

Travel and OPT

Students have many questions about whether or not it is okay to travel while OPT is processing and/or during the OPT period. Here are the rules about travel and OPT, depending on your situation.

1. During your final semester, after you submit your Post-Completion OPT application:

You can travel and reenter the U.S. as a student during your final registration semester. You will use the new I-20 with the OPT recommendation printed on page 2, along with the other regular travel document (<https://www.kysu.edu/academics/college-acs/school-of-face/international/current-students-travel-plans-abroad.php>). If you plan to return to the U.S. **before** the expiration date of the new I-20 (your program completion date), it does not matter whether your OPT application is still processing or is approved, and whether or not you have a job offer yet.

2. After graduation, while your Post-Completion OPT application is processing:

After your final semester ends, you can travel and reenter the U.S. while your post-completion OPT application is processing, with or without a job offer. You must carry your OPT receipt notice from USCIS, your OPT I-20, and the other regular travel document (<https://www.kysu.edu/academics/college-acs/school-of-face/international/current-students-travel-plans-abroad.php>). **However, be aware of these risks:**

- USCIS sometimes sends a request to OPT applicants asking for more information or for you to correct a problem with your documentation. These requests are sent by postal mail, so it might be difficult for you to respond if you are not inside the U.S. It is your application, so KSU or Office of International Affairs does not have the authority to respond for you.
- After your OPT application is approved, you must also have proof of employment and your EAD in order to reenter the U.S. If the OPT application is approved while you are abroad, and if you do not yet have proof of employment or your EAD, this could jeopardize your return to the U.S.
- You must have a valid F-1 visa to travel during the OPT year (except for short trips to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean). It is risky to apply for an F-1 visa while your OPT application is pending. If your current F-1 visa is expired, we recommend waiting until your OPT application is approved and you have a job offer before applying for a new F-1 visa.

3. After graduation, and after your Post-Completion OPT application is approved:

After graduation, if your post-completion OPT has been approved and your EAD issued, you can travel and reenter the U.S. **only if you have proof of employment.** If you are still looking for practical training opportunities, you should not travel internationally.

For travel, carry the following documents with you:

- OPT I-20 signed for travel by an international student adviser within the last **6 months**
- Proof of employment (see above) in your field of study (letter of employment, written job offer)
- EAD card (on the EAD card, there is a statement “Not Valid For Reentry.” This means the EAD card cannot be used by itself for reentry to the U.S.)
- Valid passport
- Unexpired F-1 visa

You can apply for an F-1 visa during your OPT year. Follow the regular procedures to apply for an F-1 visa (<https://www.kysu.edu/academics/college-ac/school-of-ace/international/prospective-students-prepare-for-your-travel-entry-to-us.php>) outside of the U.S. For the F-1 visa application, plan to provide the documents listed above, as well as proof of financial ability to stay in the U.S. and proof of continuing ties to your home country.

After the OPT approval start date, time spent outside the U.S. will count as unemployment against the 90-day limit. However, travel while employed either during a vacation authorized by an employer or as part of your employment will not count as unemployment. Please keep your primary DSO informed of any travel plans while on OPT that may affect your status.

If you have dependents in F-2 status who will travel without you, be sure they carry a photocopy of your EAD card and proof of your employment along with their updated F-2 I-20 that is properly signed for travel.

4. During your pending or approved STEM OPT extension period (if applicable).

If your STEM OPT extension application is already **approved**, the travel document requirements are the same as those required during the post-completion OPT period.

If your STEM OPT extension application is **pending** with USCIS, it is okay to travel internationally. This is true even if your post-completion OPT EAD is already expired.

The preamble to the 24-month STEM OPT rule [[81 FR 13103 par. 774](#)] states:

“Students on STEM OPT extensions (including those whose application for a STEM OPT extension is pending) may travel abroad and seek reentry to the United States in F-1 status during the STEM OPT extension period if they have a valid F-1 visa that permits multiple entries and a

current Form I-20 Certificate of Eligibility endorsed for reentry by the DSO within the last six months. The student's status is determined by CBP upon admission to the United States or through a USCIS adjudication of a change-of-status petition."

It is also possible to apply for a new F-1 visa during this time. The Foreign Affairs Manual, which instructs U.S. Department of State officials regarding visa issuance, states at 9 FAM 402.5-5(N)(6)(e)

"As the STEM OPT extension is automatic for the first 180 days following regular post-completion OPT (when the student has properly filed Form I-765), the student may not necessarily have a renewed EAD. Therefore, any students having automatically authorized employment through the OPT extension may not be able to present a valid EAD when they apply to renew their visa. However, F-1 students in this situation can request an updated I-20 from the DSO, annotated for the STEM OPT extension, as well as proof that the I-765 petition was filed in a timely manner. You must confirm that the student's electronic SEVIS record contains the same information as the updated hard copy Form I-20 before issuing a visa."

For reentry to the U.S. with a pending STEM OPT application, you should carry:

- STEM OPT I-20 signed by an OIA adviser within the last **6 months**
- USCIS receipt notice for your STEM OPT application
- Proof of employment
- Valid passport
- Unexpired F-1 visa

You can apply for an F-1 visa while the STEM OPT application is pending (up to 180 days pending status). Follow the regular procedures to apply for an F-1 visa (<https://www.kysu.edu/academics/college-acs/school-of-ace/international/prospective-students-prepare-for-your-travel-entry-to-us.php>) outside of the U.S. For the F-1 visa application, plan to provide the documents listed above, as well as proof of financial ability to stay in the U.S. and proof of continuing ties to your home country.