



Madison College

## APPLYING FOR SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP (SEH) WORK AUTHORIZATION



### Step 1: Request SEH Recommendation from CIE.

Schedule an appointment with an International Student Services staff member in CIE. At the appointment, you will be given guidance on how to draft a written overview (to be addressed to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) regarding the situation that has led to the economic hardship and why on-campus employment options are not sufficient. You will also need to gather documentation that serves as evidence of the situation. CIE must review these items before giving the SEH recommendation. The documents must be sent to the USCIS for the final decision. CIE staff will provide guidance on how to select an appropriate work authorization start-date. Please note that the work permission often takes 3 months for the USCIS to process and employment off-campus is not permitted until the work permission has been received. The work authorization is given in one-year increments, but cannot exceed the end-date of your I-20.

### Step 2: Assemble Your SEH Application Packet.

- Photocopy of new I-20 from CIE with the SEH Recommendation listed on page 2. The application must be received by the USCIS within 30 days of when the I-20 was issued.
- Written letter describing the situation that has led to financial hardship and why on campus employment options are not sufficient.
- Documentation to support the situation described in the letter, if available
- The I-765 form (available at [U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services](https://uscis.dhs.gov/i-765)) with the following detail included:
  - Item # 20 should be completed with (c)(3)(iii) for Economic Hardship OPT. Skip #21-23.
  - If you are not 100% certain that you will be at your current mailing address when receiving the EAD card in 3-4 months, do NOT provide that address on the I-765. The CIE mailing address may be used by specifying “c/o Center for International Education” in the address
- I-765 fee in the form of a check or money order payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” OR you may submit form I-912 to request a fee waiver. Please review USCIS guidance on the fee waiver request at [US Citizenship & Immigration - Filing a Fee Waiver](https://uscis.dhs.gov/i-912).
- Two identical immigration style/passport photos-face forward, looking directly at the camera. Very lightly write your name & I-94 number on back of each photo.
- Your I-94 record, which can be printed online at: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>
- Photocopies of your passport page(s) that show your identity (photo, name, birth date, etc) and the passport validity dates (the date the passport expires). Also include any pages that show amendments, such as name changes, corrections, etc., if any.
- Photocopy of the F-1 visa stamp in your passport (if you applied for the F1 visa abroad), OR a copy of the change of status to F1 approval notice form (if you changed visa status in the US).
- Optional: The G-1145 form (available at [U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services](https://uscis.dhs.gov/g-1145) under “forms”) can be included as the first page, if you wish to receive text and/or email updates from the USCIS during the process

### Step 3: Mail the above items to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

USCIS must receive the OPT application packet **within 30 days** of when the I-20 with OPT recommendation was issued and **by no later than 60 days from the date you graduated!**

- If using the U.S. Postal Service (recommended): USCIS, P.O. Box 21281, Phoenix, AZ 85036
- Other mail service: USCIS, ATTN: AOS, 1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85034



#### **Step 4: Wait.**

In about 3 weeks you will receive a receipt notice in the mail with directions on how to look up your case status online. It typically takes 3 to 3.5 months to receive SEH approval, which will come with an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). You are NOT eligible to begin off-campus employment until you have received the original EAD card and until the SEH start date listed on the EAD card. Please note that the actual SEH start date listed on the EAD card may be later than the dates requested, if the SEH application is reviewed and authorized *after* the original desired start date.

#### **While on SEH:**

- SEH is a benefit of the student visa, not a “work visa.” You remain on the F-1 student visa for the duration of SEH, so you must continue to follow F-1 visa regulations accordingly. This means you must continue to enroll full-time during both the Fall and Spring semesters.
- Be certain to provide a copy of your EAD card to both CIE and your employer(s).
- During the period of approved SEH, you may work:
  - Only part-time (less than 20 hours per week) during the Fall and Spring semesters.
  - Full-time work (more than 20 hours per week) is permitted during the summer or semester breaks.

#### **Renewing SEH:**

- The same process may be repeated to apply for additional periods of SEH work permission. Please remember that it may take more than 3 months to receive a new EAD card, so it is best to apply up to 4 months before the end of your current SEH authorization, if you wish to avoid a gap between the two periods of approved SEH.