Can international students work on campus?

Non-immigrant students in F-1 or J-1 status are eligible to work at the school they are attending and which issued them their SEVIS I-20 (F-1) and SEVIS DS-2019 (J-1) Forms. On-campus employment includes all assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships. In order for a student to be considered eligible for on-campus employment, s/he must be enrolled as a full-time student and must be in lawful F-1 or J-1 student status.

Your eligibility for on-campus employment is in effect ONLY as long as you are maintaining lawful non-immigrant F-1 or J-1 student status (refer to Rules for Maintaining Lawful F-1 Status in the United States and Rules for Maintaining Lawful J-1 Status in the United States). If you violate your status, you make yourself ineligible for on-campus employment, because on-campus employment is a benefit granted only to those students who maintain lawful status.

If you were to violate your status and continue working on-campus, you would be engaging in illegal employment, and would potentially risk deportation. You would also jeopardize your eligibility for any future benefits from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), such as "practical training," "academic training," and/or adjustment to another non-immigrant status.

J-1 students interested in on-campus employment should make an appointment to meet with an advisor before they begin work on campus.

How soon can I work on campus after I have arrived in the U.S.?

A student who enters the U.S. on an “initial attendance” I-20 may begin employment on campus no more than 30 days before the start date listed on her I-20. Transfer students may begin on-campus employment after completion of their legal transfer to DePaul University. (Transfer students should confirm directly with the OISS that their transfer is complete before engaging in on-campus employment.)

How can I learn more about my eligibility to work off campus?

Off-Campus Employment is available to non-immigrants in F-1 and J-1 student status under certain conditions. You may begin off-campus employment only AFTER you have obtained authorization to do so.

Options for F-1 students

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Optional practical training is off-campus work authorization that may be obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to accept employment in your academic field. You are eligible to apply for OPT once you have maintained your F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year. F-1 students are eligible for 12 months of optional practical training at each academic level (example: a student can apply for OPT after completion of a U.S. bachelor's degree and, after pursuing a Masters degree, can apply for another 12 months of OPT). Students may choose to use a portion of their OPT prior to degree completion; however, authorized pre-completion OPT will be deducted from the 12-month allotment. There are very specific restrictions and timetables stipulated in new regulations related to this benefit. For more information, read our handout on Optional Practical Training.

Effective April 8, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published an interim final rule that affects students who wish to use OPT. The new provision includes an extended deadline for OPT applications, new reporting requirements, STEM extension, Cap-Gap extension, and restrictions on unemployment for post-
completion OPT. For more details please review the OISS’s handout on OPT Changes, the USCIS Q&A release #1 and USCIS Q&A release #2. Questions regarding the interim final rule can be addressed by an advisor in weekly Employment Q&A advising sessions.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): CPT is off-campus work authorization that may be obtained from the International Student Office to accept employment in your academic field. You are eligible to apply for CPT once you have maintained your F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year. CPT requires that you receive academic credit for the work experience for which you are requesting authorization. For more information, read our handout on Curricular Practical Training.

Economic Hardship: Work permission based on unforeseen severe economic hardship is available to students who have maintained lawful F-1 status for one academic year, are currently in good academic standing, can demonstrate that they have suffered an unforeseen change in their financial circumstances, and have found that on-campus work opportunities are not available or adequate. For more information, please call the ISO at 312-362-8376 to schedule an appointment.

Options for J-1 students
Academic Training: Academic Training allows students in J-1 status to gain practical experience in their major field of study. Academic Training authorization permits you to take a job that is directly related to your field of study and appropriate to your educational level. You may apply to use academic training either prior to or after completion of studies, but the application itself must be submitted before completion of your program (and before expiration of your DS-2019). For more information, read our Academic Training handout and schedule an appointment with an International Student Advisor.

Economic Hardship: Work permission based on unforeseen severe economic hardship is available to students who have maintained lawful J-1 status for one academic year, are currently in good academic standing, can demonstrate that they have suffered an unforeseen change in their financial circumstances, and have found that on-campus work opportunities are not available or adequate. For more information, please call the OISS at 312-362-8376 to schedule an appointment.

How many hours per week am I eligible to work? What if I am doing CPT and on-campus work, does the same weekly limit apply?

All forms of employment (both on-campus and off-campus) are limited to no more than 20 hours per week during the academic year i.e. when school is in session. For example, if a student has two jobs and works 12 hours/week at the first job, he may work no more than 8 hours/week at the second job.

The 20-hour limit is applied to each week, meaning that a student can work no more than 20 hours in any given week. For instance, a student cannot work 23 hours one week and 17 the next (which averages out at 20 hours/week); to do so would constitute illegal employment, as the student worked more than 20 hours in the first week. Students who are maintaining their status are eligible to work full-time during holidays and annual vacation periods, provided they intend to register for the next academic session.

Do I need to get work authorization for unpaid internships or volunteer opportunities?

Because the U.S. government’s definition of “employment” is relatively broad, the vast majority of off-campus professional opportunities will require some form of legal authorization well in advance of participation. When in doubt, please make an appointment to meet with an OISS advisor to discuss the nature of your prospective opportunity. You may also visit the Employment section of this website for further information on eligibility and authorization for off-campus work.

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