

## Guide for Traveling Outside the United States

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### General Travel Information

- **Travel Signature on I-20**– Make sure your I-20 has been signed in the travel authorization section by a DSO **within six months** of your departure date.
- **Valid Passport** – Be sure your **passport has not expired** AND that it will still be **valid at least six months** after the date you plan to re-enter the U.S. (*A list of countries whose citizens are exempt from the requirement that their passports be valid at least six months into the future can be found on the last page of this packet.*) If you need to renew your passport, contact the consulate or embassy representing your home country in the U.S. ([www.embassy.org](http://www.embassy.org)) or the appropriate authorities in your home country.
- **Valid Visa** – Be sure the visa in your passport **(1) will still be valid on the date you plan to re-enter the U.S., and (2) still has entries remaining** (either has an “M” for unlimited multiple entries or at least “1” entry left). If you must renew your visa while out of the U.S., see the section on ***Visa Renewal Information***. If you are traveling to Canada, Mexico, or a country in the Caribbean, also see this section.
- **Evidence of Financial Support** – You may be asked to show proof of your **financial support**: most recent bank statement, the offer letter from your department if you have a graduate assistantship, statements from family if supported by them, etc. Our latest information from the United States Customs and Border Patrol (USCBP) indicates it is **very likely** you will be asked for this information if crossing a border from Canada or Mexico, and **possibly** if flying into any Port of Entry from any country.
- **Visas for Other Countries** – Be sure you have any visas needed to enter countries other than your own that you plan to visit. (Some countries require a transient visa for you to even land in their country. It is your responsibility to find out whether you are required to have such a visa.) Go to [www.embassy.org](http://www.embassy.org) for a listing of foreign consulates in the U.S. to see if you might need a visa for the country to which you are traveling. The International Programs Office has information on obtaining a **Canadian visitor’s visa**.
- **Absence from the U.S. More Than 5 Months** – If you believe you may be absent from the U.S. for 5 months or more, please consult the International Programs Office. Absences of 5 months or more require special procedures in SEVIS and also creation of a new I-20 before you are able to return to the U.S. It may also affect eligibility for CPT and OPT employment authorizations.

## Gathering of “Biometric” Data

Beginning in February, 2004, air and sea Ports of Entry began collecting “biometric” data on all visitors who enter the U.S. (including students and scholars in F and J status). Canadian citizens are currently exempt from this requirement. Immigration officers at the Ports of Entry perform “inkless” electronic fingerprinting of all visitors, and will also take photographs. The Department of Homeland security estimates these additional procedures should add only seconds to the check-in process at the Port of Entry. An additional check-out procedure will be added later in the near future, where visitors leaving the U.S. will provide their fingerprints again upon leaving the U.S. Biometric data (i.e. fingerprints and photographs) will also begin to be collected at U.S. consulates when visitors apply for new or renewal visas to enter or return to the U.S.

## Visa Renewal Information

What documents do I need to renew my visa? Check the website (<http://usembassy.state.gov>) of the U.S. consulate you will visit to see exactly what documents, including forms and photos, you will need to present. You will need to fill out special Department of State application forms, which may be downloaded from the Department of State website at <http://travel.state.gov/visaforms.html>. It would be best to fill these out before leaving the U.S. as they request special information such as names and addresses of immediate family and previous employers, and require considerable time to complete. These forms are:

- DS-156 (staple or glue your photo in the space provided on this form)
- DS-158
- DS-157 (male applicants only unless specifically requested by a consulate)

### F-1 students and F-2 dependents should take:

- SEVIS I-20 from Minnesota State University, Moorhead with a recent travel signature from DSO.
- Any I-20's previously issued by MSUM and any other U.S. school attended before enrolling at MSUM.
- MSUM student identification card (dependents should take photocopy)
- Official transcript of F-1's academic record (available from the Registration Office.)
- Letter certifying F-1's current enrollment and Status from Director of International student Affairs.
- Evidence of F-1's financial support (bank statement, graduate assistantship offer letter, family bank statement, etc.)
- If engaged in OPT, also take current EAD (dependents should take photocopy) and a letter from OPT employer stating you are working there under the terms of Optional Practical Training

## How long will it take to get a new U.S. visa?

It depends on your situation. But now, more than ever, ALL students are advised to go to the consulate to renew their visas at the earliest possible opportunity to avoid possible delays. Do not wait until the end of your stay abroad. To view a listing of U.S. embassies and their policies, go to <http://www.travel.state.gov/links.html>

## **Security Advisory Options – the “Background Security Clearance”**

Following September 11, 2001, the U.S. government instituted a new policy requiring security checks on certain individuals before a visa will be issued. These security checks are performed by the U.S. Department of State, and can take several weeks or months to complete. There are at least three ways a student can be subject to a security check:

- (1) country of citizenship: male student-visa applicants who are in the age range 16 to 45 and who are from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, or Yemen can expect to be subject to a background security check before a visa will be issued. OISS has also received information that some citizens from Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Bhutan, Brazil, Congo, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela have also been subject to this security check, particularly if (2) the area of study/research is highly technical or viewed as “sensitive:” citizens (both female and male) of any country (most notably China) have been selected for security checks for this reason. The “Sensitive Majors” list includes most engineering disciplines, chemical and biochemical/biomedical sciences, computer science, genetics, certain branches of physics, nuclear and laser technologies, and even urban planning! Complete details are available at <http://travel.state.gov/state147566.html>. Finally, people can be subject to a security check if (3) a preliminary check at the consulate reveals potential criminal history or other “security concerns.” When a security check occurs, there is absolutely nothing Minnesota State University Moorhead, or any political liaison can do to speed up the process.

## **How likely is it that my visa application will be denied?**

We cannot answer this question with as much certainty as we did in the past. There are never any guarantees that a visa will be renewed. However, in general it is still very unlikely that a visa will be denied to a student who is in the midst of a course of study. If a student has graduated and is on OPT, a denial may be more likely, since consulates have become more hesitant to renew visas for students on OPT. But as noted above, delays occur with increasing frequency.

## **What if my application for a new visa is denied?**

Ask the consular officer to give you a written explanation for the denial. Contact the International Programs Office immediately and supply details about your visa interview, what you were asked and what you replied. Give us the date and place of the denial and, if possible, the name of the consular officer who issued it. Usually, if it is clear there has been a misunderstanding, or if your documents weren't acceptable to the consulate, we can provide the additional information needed to help you get the visa. Sometimes, though, there is nothing we can do to help. The law concerning visas gives consular officers very wide latitude, so their decisions can seem arbitrary. If you have any reason to think your situation might place your visa application in unusual jeopardy, you may want to discuss it with Greg Wymer or Janet Hohenstein before traveling (and preferably before purchasing tickets).

## **Do I need to do anything upon re-entry to the U.S. on a new visa?**

While you are still at the Port of Entry, make sure the information on your I-94 is CORRECT. If it is not, bring it to the attention of the officer at the Port of Entry. It will be much more difficult and time-consuming to attempt to get it corrected later. You should also certainly keep a photocopy of your new visa and I-94 in a safe place.

## **Third-Country Nationals and Visa Renewal**

“Third-country national” means that you are not a citizen of the country in which the U.S. consulate where you will attempt to renew your visa is located. For example, citizens of China who try to renew their visas in Mexico are “third country nationals.” In general, it has become riskier to try to renew your visa in a country that is not your own. The United States Department of States says, “Individuals seeking appointments should be aware that applicants may be more likely to encounter difficulties at the time of interview when they apply for a visa outside of their home district. Consular officers...will deny visas whenever they believe there are fraud indicators present, or their lack of knowledge of local conditions and familiarity with documents in the applicant's home country prevents them from properly adjudicating the case.” This means that you could attempt to renew your visa in a country that is not your own, be denied, and then be unable to re-enter the U.S. until you travel directly to your home country and get a new visa there. If you are from one of the “state sponsors of terrorism” countries, from one of the “security advisory opinion” countries, or subject to special registration, it is likely you may encounter difficulty trying to renew your visa in a country that is not your own. However, any non-immigrant visa holder from any country could face the same problems. You could try contacting the U.S. consulate in the country to which you will travel, to see if they are generally willing to review visa applications for citizens of your home country. For more information about third country nationals and visa renewal, see <http://travel.state.gov/tcn.html>.

## **Travel to Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean (“Adjacent Islands”\*)**

\*The Code of Federal Regulations at 8 CFR 286.1(a) defines "adjacent islands" to include Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Barbuda, Bermuda, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Marie-Galante, Martinique, Miquelon, Montserrat, Saba, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Christopher, Saint Eustatius, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Maarten, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, and other British, French and Netherlands territory or possessions bordering on the Caribbean Sea. Note that Cuba is NOT considered an adjacent island for the purpose of travel into the United States.

### **“Automatic Revalidation” - Re-Entering the U.S. from Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean.**

Some people in F status can re-enter the U.S. from Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean Islands on an expired visa if:

- (1) they are returning from a visit of less than 30 days, and
- (2) they did not apply for a new visa while outside the U.S., and
- (3) they have with them (a) a valid passport, (b) an unexpired I-94 (white card in passport marked as “D/S”), (c) appropriate financial documentation, and (d) a valid I-20 signed for re-entry.

If your visa is expired and you apply for and are denied a new visa in Canada or Mexico, you cannot re-enter the U.S. under the terms of automatic revalidation. Instead you will be required to return directly to your home country to apply for a new visa in the U.S. consulate there. This means, for example, that a person in F-1 status who seeks to renew an expired F-1 visa in Canada or Mexico will not be able to re-enter the United States if the application for the new visa is denied. It also means that a person in F-2 status with an expired F-2 visa whose application for an F-1 visa is denied in Canada or Mexico is no longer able to re-enter the United States from Canada or Mexico in F-2 status.

NOTE: The automatic revalidation option is NOT available to:

- (1) Citizens of Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.
  - a. You would be required to obtain a new U.S. visa before being allowed to re-enter the U.S., and in all probability could only get a new visa from the U.S. consulate in your home country or the consulate that services your home country
- (2) Canadian “landed immigrants” who have never had an F or J visa.
  - a. You would be required to obtain a U.S. visa before being allowed to re-enter the U.S. You may be able to obtain the visa from a U.S. consulate in Canada, unless you are a citizen of one of the seven countries listed above or one of the countries likely to be subject to the Security Advisory Opinion.

## **Information for Students and Dependents Subject to Special Registration**

(Male citizens of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen – OR any other non-U.S. citizens who were instructed at the Port of Entry during 2002-2003 to report to the local CIS office for an interview.) Remember that you are restricted to leaving the U.S. from only certain Ports of Departure. To review the specific list of ports, see the website at:

<http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/lawenfor/specialreg/BLISTOFP.pdf>

Remember you also MUST check in with the Department of Homeland Security at the Port of Departure on the day you leave the U.S. Failure to do so will likely result in you being unable to enter when you attempt to return to the U.S. Instead you would be required to immediately return to your home country. Finally, remember you may face delays or other difficulties if you must obtain a new visa before re-entering the U.S.

## **Travel and Optional Practical Training**

If you have applied for Optional Practical Training (OPT) but have not yet received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card from USCIS, you should be aware that leaving the U.S. before your OPT has been authorized may be considered by the USCIS as abandoning the application. You may also experience difficulty at the Port of Entry if you do not have the EAD card.

The International Programs Office will not mail EAD cards overseas. Instead you must make arrangements for a friend or family member to pick up the EAD and he/she can mail it to you.

You should also remember that consulates are hesitant to renew visas for students on OPT, so you take a risk leaving the U.S. if you will be required to get a new visa before being able to return.