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TRAVEL ABROAD AND RE-ENTRY FOR F-1 STUDENTS

If you are planning to travel outside the U.S., the following informat

If any of these situations apply to you, you should see an advisor. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) put in place serious consequences for nonimmigrants who stay in the U.S. beyond the period authorized. If it is determined that you have failed to maintain legal status, you will need to discuss any consequences that may apply to you to learn about your options. The ISSO may need to issue you a new I-20 to begin a new period of legal F-1 status.

How often should I have my I-20 signed for travel?

The back of your I-20 (page 3) states that each certification signature is valid for one year. Nevertheless, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at airports and border crossings typically look for an I-20 that was signed for re-entry during the current semester in which the student is traveling or during the semester before an extended vacation period, such as summer vacation. We therefore suggest that you get a new signature before you travel if the one you have is from a past semester.

What can I expect from the Immigration Officer at the Port of Entry?

When you re-enter the U.S., a CBP Officer will inspect your immigration and related documents. The officer may ask questions about your school, degree program, and ability to finance your studies. If there are any doubts, he/she may contact the school, allow admission to the U.S. for only 30 days (by issuing Form I-515), or deny your re-entry to the United States. If you are issued a Form I-515, you should contact the ISSO immediately. There are severe consequences for staying beyond the date on the I-94 card; therefore, it must be resolved in a timely manner.

If the officer is satisfied with your documents, he/she will give you a new I-94 card showing the place and date of re-entry, F-1 status, and length of stay (this notation will be "D/S").

What documents do I need in order to return to the U.S. during post-completion practical training?

If you have completed your academic program and are engaged in full-time off-campus practical training employment, you must be returning to resume employment, and present the following documents to Customs & Border Protection (CBP) when you re-enter the U.S. after a temporary visit abroad:

- An employment verification letter (and pay stubs, if you have received any by the time of travel)
- A valid visa (not required of Canadian citizens, but required of Canadian Landed Immigrants).
- A valid passport (not required of Canadians)
- Your I-20 endorsed for re-entry (the endorsement should not be more than 6 months old)
- A valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from the USCIS

Can I re-enter the U.S. after a visit to Canada, Mexico or islands adjacent to the U.S.?

If you have maintained legal F-1 status, you may travel to a "contiguous territory" (Canada, Mexico, and the adjacent islands) and be allowed to return to the U.S.