

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. If you decide to work, the first step is always to talk with your designated school official (DSO).

If your DSO knows you are working without permission, your DSO must report it through SEVIS and your record can be terminated. That means that you will have to leave the United States immediately, and you may not be allowed to return. There are many opportunities to work and getting permission is easy.

On-Campus Employment

As an F-1 student in Active status, you **immediately** have an option for one kind of work: **on-campus employment**. However, there are some things to keep in mind.

Although you may work shortly after you arrive, you must be in *Active* status and your DSO must approve your request. After your DSO approves your request, you'll be given a letter of approval. This letter, along with a letter from your employer, will help you get a [Social Security number](#). When school is in session, you may only work 20 hours per week.

OPT (Optional Practical Training)

After a full year at school

OPT must relate to your major or course of study, and although you can apply for 12 months of OPT at each education level, you must have your EAD card before you begin working.

In order to obtain your EAD, your DSO needs to provide you with a new Form I-20 indicating your DSO's recommendation for employment, and you must submit a [Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization"](#) to USCIS. Your EAD card will come from USCIS. Just as with other work authorizations, you are restricted to a 20-hour work week while school is in session.

CPT(Curricular Practice Training)

CPT must relate to your major and the experience must be part of your program of study, however, unlike OPT and other work, **CPT can be full time and is not restricted by a weekly 20-hour work limit.**

In order to qualify for CPT your DSO needs to provide you with a [Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status”](#) indicating your DSO’s recommendation for employment.

Off-Campus Employment

After a full year at school, you could be eligible for **off-campus employment**. Approval for this requires special authorization from [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#). In order to apply for this kind of employment authorization, you must receive a recommendation from your DSO and file a [Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization”](#) with USCIS. After USCIS approves your employment, they will send you a [Form I-766, “Employment Authorization Document” \(EAD\)](#).

You may not begin work until you have received your EAD. Just as with on-campus work, while school is in session you are restricted to a 20 hour work week.

As an F-1 student, you can receive work authorization for training related to your studies: optional practical training (OPT) and curricular practical training (CPT). Most of the time, you must have been enrolled in an [SEVP-certified](#) school as an F-1 student for one full academic year to be eligible for either type of practical training.

International Students and Entrepreneurship

Because starting your own business constitutes work, you must qualify and apply for OPT to start a business while in F-1 status. OPT, and thus the business, must relate to your program of study and can occur either before (pre-completion OPT) or after the completion of a program of study (post-completion OPT). You can learn more on our [International Students and Entrepreneurship page](#).