

International Student Admissions

10 South 2nd St., Box 1706, Reading, PA 19603
(610) 372-4721, Ext. 5259
(610) 607-6257- Fax



Travel Out of the U.S. and Return for F-1 Students

I. EXPLANATION

F-1 students need to carry specific documentation to re-enter the U.S. to study after a temporary absence or vacation. This document explains what you need to return to the U.S. to study. If you plan to travel to a country other than your country of citizenship or permanent residence, you may need an entry visa to get into that country. You must check with the embassy or consulate of the country you plan to visit to find out if you need an entry visa. ISA has a directory of embassies and consulates in the U.S. and specific information on Canadian entry visa requirements. (*Note:* To obtain a Canadian visitor's visa, your I-20 will have to have been signed by the International Admissions Advisor within the last 3 months.) If you plan to be out of the U.S. for more than 5 months, you will need to speak with an advisor about how your immigration status will be affected.

II. CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. In order to re-enter the U.S. using your RACC I-20 form you must be currently enrolled or planning to enroll for the next academic term at RACC.
2. You cannot re-enter the U.S. with our student I-20 form once you have completed your studies unless you have received an authorization to engage in optional practical training. F-1 students on OPT will need an EAD card.
3. If you will be enrolling at another U.S. institution when you return to the U.S., you must enter using an I-20 form from that school. (The only exception is if you plan to attend summer classes at another institution, but you will return to RACC for the fall semester.)

III. PROCESS

Step 1: Find Out If You Need a Visa to Enter All Country/Countries You Are Traveling Through

Whether or not you need a visa to enter a specific country depends on your country of citizenship and legal permanent residence. Check with the embassy or consulate of each country to find out whether or not you need a visa. ISA has a listing of foreign consulates in the U.S. or you can check the Internet to find out visa requirements. Applying for visas is costly and time consuming, so plan ahead. If your plane is landing in another country, you may need a visa for that country as well, even if you do not plan to exit the plane.

Step 2: Obtain and Carry Everything You Need to Re-enter the U.S.

- A valid passport
- A valid I-20 from the school you are attending/will attend upon re-entry
- A valid signature on the back of the I-20 from the International Admissions Advisor which is *less than 6 months old*. If you need a Canadian entry visa to enter Canada, you will need a signature on your I-20 that is less than 3 months old; if you are attending a new school upon re-entry with a new I-20, you do not need a signature on the back
- A valid visa (except for “**contiguous territory**” – see “EXCEPTIONS” on page 2)
- Financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover all costs of tuition plus expenses. This can be either 1) a letter from your *department* stating the amount of funding you are receiving or 2) a letter from another *financial sponsor* stating the amount they are giving you, *plus supporting*

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financial documents, such as bank statements or salary statements. *Note*: If you are using personal funds you must also provide relevant supporting documents.

- All previous I-20s
- Current proof of financial support
- Transcripts (not required but recommended)
- Proof of current enrollment, or if travel is between semesters, proof of registration for the next semester (not required but recommended)

EXCEPTIONS:

- Canadian citizens are exempt from entry visa and passport requirements when entering the U.S. from the Western Hemisphere. If entering from other countries, they will need a Canadian passport.
- **“Contiguous territory”**- If you are traveling to **Canada, Mexico**, or one of the **islands off the U.S.** other than Cuba for **pleasure or vacation for fewer than 30 days**, you can return to the U.S. using an expired U.S. entry visa of any type, as long as you have a valid passport, I-94, and signed I-20 as specified above. *Note*: This does not apply to residents of Mexico or the islands who are returning to their home countries.

IMPORTANT NOTICE – April 2002

As of April 1, 2002, the automatic visa revalidation policy has changed for people who visit Canada or Mexico to apply for a U.S. visa at a U.S. consulate. *The following information does not impact visitors to Canada for pleasure/tourism; automatic visa revalidation may still be used.* **NOTE**: *Citizens of Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and the Sudan are not eligible for automatic revalidation at all.* According to the new policy, a person who 1) goes to Canada or Mexico for the purpose of securing a new U.S. visa and 2) is denied will *not* be able to re-enter the U.S. on an expired visa as was true before. According to a representative of the U.S. Department of State, the I-94 card will be pulled and the passport will be stamped with “Application Received” or “214 (b) Refusal.” It is possible, but currently unclear, if a person who is denied on “technical” reasons (not due to security or name check reasons), may be allowed to re-enter the U.S. *if* the person’s U.S. entry visa is still valid. Others will be required to wait in Canada for name check clearance (20 days or more). The U.S. Department of State and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS, formerly INS) are working to write consistent regulations about how this change will work in practice. At this time, details are not clear.

To discuss your situation, make an appointment to meet with the International Admissions Advisor in ISA.

Step 3: Get What You Need to Return to the U.S.

1. SIGNATURE ON YOUR I-20

It will take *3 business days* to get a signature from the foreign International Admissions Advisor. Bring your I-20 in at least one week before you travel. Do not wait until the last minute or you may have to travel without your I-20 or have to postpone your plane reservations or other travel plans. To get your I-20 signed, **bring it to ISA** anytime between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, complete a request form, and return 3 days later to pick up the signed I-20.

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If your department supports you financially, ISA will need proof. If the department has not sent us a list of supported students, you may need to get a letter from them before the document can be signed.

2. NEW U.S. VISA STAMP IN YOUR PASSPORT

If you are **NOT** traveling to “**contiguous territory**” and your visa in your passport has **EXPIRED** or is not a visa for your current immigration status (i.e., it is not F-1), plan enough time in the country you are visiting to visit the U.S. consulate and complete the visa application process.. You cannot obtain an F-1 visa from within the U.S. If you are traveling to a country which is not your country of citizenship or permanent residence, you may have some difficulty in renewing you visa- talk to the International Admissions Advisor before planning to apply for a visa in a “third” country, so that you know your options. (SEE SECTION BELOW)

To get a new visa you must demonstrate that you have enough funding to complete your program and that you plan to return to your home country. The consulate may request information in addition to the signed I-20, such as:

- Additional proof of financial support aside from that on the I-20 (bank statements for those with personal funds or department letters for those with RACC support)
- Additional proof of student status (the HUB can provide an official letter in 5 working days)
- Proof that you have no intention of immigrating to the U.S. (this is difficult, but could include future job offers at home, property, strong family ties, etc.)

These documents may not be necessary. However, you should be prepared with this documentation just in case. If you have relatives that are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, you may have difficulty obtaining an F visa.

You can try to contact the U.S. consulate you are visiting through the following website to obtain information on what they require: www.travel.state.gov/tcn.html

IV. OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

A. Recent Legislation Affecting Visa Applications in a “Third” Country

Recent immigration legislation now makes it impossible to obtain a U.S. entry visa in a country other than your home country (i.e., a “third country”) if you were NOT maintaining your legal status in the U.S. If you have not been maintaining legal status, you may be sent back to your home country to apply for the visa. This regulation became effective as of September 30, 1996. Because of this law, if you try to apply for a visa from a country other than your home country, you may need to show evidence that you have been maintaining legal status (such as copies of previously issued I-20s, visas, proof of continuous school attendance, etc.). In most cases, a recent signature on the back of the I-20 will verify to the consular officials that you have been maintaining status, but in some cases the consulate may want to see additional evidence. Therefore, it helps to be prepared with the following: letters confirming your student status, letters confirming funding, transcripts (from all current and previous U.S. schools), and copies of ALL previously issued I-20s and visas.

B. Graduating Students

ISA cannot sign your I-20 once you have graduated unless you have applied for a post completion practical training. Even if signatures are current and documents appear to be valid, it is illegal to use

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these documents to re-enter the U.S. after completing your studies unless you have been approved for practical training. Therefore, do not make plans to travel out of the country and return on your same student documents after you have completed your studies without contacting ISA to ask about your situation.

C. Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students

To re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad while on OPT, F-1 students must have an I-20 that has been endorsed in the last 6 months, a valid EAD card, and a valid visa if required (see section on “contiguous territory” on *page 2*). It is also helpful to have a letter from the practical training employer which simply explains that you are working for him on OPT from date X to date Y. Students who travel while on OPT (and particularly those who must obtain a new visa stamp to re-enter the U.S.) run a greater risk of not being re-admitted to the U.S. Please read the OPT documents or ask ISA for more details.

D. Dependents

The information above applies to F-2 dependents as well. In case of travel to other countries (other than “contiguous territory”) the dependent must have an F-2 entry visa.