Travel Risk While on OPT

For STEM OPT, see p. 2

GO | **CAUTION** | **STOP**

WARNING

► Re-entering the U.S. in a status other than F-1 (e.g. tourist) will invalidate both F-1 status and OPT authorization.

► If your F-1 visa is nearing its expiration date, you might want to consider renewing it. Renewing a visa while on OPT carries risks.

► Travel outside the U.S. is not advised for individuals from countries subject to entry restrictions (as listed here) per current "travel ban."

NOTE

Traveling with an EAD (OPT card) only is never sufficient for re-entry; the EAD only shows employment eligibility.

*** IMPORTANT!**

If your EAD is approved and is being mailed to you, you must have it in your possession before you re-enter the US. Having a friend or relative ship the card to you outside the U.S. is not recommended.

CASE SCENARIO	WHAT IS MY STATUS	CAN I TRAVEL AND RE-ENTER THE U.S.?	WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL?	WHAT LEVEL OF RISK IS INVOLVED FOR RE-ENTRY TO THE U.S.?
Post-Completion OPT application has been submitted to USCIS but not yet approved. I-20 program end date is *in the future.*	As an enrolled student you are in F-1 student status until your I-20 program end date.	Yes, you are still an F-1 student (who is enrolled) because your I-20 ends after your re-entry date.	• Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport • Proof of enrollment • If received, OPT receipt and/or EAD card	GO **Re-entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We cannot guarantee re-entry. However, you can minimize problems by planning to re-enter the U.S. a few weeks prior to your I-20 end date.**
Post-Completion OPT application has been submitted to USCIS but not yet approved. I-20 program end date is *in the past.*	You are on an extension of your F-1 student status.	Maybe. Check with ISP for more details.	• Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport • Employment/job offer letter on company letterhead, if available • If received, OPT receipt and/or EAD card	CAUTION **Re-entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) immigration officer. We cannot guarantee re-entry.**
EAD (OPT card) is approved.* I have a job offer AND a letter stating the offer with specific dates.	You are in F-1 OPT student status.	Yes	• EAD (OPT card) • Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport • Employment/job offer letter on company letterhead, if available	GO **You have all the necessary conditions to travel. Entry to the U.S. will be decided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).**
EAD (OPT card) is approved.* My I-20 program end date has passed. I don't have a job offer yet.	You are on an extension of your F-1 OPT student status.	Maybe. 8 CFR 214.2 (f)(13)(ii) "Return to Resume Employment"	• EAD (OPT card) • Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport	CAUTION **You need to be cautious as you do not have a job to return to. Entry to the U.S. will be decided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).**
EAD (OPT card) is approved.* I am currently working. I will be renewing my F-1 visa while I am abroad.	You are in F-1 OPT student status.	Maybe. 8 CFR 214.2 (f)(13)(ii) "Return to Resume Employment"	• EAD (OPT card) • Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport • Employment/job offer letter on company letterhead, if available • Additional documents required for renewing your F-1 visa	CAUTION **You need to be cautious. You are on an extension of your F-1 student visa status. It is up to the discretion of the U.S. consulate/embassy where you apply to grant you a student visa. Re-entry to the U.S. will be decided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). *U.S. requires social media profiles be set to public as part of the visa application vetting process.***

Updated Jan 2026

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Traveling with an EAD (OPT card) only is never sufficient for re-entry; the EAD only shows employment eligibility.

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GO | CAUTION | STOP

CASE SCENARIO	WHAT IS MY STATUS	CAN I TRAVEL AND RE-ENTER THE U.S.?	WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL?	WHAT LEVEL OF RISK IS INVOLVED FOR RE-ENTRY TO THE U.S.?
Submitted STEM OPT application. I-20 program end date has passed. STEM EAD (OPT card) not approved and has not been received in the mail.	You are in F-1 OPT pending student status.	No	Travel is not recommended.	**STOP** **Re-entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We cannot guarantee re-entry.**
Working on Post- Completion OPT. STEM OPT Extension application is pending and Post-Completion OPT end date is in the past.	You are in F-1 OPT student status.	No	Travel is not recommended.	**STOP** **Re-entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We cannot guarantee re-entry.**
STEM OPT EAD approved* and I am currently working.	You are in F-1 OPT student status.	Yes	• EAD (OPT card) • Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid F-1 visa • Valid passport • Employment/job offer letter on company letterhead, if available	**GO** **You have all the necessary conditions to travel. Entry to the U.S. will be decided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).**
STEM OPT EAD approved.* and I am currently working. I will be renewing my F-1 visa while I am abroad.	You are in F-1 OPT student status.	Maybe. 8 CFR 214.2 (f)(13)(ii) "Return to Resume Employment	• EAD (OPT card) • Valid I-20 signed for travel (within 6 months) • Valid passport • Employment/job offer letter on company letterhead, if available • Additional documents required for renewing your F-1 visa	**CAUTION** **You need to be cautious if you do not have a job to return to. Visa issuance and re-entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of the U.S. embassy/consulate and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) immigration officers. We cannot guarantee re-entry.** ***U.S. requires social media profiles be set to public as part of the visa application vetting process.***

Updated May 2026