Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Travel

This travel advisory applies only to F-1 students who have applied for or have been approved for Optional Practical Training (OPT) by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and want to leave and re-enter the U.S. after the completion of their academic program.

Before the completion of your academic program, the usual procedures for F-1 student travel still apply. After completion of your academic program, the guidance for travel is related to whether OPT has been approved yet.

➢ When OPT is Pending

Students who have submitted an application for OPT (have mailed the Form I-765) but whose EAD card has not yet been issued (application not yet been approved by USCIS) should be able to leave and re-enter the U.S. to resume the search for employment. While your OPT application is pending, you are not required to have a job or job offer for re-entry to U.S.

In order to have the best chance of re-entering the U.S. without problems when your OPT is pending, you should be sure you have the following documents:

- I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797)
- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (does not apply to Canadian citizens)
- I-20 (with a travel signature no older than six months*)

You need to wait until you receive the I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797) which confirms that USCIS has received your application for OPT (form I-765) and that your application is pending. If you have applied to OPT, but you have not received the receipt notice (Form I-797) yet, you are governed by F-1 student regulations, and will not be able to reenter after the time period of your academic program.

If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa when your post-completion OPT application is pending, you should also be sure to have your I-765 receipt notice (Form I-797) in addition to the usual documents required for a visa application.

➢ When OPT is Approved but You Do Not Have a Job

If a student who has an EAD card but does not have a job or a job offer leaves the US during the post-completion OPT period, OPT is terminated (forfeited). Border officials might not allow someone in this situation to re-enter the U.S. You may not be able to re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student. Thus, students who do not have a U.S. job or a U.S. job offer but who plan to leave and re-enter the U.S. after their EAD card has been issued are taking a risk.

You cannot travel during OPT and reenter unless you are coming back to an actual job.

➢ When OPT is Approved and You Have a Job (“During OPT”)

If your post-completion OPT has been approved (EAD card has been issued by USCIS) and you have a job or a job offer, you may leave and re-enter the U.S. in order to begin or resume employment.

After USCIS has issued an EAD card for post-completion OPT, in order to have the best chance of re-entering the U.S. without problems, you should be sure you have the following documents:
- Unexpired EAD card
- Evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer.
- Passport (valid for six months after you plan to re-enter the U.S.)
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (does not apply to Canadian citizens)
- I-20 (with a valid travel signature no older than six months*)

You evidence of a job or job offer should be a letter from your employer indicating that you currently hold a job (or are offered a job and will accept it) in your field of study and will be returning to the U.S. to resume employment.

If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa, you should also be sure to have your EAD card and evidence that you already have a job in the U.S. or that you have a job offer in addition to the usual documents required for a visa application.

➢ After OPT

You are entitled to a 60-day grace period beyond the last day of training indicated on your EAD. You may not work during your 60-day grace period. You will need to notify your International Advisor in Student Life Services if you plan to start or transfer to another school after OPT.

➢ Summary

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
F-1 Student Information

Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Before completing academic program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit Form I-765. This is your application for OPT.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive Form I-797 (or Form I-797 has been issued). This confirms that your OPT application is pending.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive an EAD card (or EAD card has been issued). This indicates that OPT has been approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive an EAD card (or EAD card has been issued) and you have a job or job offer. This is during OPT.</td>
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| Travel: |
| The usual procedures for F-1 student travel still apply. |
| Do not travel outside of the U.S. You must have a Form I-797 to re-enter the US, which you will not have yet. |
| It is a risk to travel outside the US while OPT is pending if you do not have a job offer for OPT. You may leave and re-enter the US; however, if your application is approved (you are issued an EAD card) while you are out of the US, then you need to have a job offer to re-enter. |
| Do not travel outside of the U.S. You must have an unexpired EAD card and evidence that you already have a job or job offer in the U.S. to re-enter. |
| The usual procedures for F-1 student travel again apply. |

* Regulations state that during post-completion OPT, the travel signature should be no older than six months. The International Center recommends while on post-completion OPT that you get a valid travel signature every six months. Source: 8CFR214.2(f)(13)(ii)

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