

## SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

### What is Severe Economic Hardship (SEH)?

If you are suffering a severe economic hardship due to unforeseen changes in your financial circumstances, you may apply to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for authorization to work off-campus.

One condition of approval for F-1 nonimmigrant status is that a student shows the ability to pay for his or her education and support while in the United States. The severe economic hardship employment authorization benefit is intended to address situations where a financial need beyond the student's control arises, which was unforeseen at the time the student applied to the school he or she is currently attending and after all other potential employment opportunities have proven to be insufficient.

### Examples of unforeseen circumstances:

- Loss of financial support or on-campus employment
- Substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate
- Inordinate increases in tuition and/or living costs
- Unexpected changes in the financial condition of your source of support, such a loss of a family business
- Excessive medical bills

### SEH Facts:

- You must have been in proper F-1 status for at least one full academic year.
- You may only work 20 hours per week during the school year (more than 20 hours per week during official breaks and summer.)
- Authorization is granted only in one year increments, although you may re-apply for another employment period.
- You must be considered a full time student to apply for / engage in employment.
- You do not need a job offer prior to applying for SEH assistance.
- Employment authorization does not affect eligibility for practical training (OPT/CPT).
- Employment authorized for SEH is not limited to your field of study. You may accept any kind of lawful employment once you have your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.
- If you transfer to another institution, or if you violate F-1 status, your employment authorization is automatically terminated.
- You need to have a Social Security number in order to work in the US. If you do not have one, you will need to apply for one as soon as you receive your EAD card. The Office of International Student Services will be happy to help you apply for a SSN, once you have received your employment authorization. It is not possible to apply for a SSN without the EAD card.

### **How do I choose the dates of employment?**

Keep in mind that Immigration may take up to 3 months to issue a card. You should apply for SEH about 3 months before your desired start date. If granted, the employment period will last one year.

### **How long does it take USCIS to approve my application?**

Processing times take on average 3 months. You cannot start working until you receive your card.

### **When can I apply for a renewal of my EAD card if I wish to continue my SEH for another year?**

You cannot file more than 120 days before your original employment authorization expires. Also remember that if the EAD expires before the renewal is approved, employment authorization expires and you must stop working until the new EAD is received.

### **What is the letter of explanation?**

The letter of explanation written to the Immigration Officer is perhaps the most crucial part of your application for economic hardship. This is your chance to explain *why* you need to work off campus, and *how* your financial situation has changed. You should explain why other employment options (working on campus, or engaging in CPT/Pre-Completion OPT) are unavailable or insufficient. Attach any supporting documents. This may include a letter from home telling of a change in circumstances, or proof of currency devaluation including newspaper articles.

## What are the steps to apply for Severe Economic Hardship?

### 1. Apply for the SEH I-20 from ISS:

- a. Submit a SEH Request Form
- b. Pick up your I-20, check it over, and mail it with the rest of the required items no more than 30 days after the issuance date on the I-20.

### 2. Send your application and all required documents to USCIS:

- a. G-1145 Form. This will provide with E-notification that your file was received. (Free and optional)
- b. A check or money order for \$410.00 made out to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**. (DO NOT WRITE ON THE BACK OF THE CHECK!) Your name and address must be on the check. Write your I-94 # on the bottom left hand of the check (in the “memo” or “for” section.)
- c. Two passport style photographs taken within the last 6 months. Each photo must be cut to 2 inches by 2 inches with your name and I-94 # printed lightly on the back in pencil. Photos must have been taken within the past 6 months. Place the photos and check/money order in an envelope. Write your name and I-94 # on the outside of the envelope as well.
- d. Complete form I-765 **online** using the PDF version located at the following website <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-765.pdf> you will need Acrobat Reader to open the file. **Be sure to enter (c) (3) (iii) in step # 16. Print completed form I-765 and sign.**
  - i. Double check your address. Will you be there in 3 months? If unsure, you can use ISS’s address.
- e. All I-20s, Visa, Passport, I-94 card/electronic print out.

### 3. Make a copy of your completed I-20 application for your records.

### 4. Make an appointment with ISS to bring in your application to be reviewed by an advisor.

### 5. Mail your entire packet by certified return receipt mail (allows you to track the package.) If you are staying with the New York/New Jersey area, all packets mailed by USPS should be sent to:

USCIS  
PO Box 660867  
Dallas, TX 75266

## Once I receive my EAD card, what should I do?

- Make sure to check the dates are correct on the card.
- Make a copy of the card and bring it to ISS for our records.
- You must inform ISS of any employment you receive and if you change your address.
- You cannot start working until you receive your EAD card and the start date on the card has arrived.

## Severe Economic Hardship Request Form

**First Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RCC ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Street)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(City/State)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Zip Code)

**Desired Employment Start Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Intended Date of Graduation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Passport Expiration:** \_\_\_\_\_

Have you applied for Economic Hardship or OPT before (Circle one):                      NO                      YES

If YES, please indicate for which education level:                      Associates                      Bachelors                      Masters

\*\*\*\*

***I have read through this packet and understand what is needed to apply for Severe Economic Hardship. I understand that it is my responsibility to prepare the packet for USCIS and mail it to the appropriate lockbox.***

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Severe Economic Hardship USCIS Application Checklist

**You must submit all the following items to USCIS. Please put the packet together in the following order.**

- ❑ Fee of \$410. Make check payable to the “US Department of Homeland Security.” You may send a money order or personal check drawn on a US bank, NO CASH. Your name and address must be on the check. Write your I-94 # on the bottom left hand of the check (in the “memo” or “for” section.)
- ❑ G-1145. Use this form if you wish to receive email or text confirmation (within 1 week) of your receipt number from the Lockbox facility. Clip the form to the front of the OPT application. Find the form at: [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).
- ❑ Two “passport” photos. Print your name and write your admission number (I-94#) on the back of each photo. Use powder to prevent glaring and be sure there are no shadows in your photos! You may put the photos and check in an envelope and attach carefully to the front of the I-765 (do not staple photos!).
- ❑ Original I-765 form (follow instructions on how to complete form included in this packet). Make sure to sign it in blue ink.
- ❑ Letter of explanation detailing why your financial situation has changed and related evidence. Information found on the internet submitted as evidence is not acceptable by USCIS.
- ❑ A copy (NOT original) of page 1 and 2 of the new post-completion I-20 from ISS with the recommendation for SEH on page 2. Sign the new I-20 in blue ink. This I-20 cannot be more than 30 days old when it arrives at USCIS or SHE will be denied!
- ❑ A copy of ALL previously issued I-20 documents dating back to beginning of F-1 status (signed in item #11).
- ❑ A copy of your I-94 record.
  - Both sides of your I-94 card (front and back - even if the back is blank) OR
  - Printout of the electronic I-94 record from [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94)
- ❑ A copy of the photo page (identification page) and expiration date page of your passport.
- ❑ A copy of the most recent F-1 visa page in your passport (even if expired).
- ❑ A copy of any previous Employment Authorization Document (EAD) OPT card, if you have had one.

## Form I-765 Instructions for Severe Economic Hardship

- ❑ **Download the form I-765 from [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and complete it as a form-fillable pdf.** Do NOT complete the form by hand. The form is read by a machine-readable scanner.
- ❑ **Check the first box: “I am applying for: permission to accept employment.”**
- ❑ **Complete lines 1 through 16:**
  - **#1 Name:** Type your family/last name in all capital letters and your first name in sentence case.
  - **#3 Return Address:** This must be an address at which you can receive mail for at least the next 90 days. You cannot put in a forwarding order on this address - the immigration service’s envelopes state “Do Not Forward.” If the EAD is sent to an address with a forwarding order, or if you cannot receive mail at the address you use, your EAD will be returned to the immigration service. If you want to use a friend’s address, you need to make sure your name is on the mailbox. If you want your department to receive mail for you, check with your department first. You may use ISS to collect your mail – but we are unable to track the progress of your case. If you choose to use ISS as your mailing address, put the address as:

Rockland Community College  
International Student Services  
145 College Road, Suffern, NY 10901

*NOTE: If you use the ISS address, you will receive an email as soon as your card arrives in the office.*

If the mailing address you indicate on the I-765 is not located in New York/New Jersey, refer to the I-765 instructions ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)) for the proper mailing address for your application.

- **#10 Alien Registration Number:** Use your I-94 number found either on the upper left side of the I-94 card that you received when you entered the US (small white card in your passport) or taken from [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94). It is usually an 11 digit number – sometimes the last two digits are separated by a space.
- **#11 Previous Employment Authorization:** The answer is “no” unless you have previously applied for an EAD (OPT card) at this or any other institution. It is “no” even if you have had CPT or an H-1B visa.
- **#16 Eligibility Categories:** For F-1 Post-Completion OPT, fill out as follows:
  - **For post-completion Optional Practical Training: ( c ) ( 3 ) ( iii )**
- **Certification:** Sign and date the I-765 in **dark blue ink using a ballpoint pen**. Sign WITHIN the 2 lines.

**You may not change your SHE dates once you have filed the application with USCIS!  
You may not begin work until you have received the EAD card and are within the start and end date.**