

F-1 Travel and Re-Entry

International students on an F-1 visa and F-2 dependents who plan to travel outside the United States after an absence of five months or less need proper documentation to return and resume their F-1 status.

Required Documents for Re-Entering the U.S.

All F-1 Students

Both F-1 students and their F-2 dependents must have the following documents to re-enter the U.S.:

1. Valid Passport. A passport that is valid for six months beyond the entry date to the U.S. Some countries have an agreement with the United States that allows you to enter on a current passport up to the actual date of expiration. Check the [passport agreement list](#) for information. When you click on the link, look for and click on the question: “What if I have an expired passport or one that will expire in less than six months?” The list of countries should appear once you click on this question.
2. Valid F-1 (or F-2 visa if a dependent) entry visa. If your visa has expired, you will need a new entry visa to return to the U.S. Contact the [specific embassy or consulate](#) where you plan to apply for your U.S. visa for details about documents that will need to be presented and visa wait times.
3. Properly endorsed and valid Form I-20. You must be eligible for a travel endorsement on Form I-20. Only a DSO is authorized by the Department of Homeland Security to sign the I-20. Travel signatures are valid for one year, or until the end of the program, whichever date is earlier. If the last signature is older than one year, you should request a new travel endorsement from the Center for Global Engagement at least two weeks prior to your intended departure date from the U.S. Travel endorsements for students on F-1 OPT are valid for up to six months.
4. Visa if you are traveling somewhere other than your home country. You may need a visa to enter countries other than your own, even if you're only passing through during transit. Contact the consulate or embassy for the country that you will be visiting for more information.
5. Highly recommended: Evidence of financial support. Current financial documents issued within the last six months that certify available funds of for one year of academic study at ECC as listed on your Form I-20. See current rates at elgin.edu/international.
6. Highly recommended: Copy of your current or upcoming semester class schedule and your most recent transcript showing progress made toward your program of study.

Additional Documents for Students on OPT

- Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.
- Proof of employment or job offer letter.

The Center for Global Engagement does not recommend traveling outside the U.S. with a pending OPT application. If you are on post-completion OPT, please consult with a DSO prior to making travel plans outside the U.S.

Special Considerations for U.S. Visa Renewal

- You cannot renew an F-1 visa from inside the U.S. Renewal requires leaving the U.S. and applying at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad.
- There is no guarantee that a new entry visa will be issued. Be sure your documentation is in order and be prepared to document strong ties to your home country.
- Applying in a country that's not your home country or country of permanent residency can be risky and increases the chance of delays or denials, making the return to the U.S. harder if the visa is refused. If you plan to apply for a visa outside of your home country, please contact the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply to determine if you need to provide additional documentation.
- It can be challenging to obtain a new entry visa if you are engaged in OPT after completion of your program of study. There is no guarantee that your visa will be issued. Be prepared to show evidence of strong ties to your home country, in addition to the documentation required for students on practical training. Please plan accordingly.
- If you have a pending change of status application to F-1 status, you should not plan to travel outside the U.S. unless you plan to abandon your petition.

For more information on traveling outside the U.S. as an F-1 student, visit the [Travel page](#) of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program