



# International Students and Social Security Numbers

Are you temporarily in the United States to attend a college, or a language, vocational, or nonacademic school? Do you have a nonimmigrant **F-1**, **M-1**, or **J-1** student classification? Your school may ask you for your Social Security number (SSN). Some colleges and schools use SSNs as student identification numbers. If you don't have an SSN, your college or school should be able to give you another identification number.

SSNs generally are assigned to people who are authorized to work in the United States. They are also used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. An SSN will not be issued just for the purpose of enrolling in a college or school.

If you want to get a job on campus, you should contact your designated school official for international students. This official can tell you if you're eligible to work on campus and can give you information about available jobs. Also, your school may approve certain limited off-campus employment, as permitted under Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations. **If your school has authorized you to work either on or off campus, and you meet our eligibility requirements described in the next section, you can get an SSN.**

In general, only noncitizens who have DHS' permission to work can apply for an SSN. We suggest you wait 48 hours after reporting to your school before you apply for an SSN. This wait will help ensure we can verify your immigration status with DHS.

To apply for an SSN, visit our Request a Social Security number for the first time page at [www.ssa.gov/number-card/request-number-first-time](http://www.ssa.gov/number-card/request-number-first-time). You will need to:

- Start the application online.
- Complete the application, by visiting your local Social Security office or Card Center with your documentation within **45 calendar**

**days.** You may be eligible to self-schedule an appointment online before you visit your local Social Security office or Card Center.

- Show us original documents proving your:
  - Work-authorized immigration status.
  - Age.
  - Identity.

If you cannot start the application online, you must visit a Social Security office or Card Center. You will need to show us original documents or copies certified by the issuing agency which prove identity, citizenship/immigration status, and age. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies.

You will receive your card in the mail. Most cards arrive 14 days after we approve your application.

## Immigration status

To prove your immigration status, you must show us a current admission stamp in your unexpired foreign passport and *Arrival/Departure Record* (Form I-94), if available. If you're an F-1 or M-1 student, you must also show us your *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status* (Form I-20). If you're a J-1 exchange visitor, you must show us your *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status* (Form DS-2019).

## Work eligibility

If you're an F-1 student and eligible to work on campus, you must provide a letter from your designated school official that:

- Identifies you.
- Confirms your current school status.
- Identifies your employer and the type of work you are, or will be, doing.

We also need to see evidence of that employment, such as a recent pay slip or a letter from your employer. Your supervisor must sign and date the employment letter. This letter must describe:

- Your job.
- Your employment start date.
- The number of hours you are, or will be, working.
- Your supervisor's name and telephone number.

If you're an F-1 student authorized to work in curricular practical training (CPT), you must provide us your Form I-20. The employment page must be completed and signed by your school's designated official.

If you're an F-1 or M-1 student and have a work permit (Form I-766) from the DHS, you must present it.

If you're a J-1 student, student intern, or international visitor, you must provide a letter from your sponsor. The letter should be on sponsor letterhead with an original signature that authorizes your employment.

We cannot process your application if:

- Your on-campus or CPT work begins more than 30 days from your application date.
- The employment start date on your work permit from the DHS (Form I-766) is a future date.

## Age

You must present your foreign birth certificate if you have it or can get it within 10 business days. If you can't present your foreign birth certificate, we can consider other documents, such as your passport or a document issued by the DHS, as evidence of your age.

## Identity

We can only accept certain documents as proof of identity. An acceptable document must be current (not expired) and show your name, identifying information, and preferably, a recent

photograph. We will ask to see your current unexpired foreign passport with DHS issued immigration documents.

***All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents. We also cannot accept a receipt showing you applied for the document.*** We may use one document for two purposes. For example, we may use your admission stamp in the unexpired foreign passport as proof of both work eligibility and identity.

We don't require you to have an SSN before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requires employers to report wages using an SSN. While you wait for your SSN, your employer can use a letter from us stating that you applied for a number. Your employer may use your immigration documents as proof of your authorization to work in the United States. Employers can find more information on the Internet at [www.ssa.gov/employer/hiring.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/employer/hiring.htm).

## Contacting Us

The most convenient way to do business with us is to visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) to get information and use our online services. There are several things you can do online: apply for most types of benefits; start or complete your request for an original or replacement Social Security card; find publications; and get answers to frequently asked questions.

Or, you can call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at **1-800-325-0778** (TTY) if you're deaf or hard of hearing. We can answer your call from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., weekdays. We provide free interpreter services upon request. For quicker access to a representative, try calling early in the day (between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. local time) or later in the day. **We are less busy later in the week (Wednesday to Friday) and later in the month.** You can also use our automated services via telephone, 24 hours a day, so you do not need to speak with a representative.



Securing today  
and tomorrow

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