

TRAVEL ABROAD AND RE-ENTRY FOR F-1 STUDENTS

If you are planning to travel outside the U.S., the following information will help you prepare for your return. We also recommend you read the handout, "[Understanding your F-1 visa](#)," in case your F-1 visa has expired or will expire prior to your return to the U.S. If you are traveling to a country other than your home country, make sure you find out about visa requirements for that country and be aware of possible difficulties in obtaining another U.S. visa (for your return) in a country other than your home country.

Required documents for re-entry to the U.S.

When you leave the U.S. for less than five months, you will need the following documents to re-enter in F-1 status:

NOTE - If you are from an NSEERS* country, you may need to get advanced clearance from the local Immigration Office.

- ◆ Form I-20 with an endorsement for re-entry (the endorsement is the International Student Advisor's signature on page 3 of your I-20; please read the section below to see *how often* you should have your I-20 signed)
- ◆ Copies of all I-20s or DS-2019s (previously IAP-66) issued to you
- ◆ Passport valid for at least six months after date of re-entry to the U.S.
- ◆ An unexpired F-1 visa (not required of Canadian citizens, but required of Canadian Landed Immigrants)

Recommended documents to support re-entry to the U.S.

- ◆ Your most recent transcript available on the web through Online Services (<https://inside.towson.edu/intranet/main.cfm>)
- ◆ A printout of the next semester's registration through Online Services, if available
- ◆ Documentary evidence of adequate financial ability or support
- ◆ Any work authorization document you may have

Special Notes:

If you are planning to be outside of the U.S. for more than five months, you will need to follow the procedures in the ISSO handout "[Your F-1 Status and Absence Outside the U.S. for More Than Five Months](#)."

If you changed your status to F-1 by an application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from within the U.S., you did not receive an F-1 visa; you received F-1 status only. See the ISSO handout "[U.S. Visas and Travel to Canada, Mexico, and Other Contiguous Territory: Automatic Extension of an Expired Non-Immigrant Visa](#)." If you travel outside of North America, you will need to apply for an F-1 visa in order to re-enter the United States. Also note that there are new travel documents required for citizens of Canada, Mexico or Bermuda if you are planning to travel to and from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Bermuda. Please ask for relevant hand-out at the ISSO.

How do I get my I-20 signed for re-entry?

Please bring your I-20 to the ISSO at least four working days before your departure date. A minimum of two working days is necessary for I-20 certification because the process requires a considerable amount of staff time, especially during busy periods when many TU international students are traveling at the same time (such as at the end of each semester and before vacation periods). In order to endorse your I-20, the USCIS requires that we must certify the following information:

- ◆ that your academic progress (G.P.A.) is satisfactory
- ◆ that you have been a full-time student
- ◆ that you are in legal F-1 status; and,
- ◆ that you have met your financial obligations to Towson University.

Your request for endorsement may be delayed or denied in any of the following cases:

- ◆ if you have a financial obligation to the university
- ◆ if you are registered as a part-time student without ISSO approval
- ◆ if you are on academic probation or suspension; or
- ◆ if the completion date on item 5 of your I-20 has expired

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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. with an expired U.S. visa. (The visit may only be as a "tourist" and for no more than 30 days.) Your visa will be "automatically revalidated" upon re-entry, as long as you present your valid I-94 card to the CBP officer. Be sure that an airline official or CBP officer does not take your I-94 card when you leave the U.S. As in all cases of travel, your I-20 must be signed on the back by an ISSO advisor and you will need a valid passport. For more information, read the ISSO handout "[Visas and Travel: Automatic Extension of an Expired Non-Immigrant Visa](#)." Students who apply for a U.S. visa in Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands and citizens of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba are no longer eligible for the "automatic revalidation" benefit.

*Nonimmigrant alien visitors subject to NSEERS registration at the Port of Entry: Certain citizens or nationals of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Syria, as designated by the DHA Secretary in the Federal Register; nonimmigrants who have been designated by the State Department; and, any other nonimmigrant, male or female regardless of nationality, identified by immigration officers at airports, seaports and land ports of entry in accordance with 8 CFR 264.1(f)(2).