

F-1 TRAVEL AND RE-ENTRY ISSUES

When F-1 students wish to leave the US temporarily and return to continue studies at the institution in which they are enrolled, they must secure the necessary documents to 1) permit entry to another country and 2) permit re-entry to the United States. For entry into another country, the student is responsible for investigating that country's entry requirements well in advance of traveling; students can access that information from foreign embassies at www.embassy.org.

In order to re-enter the US in F-1 status, the student must present all of the following:

1. A valid I-20 with current DSO signature from the school he/she is entering to attend
2. A valid F-1 student visa stamp
3. A valid passport or travel document

A student who has completed his or her program of study has no basis for re-entry to the US as an F-1 student unless he or she has been admitted to a new program of study and has the new Form I-20 OR he or she is returning to an authorized OPT job after completion of studies.

Your Form I-20

If you travel outside the US while you are in F-1 status, your I-20 must be signed on page 3 by a DSO from the school that issued your I-20. Your valid I-20 with a DSO's signature confirms that you are maintaining your F-1 status and are eligible to re-enter the US. **The signature is valid for one year.**

- Page 3 must be signed for travel authorization
- Absence from US must be less than five months
- You must allow DSO to check your passport and visa for validity before traveling

Notes: It is not necessary to reprint an I-20 for a travel signature unless all signature lines are full. Transferring students should present the new I-20 from the new school when re-entering.

Form I-515A

A student who re-enters the US without required documentation may be allowed entry by the Port-of-Entry official using Form I-515A (formerly I-515). This allows a student to enter for up to 30 days within which time the student will report to the DSO for required documentation. The 30-day period will be reflected on a date-certain I-94 card (not stamped "D/S"). In most cases, Form I-515A is used when the student did not obtain a DSO signature on page 3 of the I-20 or he/she lost the I-20. If a DSO signature was not obtained prior to departure, the POE officer will issue the I-515A to allow the student to enter and obtain the proper signature. If the student has lost the I-20, the DSO will re-print a copy for processing. The Form I-515A along with required documentation must be processed at the Washington DC address.

Five-month rule

An F-1 student who remains outside the US for five or more consecutive months, even with a valid travel signature, will need a new initial attendance I-20 for re-entry. A common example is a leave of absence when the SEVIS record has been terminated. The previous I-20 is no longer valid for re-entry. Payment of SEVIS fee is required for new initial attendance I-20.

Your F-1 Visa Stamp

A valid visa stamp in your passport is also required for re-entry. If your visa stamp has expired, you will need to go to a US Consulate outside of the US to apply for a new visa.

SEVIS I-901 Fee

Before attending the visa interview in your home country, you must pay a \$200 SEVIS fee directly to

the US Department of Homeland Security. There are three ways to pay the fee:

1. Complete the Form I-901 and mail it with a money order in US dollars;
2. Pay online with a credit card at www.fmjfee.com (this is the fastest method). When paying online, please allow three business days for your payment to be processed before going to your F-1 visa interview. It is important that you save the receipt and keep it in a safe place. You may be asked to show this receipt during your visa interview, at the US port of entry, or after you are in the US.

Automatic Visa Revalidation (in contiguous territory and adjacent islands)

After initial entry to the US, an F-1 student who has a single-entry visa or an expired multiple-entry visa may re-enter the US without obtaining a new visa under the following conditions:

1. The student has retained the I-94 arrival/departure card with F-1 D/S entry noted;
2. The student's I-20 is properly endorsed;
3. The student has not applied for a new visa at the US consulate with the result being either a denial or delay of more than 30 days;
4. The student is not a citizen of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, Cuba or Syria;
5. ****post-completion OPT only****--the student has a valid EAD card and employer's letter showing evidence of employment or job offer.

For travel to contiguous territories or islands adjacent to the US, travelers should have all of the above. However, you will not be able to re-enter the US if you have a newly-issued passport which does not have any US visa stamps; therefore, you should carry both the expired and the new passport.

Note: You may be required to have an entry visa for the contiguous territory. Neither your US visa nor your I-20 automatically grants you entry.

"Third Country National" Visa Renewal

It is sometimes possible to receive a US visa at a US consulate in Canada or Mexico. This method is often unsuccessful and therefore not encouraged; students are strongly advised to apply for the F-1 visa from their home country. If you are interested in traveling to Canada for this purpose, see <http://www.nvars.com>. If you are denied a visa as a Third Country National applicant, you will NOT be allowed to re-enter the US and will have to return to your home country to apply for the visa.

Your Passport

F-1 students seeking re-entry to the US must have a passport valid for at least six months into the future. In rare circumstances, a student will arrive at the port of entry either with an expired passport or without the appropriate visa stamp in the passport. In such cases, the immigration inspector has the discretion of allowing the student to apply for a waiver of either requirement using Form I-193, "Application for Waiver of Passport and/or Visa" and paying the required fee. Admitting someone in this way is a highly discretionary act, and students should not count on being granted a waiver.

****Special Notes on OPT and Travel****

Students on post-completion OPT must have travel signatures revalidated every 6 months. In addition to the valid passport, current I-20 with OPT noted on page 3, and visa stamp, OPT students must also present the border agent with a valid EAD card and proof of OPT employment or an appropriate job offer letter. You may also be asked to prove that you have sufficient funds to live in the US.

If you have applied for OPT and have not yet received the EAD card, **DO NOT** travel outside the US. Also, if you have received the EAD but do not have proof of a job to return to, **DO NOT** travel.