APPLYING FOR A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

A Social Security Number (SSN) is a 9-digit employee and tax identification number issued by the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA). Eligibility for a Social Security Number is based upon a person's eligibility to accept lawful employment while in the United States. Foreign nationals are eligible to apply for SSNs only in specific circumstances.

PURPOSE OF A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

A Social Security Number (SSN) is required by the U.S. government for tax reporting purposes. Anyone who is engaged in paid employment must have a SSN.

SSNs are often used for a variety of unofficial purposes, such as opening telephone, utility, or bank/credit card accounts. While having a SSN is convenient for these reasons, international students and scholars must demonstrate proof of authorized employment in order to be eligible for a SSN. If you have difficulty opening a bank account or other types of accounts because you do not have a SSN, please contact the Office of International Services (OIS).

NOTE: Having a Social Security Number does not mean that you have legal authorization to work in the U.S. However, you must have a Social Security Number if you have been granted legal authorization to work and are working.

SSN APPLICATION PROCEDURE

1. Obtain evidence of employment authorization. To apply for a SSN, you must first obtain documentation certifying that you have employment authorization. Acceptable documentation can be one of the following:

   - **On-Campus Employment (F-1 and J-1 students):** Obtain a letter from a TC or Columbia department confirming that you have been offered an on-campus job. See the OIS for a sample department letter. The employment letter must be printed on original department letterhead, signed on the original by your hiring department. (See step 2.)
   - **Curricular Practical Training (F-1):** Obtain an updated Form I-20 from TC showing that you have been authorized to engage in F-1 Curricular Practical Training (employment based on an academic internship / fieldwork / practicum).
   - **Optional Practical Training or other F-1 off-campus employment (F-1):** Obtain a valid, unexpired Employment Authorization (EAD) card from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services authorizing you to work under F-1 optional practical training (OPT), international organization employment, or severe economic hardship employment.
   - **Academic Training:** Obtain an updated DS-2019 as well as a letter from the OIS, both indicating your academic training authorization. Note: If you are a J-1 student sponsored by an external organization such as IIE, LASPAU, or AMIDEAST, your academic training will be authorized by your visa sponsor, not the OIS.
   - **J-1 Professors/Visiting Scholars:**

2. Come to the OIS to request a SSN Letter (ONLY FOR ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT). If you are requesting a Social Security Number based on on-campus employment, you must bring your TC or CU department letter to the OIS. The OIS will issue a second letter to confirm that you have secured on-campus employment and that you are a full-time student in good standing. An OIS letter is not required if you have another form of employment authorization (CPT, OPT, and international organization employment, severe economic hardship employment, or academic training). Additionally, if you are a J-1 student sponsored by an external organization such as IIE, LASPAU, or AMIDEAST, you must obtain a Social Security authorization letter from your visa sponsor. You do not need a letter from the OIS. Note: If you have been hired for a position at TC, you must complete either the paper or online post-hire process before we can process your letter.

3. Go to a Social Security Card Center (see below) to apply for a SSN. Complete the Social Security form SSA-5 (available at the SSA office). No fee is required. Bring your:

   - Form I-20/DS-2019
   - Passport
   - Visa or change of status approval notice
   - I-94 card or electronic I-94 record printout
   - Supporting documentation:
     - If you are working on-campus: Employment letters from your on-campus employer and the OIS visa sponsor
     - If you are engaged in CPT: Your I-20 must have an authorization for CPT printed on page 3 of the form
     - If you are engaged in OPT or other F-1 off-campus employment: You must bring your unexpired Employment Authorization (EAD) card

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- If you are engaged in Academic Training: You must bring your DS-2019 with academic training authorization and academic training letter from OIS or your visa sponsor (if sponsored by third-party).
- J-1 Professors/Scholars: ____________

When you submit your application, your documents will be reviewed by a SSA examiner. Once your application is accepted, ask for an application receipt so that you can show your employer that you have applied for a SSN. You can expect to receive your SSN within 4-6 weeks, although processing times vary.

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD CENTERS
As of August 13, 2012 if you live or receive mail in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, or Queens, you must go to a Social Security Card Center in order to apply for a social security number or replacement card. Other Social Security field offices located in Manhattan no longer issue social security numbers or replacement cards. You can apply at any of the Social Security Card Centers listed below. You do not need to apply at the card center located in the borough where you live. If you live or receive mail in Staten Island, New Jersey, Connecticut, or another area, you can either apply at a local office near your place of residence or at any of the Social Security Card Centers listed below:

Manhattan Social Security Center: 123 William Street, 3rd Fl., New York, NY 10038
Take the A / C/ J / Z / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 to Fulton St.

Bronx Social Security Center: 820 Concourse Village West, 2nd Fl., Bronx, NY 10451
Take 4 / D to Yankee Stadium (161 River Ave)

Brooklyn Social Security Center: 154 Pierrepont Street, 6th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201
Take 2,3,4,5 To Borough Hall / N,R To Court Street / A,C,F To Jay Street-Metro Tech

Queens Social Security Card Center: 155-10 Jamaica Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11432
Take the E / J to Jamaica

All Social Security Card Centers listed above are open Monday to Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.