

Travel Guidelines

Disclaimer: KGI OISS has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice. KGI OISS staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult.

Travel within the United States:

If you are traveling in the United States, make sure you carry the documents listed below. If you are crossing state borders or traveling to San Diego, CA, take the original documents with you. Otherwise, if you are traveling within California it is advised that you leave the originals at home but have copies with you to minimize risk of losing original documents.

- Passport
- Visa
- I-94 card (printed from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/>)
- I-20 or DS-2019

Traveling to Home Country:

To travel to your home country, you will need the following:

- Valid passport (at least 6 months into the future).
- Valid F-1 or J-1 visa
 - Canadian citizens do not require a visa
- Valid I-20 or DS-2019 with travel signature. The travel signature is valid for 5 months.
- Students on a period of OPT will need additional items (see page 3)

TIP: Keep your original documents with you at all times, but carry copies on your phone in case of emergency.

Students from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen should consult with the Office of International Students and Scholars and contact their consular office to inquire about the waiver process for re-entry *before* making plans to leave the US.

Traveling to Another Country:

If you are traveling to a country **other than your home country**, [check to see if you need a visa](#) to enter that country. PLAN AHEAD: It often takes several weeks to process a visa application.

Students from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen should consult with the International Student Services office and contact their consular office to inquire about the waiver process for re-entry *before* making plans to leave the US.

Traveling While On Optional Practical Training:

Travel recommendations are based on your stage in the OPT process. See the last page of this document.

What should I do if my Visa is about to expire or has expired?

If your visa has expired, you must apply and renew your visa before making your way back to the U.S. We recommend applying for the visa in your home country. If you are unable to apply in your home country, you may contact the visiting country's [embassy/consulate](#) and find out if they will review your application. Please keep in mind processing time and possible delays. You will need the following documents with you:

- Passport
- I-20 or DS-2019, signed for travel
- Financial Documents
- Proof of full-time enrollment (letter from Registrar)
- Any other items required by your specific embassy

If you need to get your F-1 visa renewed or if you need to apply for an F-1 visa, you should contact the US Embassy/Consulate in the country where you are traveling BEFORE you travel to learn how long the process may take.

Students from Iran, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen should consult with the International Student Services office and contact their consular office to inquire about the waiver process for re-entry *before* making plans to leave the US.

Automatic Revalidation: The *only* exception to traveling on an expired visa might be if you visited Mexico, Canada, or an [adjacent island](#) where you might be able to take advantage of a process called [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#). You must have your I-20/DS-2019 endorsed prior to your travel. Auto Revalidation requires you to **retain** your I-94 number/card for exit and entry to the U.S. **DO NOT** surrender the I-94 card when you leave the U.S. You will not be eligible if you do. Please also note that you cannot be a citizen of Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, or Yemen. Citizens of these listed countries must have a valid visa to enter the U.S.

It is highly recommended that you print the information on [Automatic Visa Revalidation](#) to show to a border patrol officer if needed.

TRAVEL WHILE ON OPT: DECISION GUIDE

Please reference the chart below for travel suggestions and documentation needed.

Scenario	Travel Recommended?	TravelRisk Level	What You Need
1) Applied for OPT. Application is pending and <u>you are still a student</u> (end date on page one of I-20 has not yet been reached)	Yes	None, as long as you reenter the country at least a couple weeks before the end date on your I-20.	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa
2) Applied for OPT. Application is pending and <u>you are no longer a student</u> (end date on page one of I-20 has been reached)	Yes	Low – immigration officials do not have to let you back into the US solely for the purpose of OPT. However, many students have travelled in this situation without a problem. It is <u>critical</u> that you make arrangements to continue to receive mail at the address listed on your I-765 application and that someone can forward you the EAD card when it is received. <i>If it is close to the time your EAD is supposed to be approved, it is not recommended you travel. Consult KGI before making travel plans.</i>	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa Proof that you have applied for OPT (i.e. your formal receipt) *EAD card, if approved while outside of the US
3) Application for OPT is approved and you have your EAD card, but you do not have a job offer	Perhaps	Moderate – if you decide to travel, you should take proof that you are actively looking for a position (i.e. proof that you submitted resumes, upcoming interviews, etc). Even if you have this proof you may be denied reentry into the country, as again, immigration officials do not have to let you in for the purpose of looking for jobs.	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Proof that you are actively looking for a job
4) Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card and a job offer, but the position has not started	Yes	Low—if you decide to travel, make sure that you take a job offer letter on official letterhead which should include your expected start date.	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Job offer letter
5) Application for OPT is approved, you have your EAD card, and you have begun work	Yes	None – request a letter from your employer indicating that they approve your travel and listing the date they expect you back	Signature on your I-20 Valid passport & visa EAD card Letter from employer
6) Application for STEM OPT is pending, and your current EAD card has expired	NO	High – your F-1 status has technically ended. Customs and Border Protection is routinely denying entry on these cases.	Do not travel until your application has been approved and your new EAD has been received. At that time, take items listed under #5.
7) Original OPT period has ended, and you are in a period of H1-B cap gap.	Generally no	High – your F-1 status has technically ended. Customs and Border Protection is routinely denying entry on these cases. However, depending on the timing of your change of status, you may be able to travel. You must consult your filing attorney on this option. OISS is unable to advise on these scenarios.	As required.