Severe Economic Hardship

Who can apply for permission to work based on economic hardship? To be eligible to apply you must meet all of the following requirements:

1. You must have been in F-1 status for at least one full academic year (two semesters)
2. You must have been a full-time student for at least one academic year
3. The economic problem must be unexpected
4. The economic problem must be severe

What is a “severe” economic problem? A “severe” economic problem is one that would prevent you from completing your educational program.

What does “unexpected” economic problem mean? An unexpected problem is one that you could not have predicted when you provided the financial documents for the I-20. This might include sudden and significant changes in exchange rates, natural disasters that result in loss of business or family income, war, political change which freezes bank accounts, etc.

What is not considered an unexpected financial problem? Uninsured medical bills, brother or sister starting college, shift in exchange rate which is part of a long-time pattern, parent’s retirement, etc., are not unexpected financial problems.

How much can I work? You will be eligible to work off campus up to 20 hours per week when school is in session and more than 20 hours per week during the summer and when school is not in session?

Do I have to register as a full-time student? Yes, although you have financial difficulty, you must register for at least 12 credits in the fall and spring semesters.

How do I apply and how long will it take to get a work permit?

1. Write a letter explaining your situation and how this situation was unexpected and beyond your control. Also collect supporting evidence (newspaper articles, articles from websites, bank statements, letters from sponsors, etc.) Your application is sent by mail and the decision is based on your documentation. If you really need to work, you need to collect as much supporting evidence as possible and explain your situation clearly.
2. Make an appointment with an International Student Advisor to discuss your situation and review your letter. Although the International Student Office cannot give the work permit, we are required to review your application and determine whether the application is valid.
3. Work with the International Student Advisor to prepare the application that you will send to USCIS. (See back of this page for list of items to send and address)
4. Mail the application to USCIS; it may take six to eight weeks to receive an answer.

Office of International Student Services
7630 Little River Turnpike, Suite 815 • Annandale, VA 22003
Phone: 703-323-3423 • Fax: 703-813-1329
Email: oiss@nvcc.edu • www.nvcc.edu/international
Documents to send to USCIS

- I-765 Application for Employment
- Check written to “Department of Homeland Security” for $410
- Letter explaining your situation and supporting documentation
- A complete listing of your current assets, income and expenses. Include copies of recent bills, receipts and bank statements
- Copies of the financial documentation which you provided to NOVA for your I-20 (the International Student Advisor has this information in your file)
- A statement from your sponsor explaining the events which have occurred and why these are unexpected and evidence of their current financial status
- An outline of departures from and arrivals to the U.S. since your initial arrival. Include the dates and reasons for travel
- A letter from the International Student Advisor explaining the recommendation for work and confirming that you have been unable to find on campus employment which was sufficient
- Photocopy of pages 1 and 3 of current I-20
- Photocopy of I-94
- Photocopy of passport ID page
- Two passport style photographs

Send to:

If sending by U.S. Postal Service:    If sending by Express mail:
USCIS                        USCIS
P.O. Box 660867            Attn: AOS
Dallas, TX  75266             2501 S. State Hwy. 121, Business
                                Suite 400
                                Lewisville, TX  75067

We recommend that you send the application by certified mail with a return receipt.

United States law requires you to obtain written authorization before starting any type of compensated employment. Beginning work without authorization from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) or NOVA’s Office of International Student Services is a serious violation of your F-1 status.

You may not begin working until you receive the work permit!