-20 – with unexpired DSO signature on page 3
 - ✓ Financial documents
 - ✓ Your EAD card
 - ✓ You should also be prepared to discuss how this job experience will help you find a job in your home country.

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