

F-1 and J-1 Travel Guidance

Note: Due to the ongoing and quickly evolving nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, please speak with your airline. Please also check the latest CDC requirements [HERE](#). If you choose to travel, you do so at your own risk.

If you are planning to travel outside the United States, be sure that you have all necessary documentation to re-enter in F-1 or J-1 status. While there is never any guarantee of entry to the U.S., having the correct paperwork can ease the process at the border.

Documents to Carry With You:

- Passport valid for at least six months from date of re-entry
- Valid U.S. visa stamp in your passport (if your visa in your passport is not valid, or has expired, you will need to obtain a new one before you re-enter the United States)
- Most recent form I-20 or DS-2019 with travel signature

Students on an active, unexpired OPT or STEM OPT period:

All documents listed above, plus:

- EAD card
- An offer letter or other letter from your employer confirming your employment (if applicable)
- Ensure employment is updated in the SEVP Portal and appears on your most recent I-20

Students pending OPT approval:

Current travel reports do not recommend traveling at this time with a pending OPT application, as pending OPT students may incur a higher risk of scrutiny upon re-entry to the U.S. If you do need to travel, please make an appointment to meet with an ISSS advisor to discuss your options.

Students pending STEM OPT approval:

If your post-completion OPT period has expired and your STEM OPT case is pending, it is not recommended to travel. You will not be re-admitted to the U.S. until you have a valid STEM OPT EAD card. If you must depart the U.S. after your OPT has ended and you have not yet received STEM OPT approval, make an appointment to meet with an ISSS advisor.

Note: If you travel outside of the United States during your grace period and have not applied for OPT, you will forfeit your OPT eligibility and will not be able to return to the United States in your current F-1 student status.

Travel Signature:

Students must obtain a travel signature on the form I-20 or DS-2019 prior to travel if the current signature on the form is older than six months. This can be done by dropping off your I-20 or DS-2019 at the ISSS office. Your document will be ready for pick-up the following day after 3pm.

Visa Support Letter:

If you will be renewing your visa, you may request a support letter from the ISSS office. This letter confirms that you are maintaining an active F-1 or J-1 visa and may be taken to a visa renewal appointment as additional evidence. To request a letter, please complete the “Visa Support Letter” E-Form using the UAtlas link found at www.iss.utah.edu. You will receive the letter within one week of submission.

Travel to Canada or Mexico:

If you will be traveling to Mexico, Canada, or specific Caribbean islands for less than 30 days, you may qualify for automatic visa revalidation. This means that you do not need a valid U.S. visa to return from short visits to these countries. If you will be traveling to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean islands and would like to use this provision, please speak with an ISSS advisor.

Note for J-1 Exchange Visitors:

If you are a J-1 Exchange Visitor in the Professor, Researcher, or Intern category, you must meet with an International Scholar Advisor if you plan to be out of the country for more than 30 days with intent to return. A departure of more than 30 days could result in a denial for re-entry at a U.S. Port of Entry, but in certain situations, ISSS can keep your SEVIS record Active for an extended absence. Please make an appointment with an advisor so that we can determine if you are eligible for this benefit.

Note for F-1 Visa Holders:

If you will be away from the United States for a semester or more, please speak with an ISSS advisor to discuss your options for remaining in status. If you are on a vacation semester (summer term), you do not need to speak with an advisor as long as you are planning to return for the fall semester.

***Disclaimer:** International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) provides support and information related to U.S. immigration laws and regulations related to F and J status at the University of Utah. ISSS staff are not attorneys and any information provided by ISSS should not be construed as legal advice. Individuals are welcome to consult a qualified immigration attorney for specific legal advice, particularly in complicated cases. For a list of local Utah attorneys please visit our website [here](#).*

***Maintaining Status:** USCIS states that it is the student’s responsibility to understand the rules and regulations governing their visa [see 8 CFR 214.2(f)].*