

TRAVEL AND REENTRY TO THE UNITED STATES

Entry to the U.S. is controlled by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Officers at the Port of Entry (POE) decide whether or not nonimmigrants are admitted to the United States. This decision is based upon the individual facts and circumstances presented at the time the student applies to enter. Students should always be encouraged to consult their Designated School Official (DSO) prior to traveling.

Students' individual circumstances can differ when it comes to travel. However, there are many general principles that are true of most situations. The key is to ensure that travel for the student is appropriate and that the student has everything necessary to be admitted to the United States.

INITIAL ENTRY

Students are allowed to make initial entry into the U.S. up to 30 days before the program start date listed on the SEVIS I-20 form. Students should be instructed to always hand-carry their immigration documents and not pack them in checked luggage. Upon initial arrival in the U.S. students will be asked to present the following:

- A passport, valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry
- SEVIS Form I-20
- A valid, current F-1 visa, unless exempt (Canada, etc.)
- Financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition and living expenses
- Paper receipt for the SEVIS fee
- Name and contact information for the "Designated School Official", including a 24-hour emergency contact at the school

If Arriving By Air: Flight attendants will distribute Customs Declaration Forms (CF-6059). CBP no longer requires international non-immigrant visitors to fill out a paper Form I-94 upon arrival to the U.S. by air. The agency will gather travelers' arrival/ departure information automatically from their electronic travel records. Instead of the paper I-94 card and electronic I-94 is issued that can be printed at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/>. Students will leave immigration inspection with the passport stamped F-1, D/S. M-1 students will have M-1 and an expiration date.

If Arriving By Land: The CBP Officer at the port of entry will provide the necessary Customs Declaration Forms (CF-6059) and Arrival-Departure Record Forms (I-94) to be filled out upon arrival by the student.

Initial Enrollment: Students should report to their school within 30 days of the date that appears on the SEVIS I-20 form to register for courses or to validate their intended participation. Failure to do so requires reporting the student as a no-show in SEVIS. Once validated, the SEVIS record is changed from "initial" to "active" status.

SUBSEQUENT TRAVEL AND REENTRY

The basic requirements for an F-1 or M-1 students to reenter the United States after he/she has made initial entrance include the following:

- Present a current SEVIS Form I-20 endorsed for travel by a DSO within the past 12 months (6 months if on Optional Practical Training)
- The student must have been out of the United States for less than five months
- Present a current passport valid for at least six months after the date of reentry
- Have a valid, current visa, unless the student traveled to a contiguous country or adjacent island for less than 30 days, or, unless visa exempt (Canada, etc.)
- Produce financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition and living expenses if requested

Note: A new I-94 card will be issued to the student upon reentry.

AUTOMATIC VISA REVALIDATION

Students who wish to travel to Canada, Mexico, or one of the territories (other than Cuba) adjacent to the United States can return even if the visa stamp is expired provided the visit is of less than 30 days. This process is known as **automatic visa revalidation**. However, if students meet any **one** of the following criteria, **they will not be able to automatically revalidate their visa**.

- The student applied for a new visa and it has not been issued.
- The student applied for a new visa and it was denied.
- The student has a terminated SEVIS record indicating that he/she is out of status
- The student has been out of the United States for more than 30 days.
- The student is a citizen of: Iran, Sudan, Syria

The adjacent islands are: Saint Pierre, Miquelon, The Dominican Republic, Haiti, Bermuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, The Windward and Leeward Islands, Trinidad, Martinique, Other British, French, and Netherlands territory or possessions in or bordering on the Caribbean Sea.

Students do not need a valid visa to visit Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands, but do need a valid SEVIS Form I-20.

EXPIRED VISA STAMPS

Students can stay in the United States with an expired F-1 or M-1 visa stamp as long as they maintain their student status (maintain a valid I-20; pursue a full course of study, etc.). However, if the student is returning home or traveling to a country where automatic revalidation does not apply, the student must have a valid visa to return to the United States.

The following documents are required when making a new visa application:

- A SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by a DSO
- Original evidence showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition and living expenses
- Evidence showing intention to return to the home country upon program completion, including evidence of compelling social and economic ties to your home country
- If the student has applied for or had Optional Practical Training (OPT) approved, bring a copy of the Form I-20 endorsed for OPT and the Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if one has been issued. If on post-completion OPT the student must also have a written job offer to present.

Note: A visa stamp cannot be renewed in the U.S.

The Department of State recommends that students apply for a visa in their home country. Students can apply for a visa in a third country, but they will not be able to return to the United States until the visa has been issued. In some cases, this could take several weeks if a background check is required. If the visa is denied, the student will not be able to return to the United States. Continuing students do not need to pay the SEVIS fee again prior to making the visa appointment.

ABSENCES OF 5 MONTHS

Students who travel outside the U.S. must return prior to being absent for 5 months. Students absent for periods that exceed 5 months in duration should have the SEVIS record terminated. The only exception to this rule is for students who are absent for 5 months but who are participating in an authorized study abroad trip for the institution.

STUDENTS TRAVELING WITH A TERMINATED SEVIS RECORD

Students who violate their student status must have their SEVIS record terminated. In addition, students who will be absent from the U.S. for a given term but who will not be absent for more than 5 months, should have their SEVIS records terminated. 60 days prior to return the DSO is supposed to request a data fix with the SEVIS help desk to have the SEVIS record made active again. Students with pending data fixes should not attempt to enter the U.S. until the SEVIS record is made active again. There is not guarantee the student will be readmitted to the United States if they travel on a terminated record with a pending data fix. In most cases, inspectors do allow the student to reenter the United States if he/she is otherwise admissible and the DSO has properly annotated the Form I-20. It is likely, however, that they will be sent to secondary inspection while CBP determines whether they are eligible to return to the United States.

Terminated students who wish to regain proper status through travel must have a new initial I-20 issued. They will be considered an initial student for SEVIS purposes. They will have to pay the SEVIS fee and any time that they accrued towards qualification for practical training or employment is lost. Students in this circumstance should be aware that the CBP inspective officer will determine whether or not to admit them to the United States with the new SEVIS Form I-20. CBP may decide that the student is not eligible to reenter because he/she did not comply with the terms of their status during the prior stay in the United States.

TRAVELING DURING THE GRACE PERIOD

Students who have applied for Optional Practical Training can travel while the application is pending provided the I-20 has not expired and the EAD has not been approved. Once OPT has been approved, the student can only reenter if he/she has a written job offer. Students without a job on post-completion OPT cannot travel.

I-94 CARD ISSUES

Upon entrance to the U.S. students are issued an I-94 arrival departure record. This card indicates the name, date of birth, country of birth, country of citizenship and the immigration status of the student. Students are required to be in possession of the I-94 card during their entire stay. Each time a student leaves the U.S. a new I-94 card will be issued which can be printed at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/>. Students who last entered prior to April 30, 2013 will have the old paper I-94 card that should be surrendered at the port of exit the next time they depart. If the paper I-94 card is lost, a replacement card must be applied for with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. This is done using the application form I-102. There is a \$445.00 fee associated with the I-102 form and it could take up to 6 months to receive the replacement I-94 card.

Students entering the U.S. without all appropriate documentation can be admitted on the form I-515A. The most typical reason an I-515A is issued occurs when a student fails to have a valid signature on page 2 of the I-20 form. When issued an I-515A the student is given 30 days to send the appropriate documents to the SEVP. The documents should then be mailed to the Department of Homeland Security within the 30 day window to:

Student and Exchange Visitor Program
DHS/ ICE
ATTN: SEVIS/I-515A Processing Team
500 12th Street SW STOP 5600
Washington, DC 20536-5600

The documents must be mailed by USPS, FEDEX, or UPS. The documents will be processed within 15 business days and returned to the DSO. If the I-94 card has not been received by the DSO within 15 business days an inquiry can be made by email at SEVIS.I-515a@ice.dhs.gov or by phone at 202-305-2346.

If the student does not respond to the Form I-515A within the initial 30-day deadline, SEVP will notify the student and the school official of the "Intent to Terminate". Failure to comply with the "Intent to Terminate" notice within 14 days of the date the notice was sent will result in the termination of the student's SEVIS record and the end of the student's legal status.