Severe Economic Hardship:
Frequently Asked Questions for Students in F-1 Status

Overview
What is Severe Economic Hardship?
Severe Economic Hardship is a request to work off campus due to severe financial hardship. The work permission application is sent to USCIS, costs $410, and can take up to 90 days for USCIS to process. If the application is approved, students are permitted to work off-campus, with some limitations (see below).

Under what circumstances can students apply for off-campus work permission?
Students can apply for off-campus employment if they are able to demonstrate severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances. These circumstances include the following:
- Loss of financial aid or on-campus employment through no fault of the student
- Substantial fluctuations in the value of exchange rates or national currency
- Inordinate increase in tuition and/or living expenses, and/or
- Unexpected and substantial change in the financial conditions of the student’s source of support, medical bills, or other unusual expenses

Eligibility
Who is eligible?
Students who have been in F-1 status for nine months, are in good academic standing, can demonstrate that acceptance of employment will not interfere with the ability to carry a full course of study, and have not been able to find on-campus employment may apply for off-campus work permission.

Can F-2 dependents (spouses and children of the F-1) apply for Severe Economic Hardship?
No, F-2 dependents are not allowed to work under any circumstances.

Do students need a job offer before USCIS will authorize work permission?
No.

Applications to USCIS
Who authorizes off-campus employment?
Iowa State University students must file an application with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

How do I start the process to apply for Economic Hardship?
Make an appointment with an International Student Adviser. An International Student Advisor must first issue an I-20 for Economic Hardship before a student may apply.

What is the process to apply to USCIS?
1. Complete Form I-765 typed
2. Complete Form G-1145 to receive E-Notification and case tracking information from USCIS
3. Write a letter to explain reasons for requesting off-campus employment and inability to find work on campus
4. Obtain, if possible, supporting documentation showing an unforeseen change in financial circumstances. For example:
   - Letter from sponsor which shows funding has been discontinued
   - Copies of medical bills
   - Newspaper articles discussing currency fluctuations in home country

5. Make an appointment with an International Student Advisor in 3248 Memorial Union. Bring with you the completed:
   - Form I-765 typed
   - Form G-1145 typed
   - Letter and supporting documentation of unforeseen circumstances
   - Copy of I-20

6. If student has all the necessary papers, the International Student Advisor will request an I-20 containing the recommendation for off-campus employment

7. Send the following documents to USCIS:
   - Payment of $410
     - Personal check or money order made payable to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or
     - Form G-1450 authorizing credit card payment
   - Printed copy of completed Form I-765 typed
   - Printed copy of completed Form G-1145 typed
   - Typed letter with supporting documentation
   - Photocopy of I-20
   - Photocopies of the identity pages from passport (picture, number and expiration date)
   - Form I-94
   - Two color passport photos taken in past 30 days
   - Photocopies of any previously issued EAD cards

8. Send all documents by certified mail requesting a return receipt to:
   USCIS
   P.O. Box 21281
   Phoenix, Arizona 85036

How long do students wait before they obtain the EAD card?
Students will receive a case number and instructions from USCIS that can be used to track the estimated processing times via the USCIS Website. Note that estimated processing times are subject to change. If employment is authorized, USCIS will send the EAD to the address indicated on Form I-765.

Employment
How many hours per week can students work?
Students may work a total of twenty hours per week when school is in session. All on- and off-campus employment is counted toward the twenty hour limit. Students may work full time during vacation and summer periods, provided they intend and are eligible to register for the next school term.

How long is the work permission valid?
USCIS may grant employment permission in one-year intervals. Renewals may be authorized by USCIS if students remain in good academic standing. Employment authorization is automatically terminated if students fail to maintain status.
What documentation do students receive to show approval of work permission?
USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to document off-campus work permission.

When can students begin to work?
Students can begin to work only after the EAD is received from USCIS.

If students lose their EAD, how can they obtain a replacement?
Students must request a replacement EAD by completing a new Form I-765 and sending it along with the application fee of $410, two photos and photocopies of the Form I-797 Receipt Notice and/or of the lost EAD.
Disclaimer: This Frequently Asked Questions document is intended for general information and guidance. Please consult with an International Student and Scholar Advisor in the International Students and Scholars Office regarding your individual request.