Social Security Numbers

What is a Social Security number?
The Social Security Administration issues Social Security numbers (SSN) to all individuals eligible to work in the United States. The SSN is used to identify participants in the federal government’s social security program which provides retirement and disability benefits to workers and their families. Although the Social Security Administration states that the SSN is intended only for employment purposes, many public and private institutions, such as banks, phone companies and utilities (gas and electric) have adopted the SSN as a unique identifier for its customers. There is no fee required to obtain a SSN and card.

Do I need a Social Security number?
If you plan to work in the United States, either on campus or with off-campus work authorization, you must obtain a SSN. Your employer will withhold Social Security taxes from your paycheck and submit them to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which credits each payment to your Social Security account. You may start working on campus without a SSN.

Am I eligible for a Social Security number?
If you hold J-1 visa status, you are eligible for a SSN.
If you hold F-1 visa status, you are eligible for a SSN if you meet at least one of the following criteria, and can provide proof of employment (visit the ISSSO for details).
- you are currently working on campus
- you have been offered an on-campus job
- you have obtained off-campus work authorization
If you hold any other visa status, please consult with an international student advisor or the Social Security Administration about your eligibility to apply for a SSN.

How do I apply?
To apply for a Social Security number, please:

1. Visit the ISSSO to discuss your eligibility for a SSN. If eligible, the ISSSO will provide you with a letter to present to the Social Security Administration certifying that you have the necessary immigration status and work authorization to be eligible for a SSN. If you have been offered a job on campus, you must obtain a letter from St. John’s University’s human resources department stating the nature of employment, where you will be working, supervisor’s name, number of hours per week (maximum 20 hours), and the employer identification number.

Contacting the Social Security Administration
Visit the Internal Revenue Service’s web site at www.socialsecurity.gov or call 1-800-772-1213 (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call the TTY number, 1-800-325-0778). Information is available through their automated phone service 24 hours a day and specific questions may be answered by a service representative.

International Student and Scholar Services Office
St. John Hall, Room 116 Phone: (718) 990-6083 Fax: (718) 990-2070 ISS@stjohns.edu
How do I apply? (cont.)

2. After you have been in the U.S. for at least 10 days, take the documents listed below to the Social Security Administration office closest to you:
   - ISSSO Certification of your immigration status and work authorization (F-1 or J-1)
   - Proof of employment (F-1 students only)
   - Passport
   - I-94 card (small, white arrival/departure card)
   - I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1)

The closest Social Security Administration office to St. John’s Queens campus can be found at:
Joseph P. Addabbo Federal Building, Second Floor (Corner of Parsons Blvd. and Jamaica Ave.)
155-10 Jamaica Avenue
Directions: Take any bus running south on Utopia Parkway to Hillside Avenue. Then, either transfer to any bus running west on Hillside Ave. to 161st St., or you may walk.

3. You will receive your SSN and card within a few weeks of submitting your application. If you work on campus, you must bring your SSN to Human Resources at Chiang Ching-Kuo Hall and inform the administrator in the department that is employing you once you receive your card.

Should you encounter a problem at the Social Security office or if they say you are not eligible for a Social Security card, go to the security desk and ask to speak with the manager for an explanation.

What if I am not eligible for a Social Security number?
Some government agencies (e.g., the Department of Motor Vehicles) and private institutions (e.g., banks, phone companies, utilities) now use the SSN for identification purposes. Below is some information on how to access these services without a SSN.

New York State Driver’s License
The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles requires all applicants for driver’s licenses to provide a Social Security card or a letter from the U.S. Social Security Administration stating that you are not eligible for a SSN. The SSA Letter must have been issued within the last 30 days.

Banking
A SSN is NOT required to open a bank account. Show your passport and a copy of either your bill from St. John’s University or your student identification card. You will be asked to complete a W-8BEN form (for tax withholding). The ISSSO may assist you by providing a letter certifying that you are a student at St. John’s University and your local address. When opening a checking account, you can apply for a check card. This VISA or MASTERCARD can be used to make purchases which are debited directly from your checking account.

If you do not have a SSN and a credit history in the United States, you may apply for a Secure Credit Card (minimum credit line is between $500 and $1,000). The funds must be available in an account at the bank. A Secure Credit Card can help you establish a credit history.

Utilities
Students applying for gas and electric utilities through NYSEG are not required to have a SSN. You will be asked to provide a St. John’s University ID, passport, name, address etc., as well as a copy of your lease. Leases under one year are required to pay a security deposit.

Phones (off campus, non-university housing)
You may set up a Verizon land line without a SSN. Dial 1 + area code + 890-1550. To verify your identification, you will need to fax two forms of identification: your passport and I-20/DS-2019.

Cell Phones (Please refer to the mobile/cell phone information handout)