WORKING IN THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. government takes working illegally very seriously. This page will help you learn the basics of the work authorization process.

There are limited work opportunities available in the United States for F-1 students. For this reason, before coming to the United States, F-1 students must prove they have the financial ability (e.g., present bank statements) to pay for tuition and living expenses while studying. If you decide that you want to work, the first step is always to talk with your designated school official (DSO).

If your DSO knows you are working without permission, they must report it through SEVIS, meaning your SEVIS record will be terminated. That means that you will have to leave the United States immediately, and you may not be allowed to return.

Depending on your status and program of study, you may be eligible for the following type of employment opportunities while you study in the United States:

On-Campus

On-campus employment is work that F-1 students whose status is *Active* in SEVIS status may apply for. On-campus employment is specific to work that takes place on campus or at an off-campus location that is affiliated with the school. Examples of on-campus employment include working at a university bookstore or cafeteria.

Off-Campus

Off-campus employment is work that that takes place outside of a school campus. Off-campus employment is only available to F-1 students who have completed at least one full academic year of their program of study, and who have an economic hardship that qualifies for the Department of Homeland Security's emergent circumstances.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) assigns nine-digit Social Security numbers (SSNs) to U.S. citizens, permanent residents and eligible nonimmigrant workers in the United States. SSA uses SSNs to report wages to the government, track Social Security benefits and for other identification purposes. Every F and M student who U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) grants employment authorization to needs an SSN.

Please note: *If an F or M student (or dependent) is ineligible to receive an SSN, but receives non-wage income while in the United States (e.g., scholarships, grants, interest on stocks, gambling/lottery winnings), they must apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).*

STEPS FOR OBTAINING A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

If want to receive an SSN while studying in the United States, follow these steps:

1. Talk with your DSO about working and training in the United States.
   - Your DSO will share important information regarding the regulations and requirements for F and M students, and confirm whether you are eligible to apply for an SSN.
2. Obtain employment (on campus employment, Curricular Practical Training or Optional Practical Training)
   - **On-Campus**
     - On-campus employment is work that F-1 students whose status is Active in SEVIS status may apply for. On-campus employment is specific to work that takes place on campus or at an off-campus location that is affiliated with the school. Examples of on-campus employment include working at a university bookstore or cafeteria.
   - **Off-Campus**
     - Off-campus employment is work that that takes place outside of a school campus. Off-campus employment is only available to F-1 students who have completed at least one full academic year of their program of study, and who have an economic hardship that qualifies for the Department of Homeland Security's emergent circumstances.
3. Ensure you are in Active status in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).
   - Your SEVIS record must be in Active status for at least two days before applying for an SSN. If you have a record in any other status, you will not be successful in applying for an SSN.
4. Wait 10 days after arriving in the United States before applying for an SSN to allow enough time for your arrival information to update in all government systems.
   - SSA uses the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to verify your nonimmigrant student status and determine if you are eligible for an SSN. You can use the SAVE Case Check to follow the progress of your SAVE verification check online; visit our Checking Your SAVE Case Status for more information.
5. Visit your local SSA office.
   - You can file your application for an SSN card in person at any SSA office. Be prepared to provide your original documents to prove your age, identity and work-authorized immigration status. All evidence of immigration status and work authorization must be unexpired.

For more information on the types of documents you need to apply for an SSN, refer to the SSA website.

Social Security Numbers and Driver's Licenses

Many states require that you or your dependent have an SSN or have already applied for one before you apply for a driver's license. In these states, if you or your dependents are not eligible to work but want to apply for a driver's license, you must first apply for an SSN at the local SSA office and receive a Form SSA-L676, "Refusal to Process SSN Application." To learn more, visit our Driving in the States page and talk with your DSO.