



Traveling While on OPT or STEM OPT

This document applies to F-1 students who have applied for or have been approved for OPT or STEM OPT by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and want to leave and re-enter the U.S. **after** the completion of their academic program.

Before the completion of your academic program, the usual procedures for travel still apply. **Review the standard travel guidance and travel signature instructions [here](#).**

Remember, your entry into the U.S. is the decision of Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Re-entry to the U.S. is never guaranteed.

Travel While OPT Application is Pending

Students with pending OPT applications often face additional issues upon reentry. Multicultural Affairs generally does not recommend traveling with a pending OPT application. Please contact your DSO before traveling to understand the risks and discuss your situation.

Important Reminders:

- OPT applications must be filed from inside of the U.S. Do not depart the U.S. before your OPT application is filed, especially if it is after your I-20 program end date.
- When you submit your OPT application to USCIS, you must provide a U.S. mailing address that is valid for 3-4 months. USCIS will send notices and your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) here. If you are outside of the U.S., you may miss these important notices.
- USCIS may issue a notice to appear for a [biometrics services appointment](#) at a local Application Support Center. In this case, you would be expected to appear in person to provide biometrics.
- If your OPT is approved while you are outside of the U.S., you may be expected to have your EAD for re-entry to the U.S.
- If your OPT is denied while outside of the U.S., you will not be allowed re-entry in F-1 status.
- If your F-1 visa is expired or will expire while you are outside of the U.S., it is very difficult to renew your F-1 visa while your OPT is pending. We recommend you have your EAD before you attempt to apply for a new F-1 visa at the U.S. Embassy.

Even with the required documentation, Multicultural Affairs can never guarantee entry to the United States as the decision is up to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer at the U.S. Port of Entry.

Please be aware that if you do choose to travel while your application is pending and have difficulties returning to the U.S., Multicultural Affairs may be of limited assistance.



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The chart below may help you decide whether you should travel internationally:

When are you traveling and re-entering the U.S.?	What is your OPT application status?	Documents needed to re-enter the U.S.:
Before I-20 program end date	Pending	- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the US) - Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport* - I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months) - I-797c Receipt Notice showing that USCIS is reviewing your OPT application
After I-20 program end date	Pending	Multicultural Affairs does not recommend international travel due to the risks discussed above.
After I-20 program end date	Approved	- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the US) - Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport* - I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months) - EAD - Proof of OPT employment

*The visa stamp requirement does not apply to Canadian citizens.

Travel After OPT is Approved

If your post-completion OPT has been approved (your EAD has been issued by USCIS) and you have a job or a job offer, you may leave and re-enter the US in order to begin/resume employment. In order to have the best chance of re-entering the US without problems, you should be sure you have the following documents:

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months)
- EAD
- Evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer

If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa, you should be sure to have your EAD and evidence that you already have a job in the US or that you have a job offer in addition to the usual documents required for a visa application.

Travel While OPT STEM Extension Application is Pending

If your post-completion OPT has not expired yet, you can travel as usual on your approved OPT. If your OPT has expired and your STEM application is still under review, we would recommend you do not travel outside the US. If you believe you must travel, you should take:

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the US)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months)



Multicultural Affairs Student Affairs and Campus Inclusion

- OPT EAD
- I-797c Receipt Notice showing that USCIS is reviewing your STEM application
- Evidence that you already have a job in the US or that you have a job offer
- (suggested) a copy of your I-983 training plan

Please note it is extremely difficult to renew your F-1 visa while your STEM application is pending, we recommend you only try to renew your F-1 visa after the STEM EAD is issued and you have it in hand along with the other evidence required to apply for a visa application.

Travel After OPT STEM Extension is Approved

Students who wish to travel outside the US during their OPT STEM Extension should take the following with them:

- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the US)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months)
- EAD issued for the STEM extension
- Letter of Employment or Offer Letter from employer
- (suggested) a copy of your I-983 training plan

A Note on Visa Renewals

Please be aware that an F-1 visa renewal is not guaranteed, and you could find yourself subject to delays, including administrative processing.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Multicultural Affairs.

Note: This publication is not intended to provide legal advice but to provide information on legal matters. If you are looking to work with an immigration attorney for any reasons, please contact [the State Bar of Wisconsin](#). You can also check [this website](#) for advice provided by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA).