

TRAVEL GUIDELINES FOR OPT AND STEM OPT

Alumni on post-completion OPT or the STEM extension remain in F-1 status throughout OPT. If you travel abroad in this period, you re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. You are eligible to re-apply for an F-1 visa if needed. You should remember that entry to the U.S. in F-1 status and visa approval require that you demonstrate non-immigrant, temporary intent in the U.S.

Some people get confused or worried because their Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card may say, "Not valid for reentry to U.S." This means the card cannot be used to enter the U.S. alone by itself. The EAD card must be presented in addition to other immigration documents, like valid F-1 visa and signed I-20, for re-entry to the U.S.

[ICE FAQ - Travel and OPT](#)

Q: Can I re-enter if my request for OPT is pending?

A: Yes, but traveling during this time should be undertaken with caution. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away, however, so you would want to make sure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to your DSO and on the application and would be able to send in requested documents. Also, if USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States. Like a request for further information, USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address.

Q: Can I reenter if I left while on OPT?

A: If USCIS has approved your OPT you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States, in addition to your Form I-20, valid passport and visa, and a letter of employment if you have one. If you exceed the limits on unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status.

TRAVEL WITH PENDING OPT

It is easiest to wait to travel internationally until your OPT has been approved. That way you can make sure you have received your EAD card from USCIS in hand before traveling outside the U.S.

If your OPT or STEM extension is still pending with USCIS and you decide to travel, you should carry your receipt notice (I-797). We recommend having someone you trust check your mail while you are abroad, so they can send your EAD card to you when it is approved, so you have it in hand for re-entry.

To re-enter the U.S while your OPT is pending. you should carry:

- OPT I-20 with travel signature on page 2
- valid F-1 visa (or else you need to renew the visa)
- passport valid at least six months into future

- I-797 receipt notice

TRAVEL WITH APPROVED OPT

If your OPT is approved, you should take your EAD card with you when you travel internationally. You will also need to carry evidence of your training or employment. This may include a job offer letter, paystubs, or an employment letter.

If possible, OIA recommends you ask your supervisor (or HR as appropriate) for an employment letter confirming your international travel plans. This letter should be on company letterhead and include the following:

- original hire date
- job title and salary
- brief description of duties (should be directly related to the field of study)

To re-enter the U.S. while your OPT is approved you should carry:

- Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- evidence of your employment or training (job offer, paystubs, letter of employment)
- I-20 with a new travel signature *every six months*
- valid F-1 visa (or else you need to renew the visa)
- passport valid at least six months into future

I-20 TRAVEL SIGNATURE

During OPT and STEM OPT, I-20 travel signatures are valid for only six months. We recommend you keep the signature up-to-date in case of emergency travel.

To request a new travel signature, please email OIA@pratt.edu with the subject, "Travel signature for: Name, Pratt ID#, SEVIS# N00XXXXXXXX" (from your I-20). The I-20 will be emailed to you. You should then print it on regular paper, hand-sign the bottom of page 1, and carry the paper I-20 with you when you travel.

F-1 VISA RENEWAL

If your visa has expired, you must renew your entry visa in order to re-enter the U.S. You are not able to renew your visa inside the U.S. Visas are issued at [U.S. consulates](#), which are only outside the country. We do not recommend leaving specifically to renew your visa, unless you have another reason to travel, as you may remain legally in F-1 status with an expired visa.

When you travel outside the U.S with an expired visa, you need to make plans and allow time for visa application and approval before your planned re-entry date. We generally recommend that you apply for your visa at the consulate nearest to your home residence. It may be possible

to apply at a consulate in a different country, such as Canada or Mexico, but there are some risks with this. You need to prove ties to your home country during your visa application, and it is easier to do so when you apply at your local consulate. In addition, if your visa is denied, you must return to your local consulate to reapply again.

Each consulate has different procedures for F-1 students applying for another visa, so please make sure you follow the local instructions. In general, you should be prepared with the following documents:

- passport valid at least six months into the future
- most recent I-20 with valid travel signature
- EAD card
- evidence of your employment/training
- unofficial or official transcript from the Registrar
- proof of reason for travel (if applying at a consulate other than your local consulate)
- any evidence of temporary intent in the U.S. or ties to your home country, such as property or permanent job offer in home country, if applicable

The majority of student visa re-applications are successful, since you already demonstrated eligibility with your first visa approval. Remember that F-1 is a non-immigrant, temporary status. As with the first visa application, students should demonstrate non-immigrant, temporary intent, and show ties to their home country. If your visa is denied, you should request the denial reason in writing from the consulate and consult OIA@pratt.edu.

VISA REVALIDATION

The requirement to have a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. has one exception. F-1 status holders with expired visas may be eligible to travel for short trips to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The benefit is called [Automatic Revalidation](#) of visa and allows return to the U.S. despite the visa being expired. The following requirements must be met:

- you are currently in F-1 status
- the trip is 30 days or less
- you only travel to Canada, Mexico, and/or Caribbean [adjacent islands](#)
- you are not applying for a new F-1 entry visa during the trip

If you are going to use Automatic Revalidation, we recommend bringing with you:

- I-20 with valid travel signature
- most [recent I-94 record](#)
- expired visa in passport
- passport valid at least six months into the future
- print-out of [Automatic Revalidation](#) rule