



Employment Based on Severe Economic Hardship

Overview

According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcements, USCIS makes case-by-case decisions for off-campus employment for students who can show that new, unexpected circumstances beyond their control have created severe economic hardship. These may include the following:

- Loss of financial aid or [on-campus employment](#) (if the student is not at fault)
- Large increases in tuition or living costs
- Substantial decrease in the relative value of currency the student depends upon to pay expenses
- Unexpected changes in the financial conditions for a student's sources of financial support
- Unexpectedly large medical bills not covered by insurance
- Other substantial, unexpected expenses

Eligibility

You are eligible to apply for employment base on severe economic hardship if:

- You have been in F-1 status for one full academic year
- You are in good academic standing and are taking a full course load
- Employment will not interfere with your studies
- You can demonstrate that the employment is necessary to avoid severe economic hardship due to unforeseen economic circumstances beyond your control

USCIS CAN TAKE UP TO 90 DAYS TO AUTHORIZE EMPLOYMENT BASED ON SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, SO YOU SHOULD APPLY AT LEAST 3 MONTHS BEFORE YOU PLAN TO WORK.

Conditions and Limitations

- You must prove to USCIS that the economic hardship was unforeseen (see above).
- You must have been enrolled as a full-time student in legal immigration status for at least one academic year.
- The work does not need to be related to your course of study. Employment based on severe economic hardship is designed for off-campus employment but can be done on campus.
- Authorization is granted in one-year intervals up to the expected date of completion of studies. You must reapply to the USCIS each year to renew this work authorization. Authorization ends if you transfer to another school.

- Work is limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session but can be full-time during official school breaks.
- Use of this category does not count towards the 20-hour on-campus limit, nor does it affect OPT/CPT eligibility.
- An offer of employment is not required as a condition of eligibility.
- **OFF-CAMPUS WORK IS PROHIBITED UNTIL YOU RECEIVE AUTHORIZATION FROM USCIS**

Requirements/ Documents Needed:

- A personal statement describing the unforeseen hardship situation and, if possible, attach backup documentation;
 - For example, news articles, a letter from home telling of a change in family circumstances or proof of a currency devaluation in your country, etc.
- Completed [Form I-765](#), using the code (C)(3)(iii) at item 16. **Do not** date the form until you are ready to send the application to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- Copies of your current and previous I-20s
- Copy of paper or print-out of electronic form i-94
- Copy of your passport and F-1 visa
- Copy of your unofficial transcript

How to Apply

1. Schedule an appointment with the DSO (Michael Fekete at feketemi@lewisu.edu or 815 836 5549) of the International Students and Global Scholars Services office and bring the documents listed in Requirements/ Documents Needed to your appointment.
2. The DSO will review your documents.
3. The DSO will send your request to SEVIS electronically, and generate a new SEVIS I-20. The recommendation will be written on page 2 of the new I-20.
4. The DSO will notify you when your new I-20 is available.
5. Sign your name on the I-20 immediately.
6. Send your request to USCIS. Refer to Submitting Your Severe Economic Hardship Request Application to USCIS below.

Submitting Your Severe Economic Hardship Application to USCIS

Once you have requested a Severe Economic Hardship Employment recommendation and received your new I-20 from the International Students and Global Scholars Services, you will need to prepare and submit the following list of items to USCIS:

- A copy of the new I-20 with employment recommendation
- Copies of your previous I-20(s)
- Copy of paper or print-out of electronic form i-94
- Copy of your passport page showing your biographical information and the expiration date
- Copy of your F-1 visa page or I-797 (approval of change of status to F-1), if applicable
- Form I-765 and the [base fee](#)

- Two full-face passport style photos. The photos must be identical and in color with a plain background. They must be no more than 30 days old when the I-765 is filed to USCIS.
 - Put photos in an envelope.
 - You should attach the fee and the photo envelope on top of the entire application (on the upper left-hand corner).
 - Please do not staple the fee and the photos.
- The personal statement along with any other supporting documents, if available.

Mailing to USCIS

USCIS Chicago Lockbox

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS
PO Box 805373
Chicago, IL 60680

FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

Employment Authorization Card (EAD)

If the application is approved, USCIS will issue an EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to you. If the application is denied, you will be notified by USCIS in writing.

Application Fee Waiver

If you are unable to pay the fee for a USCIS service or benefit, you may request a fee waiver by filing [Form I-912, Request for Fee Waiver](#).