

# Social Security Numbers

## What is Social Security?

Social Security (also known as FICA—Federal Insurance Contributions Act) and Medicare are U.S. government programs that provide benefits for U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents, usually for retirement. It is financed by taxes withheld from the paychecks of working people. F-1 students and scholars who are "non-residents for tax purposes" are not required to pay these taxes. See the [IRS Publication 519\(link is external\)](#), to determine if you are considered a resident or non-resident for tax purposes.

F-1's who have become "residents for tax purposes," are required to pay into Social Security and Medicare taxes. If Social Security and Medicare taxes are withheld from your paycheck in error, you can obtain a refund by following the instructions in [IRS Publication 519\(link is external\)](#).

## [How to Apply for a Social Security Number](#)

[\(See below page 3\)](#)

## What is a Social Security Card?

A Social Security card is required for everyone who works in the U.S., even non-immigrants. On the card will be a unique Social Security Number (SSN) that you will keep for life. You will need the number for many purposes in the U.S. including employment and paying taxes. A Social Security card is **not** a work permit. Visit the Social Security Administration's web site for more information at <http://www.ssa.gov/>(link is external)

## Who is eligible to apply for a Social Security Number?

- F-1 students with a job offer letter and/or work permission
- Individuals with other types of immigration status allowing employment

**Note:** F-2 dependents are not eligible for Social Security Numbers.

An SSN is issued once per lifetime. If you have previously had a SSN, but do not have the card or do not remember the number, you can apply for a duplicate card if you meet the eligibility requirements above.

## When to Apply for a Social Security Number

Applications made too early may be rejected or delayed beyond the usual processing time. Students must be physically present in the U.S. to apply for an SSN. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is required to verify your legal entry into the U.S. before issuing an SSN. You must wait at least 10 days after entering or re-entering the US to apply in order for your admission record to be verified.

## F-1 Students

- New students** must wait at least 10 days after being registered full-time and after the first day of classes (both must be true) AND must meet the requirements for "Registered students," below
- Registered students** can apply no more than 30 days before:

- F-1 On-campus employment start date on the offer letter
- F-1 [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#) start date on their I-20

**Students on post-completion training** can apply no earlier than:

- F-1 students on [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) who have not applied for the SSN on their I-765 EAD application form: start date on their Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

*Please note that it is possible to apply for the SSN and the OPT EAD at the same time, on the I-765 EAD application form. See our [OPT tutorial](#) for more information.*

## Working While Awaiting an SSN

You may work while the Social Security number application is being processed. There is no provision in the law that requires employers to have their employees' SSNs before hiring them. There is no provision that prohibits an employee from beginning work if he or she has not yet obtained an SSN. However, you must have employment authorization from your program sponsor or USCIS **before** you begin working.

## Social Security Number Safety

Although an SSN is only meant to be used for tax and government purposes, it is often used by financial institutions, businesses, and others as a unique identification number. Because the SSN is a unique ID, it is often the target of 5 t 5 heir h hea o X

# How to Apply for a Social Security Number

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## Social Security Number (SSN) Application Steps for F-1 status:

# Employment Letters or Authorization for Social Security Numbers

## F-1 On-Campus Employment Letter

Ask your on-campus employer to write a letter using this