

# International Students And Social Security Numbers



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

Social Security numbers generally are assigned to people who are authorized to work in the United States. Social Security numbers are used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. Social Security will not assign a number to you just to enroll in a college or school.

## What do I have to do to work in the United States?

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 Social Security's eligibility requirements described in the next section, you can get a Social Security number.**

## How do I apply for a Social Security number?

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work from the DHS can apply for a Social Security number. We suggest you wait 48 hours after reporting to your school before you apply for a Social Security number. Waiting will help ensure we can verify your immigration status with the DHS.

To apply for a Social Security number at your local Social Security office:

- Complete an application for a Social Security card; and
- Show us documents proving your:
  - Work-authorized immigration status;
  - Age; and
  - Identity.

## 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; and
- 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; and
- 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 with the employment page 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; or
- 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. Social Security will ask to see your current U.S. immigration documents, such as a current admission stamp in your unexpired foreign passport and *Arrival/Departure Record* (Form I-94), if available.

***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.

## Do I need a Social Security number before I start working?

We don't require you to have a Social Security number before you start work. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to report wages using a Social Security number. While you wait for your Social Security number, 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.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm).

## Contacting Social Security

Visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) anytime to apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov), is available to you anytime and anywhere!