

This information sheet provides you with an introduction to employment issues and options for international students in F-1 status.

The most important employment issue that you always need to keep in mind is the issue of legal (or "authorized") versus illegal (or "unauthorized") employment. You must always make sure that any employment you plan to engage in is legal employment. Any unauthorized (i.e. illegal) employment - even for one day - even if you did not know it was illegal - poses a grave threat to your ability to remain in or return to the United States. And you must always make sure that you have the necessary employment authorization before you begin work, since starting work without prior authorization-even if you receive authorization later-constitutes illegal employment.

You should always consult with the Designated School Official before beginning any employment. This is the only way to be sure that you won't engage in illegal employment, with all of its adverse consequences for your future in the United States.

Eligibility Requirements

Different requirements exist for each type of F-1 employment, but there are basic requirements that must be met for any F-1 employment:

- You must be enrolled for a full course of study
- You must be authorized by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (former INS) or the Designated School Official.

Once employment is authorized you must maintain eligibility or you will lose your right to continue employment, even if it was authorized in writing.

Definition of Employment

Employment is any type of work performed for services provided in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, food or any other benefit. If you receive no pay or other benefit for the work performed, this activity is not defined as employment, but can be considered to be volunteer work.

Categories of F-1 Student Employment

I. On-Campus Employment

Work on CST's campus is usually permissible if it meets certain requirements. The authorization for on-campus employment is obtained from the Designated School Official; USCIS authorization is not necessary. Work on-campus is limited to 20 hours per week when school is in session but may be full-time during holiday and vacation periods. A new F-1 student who has been issued a form I-20 may work prior to the commencement of classes, but for no longer than 30 days prior to the actual start date of classes.

USCIS defines on-campus employment as the following:

Type 1: Employment at CST: Any on-campus work for which you receive a paycheck (or other compensation, such as room and board, etc.) from Claremont School of Theology.

Type 2: On Campus Work affiliated with an On-Site Commercial Firm on CST's Premises. This includes work on CST's campus for a commercial firm **if and only if** this work provides direct services to students.

Type 3: Certain Off-Campus Employment where there is an official educational relationship between CST and the off-campus employer. USCIS regulations allow work at an off-campus location provided the:

1. Location is educationally affiliated with CST,
2. Educational affiliation is associated with your school's established curriculum or is related to a graduate level research project which your school has contracted to perform, and
3. Work is an integral or important part of your program of study.

II. Internship with an International Organization

If you are offered employment in the form of an internship by a recognized international organization, you may accept such employment upon receipt of authorization from the USCIS. Examples of recognized organizations include the United Nations, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc. For more information consult with the Designated School Official.

III. Curricular Practical Training

Certain work experiences, which are an integral part of your program of study may be the basis for curricular practical training employment authorization. These experiences may include alternate work/study programs, internships, cooperative education programs and practicum experiences which are either (1) a required part of your academic program, or (2) work for which you receive academic course credit.

IV. Optional Practical Training

F-1 students are eligible for twelve months of optional practical training (OPT). Optional practical training provides an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge obtained in an academic program to a practical work experience. This employment opportunity must be directly related to your major field of study. It may, in certain circumstances, be full or part time and may take place anywhere in the U.S. You may apply to use OPT during your vacation periods, during the academic year, or when you complete your studies. Students in masters and PhD programs with thesis and/or dissertation requirements can apply for optional practical training upon completion of all coursework. OPT must be endorsed by the Designated School Official but also requires authorization from the USCIS before you can start to work. To be eligible for optional practical training, one must be enrolled in a full course of study for at least one full academic year. Applications for optional practical training can be submitted up to 90 days prior to the completion of your program of study. As it typically takes 90 days to obtain your employment authorization, you must apply early. You cannot begin working until you have received the USCIS authorization.

V. Economic Hardship Employment

In some instances, a student who is able to prove severe economic hardship caused by circumstances beyond his or her control, which arose after obtaining the F-1 students status, may be eligible for permission to work off campus. Students must have been in student status for one full academic year, and must be able to document the circumstances causing the economic need. If authorized, employment is limited to no more than 20 hours per week when school is in session and full-time during the break or vacation periods. Applications must be endorsed by the Designated School Official and submitted to the USCIS for approval. This application may take up to ninety days to process. See the Designated School Official for more information.

Social Security Numbers and Taxes

If you plan to work in the U.S. (including on-campus) you will need a Social Security Number. You must wait at least two weeks following your arrival in the United States before applying for a Social Security Number. Please visit the Designated School Official for a letter and instructions on how to apply for a Social Security Number. The Social Security Administration will process your application and a number will be sent to you in about one month.

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. for less than six calendar years are exempt from social security (also known as FICA) and Medicare taxes. You should be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer because many employers are not familiar with this provision of the tax laws. If you need more information about the F-1 social security and Medicare tax exemption, please contact the Designated School Official Advisor. Students in F-1 status are subject to all other taxes that may apply: federal, state and local.

Employment Eligibility Verification

Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form called an Employment Eligibility Verification Form (USCIS Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission.