

What is the purpose of businesses wanting social security numbers?

The main use of Social Security numbers (SSN) by businesses and landlords is to check a person's credit history. International students usually do not have any credit history since they have recently moved to the U.S., so it is useless for businesses to run a credit check on a SSN or to even ask for a SSN.

Many businesses will say that it is a requirement for the customer to provide a Social Security number. However, this is not true. Social Security numbers are the most common form of identification in the U.S., but they are **not** the only form of legal acceptable identification.

What if I don't qualify for a SSN yet?

There **is** another government-issued number that can work like a SSN. It is called an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) and is issued through the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Some F-1 visa holders can get an individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) with appropriate proof and documentation.

See <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw7.pdf> for an application and more information on where to mail the application and the required documentation.

For in-person requests, the closest IRS office is in Nashville (address: 801 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203, phone: 615- 250-5656).

For more information about Social Security numbers and regulations regarding SSN, see www.socialsecurity.gov/ss5doc/oriselfres.htm.

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Driver's Licenses

- You do **not** need to have a Social Security number to get a driver's license, if you have an F visa.
- You **do** need to bring your passport, I-20, I-94, Social Security Affidavit form (see Tip 4), two proofs of Tennessee residency (see <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dlproof.htm> for acceptable forms of proofs) and an APSU I.D. card. Be ready to take the vision, written and road driving tests and have the fee for the license.
- Be prepared for long lines at the driver's license office. It is recommended you make an appointment for your road driving tests as that can help reduce the wait time, but remember you can only take the road test after you have passed both the written and the vision tests.
- For more information and directions to the Clarksville office or to make an appointment online, go to <http://www.state.tn.us/safety/dlstations/montgomery.htm>.
- Study for the written test at <http://www.state.tn.us/safety/dlhandbook/menu.htm>.

The ESL Institute



Center for Extended
& Distance Education

International Students: Help with Social Security and Other Business Agencies

Do I qualify?

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can apply for a Social Security number. Lawfully admitted noncitizens can get many benefits and services without a Social Security number.

There are only two valid nonwork reasons:

1. A federal law requires you to provide your Social Security number to get a particular benefit or service.
2. A state or local law requires you to provide your Social Security number to get general assistance benefits for which you have already qualified.

These are NOT valid nonwork reasons:

1. Obtaining a driver's license.
2. Applying to rent/purchase a house or apartment.
3. Applying for a bank account.
4. Registering for school.
5. Obtaining health insurance.

Where to go?

The Clarksville Social Security office is located at 108 Center Pointe Drive which is off Wilma Rudolph Boulevard between 101st Airborne Parkway and Trenton Road---from Wilma Rudolph Boulevard, turn onto Center Pointe Drive at the US Bank sign (red, white and blue sign).

Get a map, phone number and hours at <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps6z/FOLO/fo001.jsp> (enter ZIP code).

What to bring?

Complete a Form SS-5 application (at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>) and bring your passport, I-20 and I-94 card and an official school letter from employer. If you have a campus job, bring your job contract, photocopy of a completed job application or proof of employment authorization. You must bring **ALL** these documents, or your application will be denied.

Additionally, you **must** be registered in SEVIS.



Useful Tips for Working With Banks, the Social Security Office, the Driver's License Station and Other Business Agencies

1. **Arrive prepared.** Make sure you have all the documents that could be useful, and be familiar with the procedure or other requirements when possible. For most situations, students will need to at least bring their passport, I-20, I-94 card and APSU I.D. card plus any other applicable documents.
2. **Plan your time carefully.** Don't expect to get your driver's license or bank account on a one-hour lunch break. Be prepared for long lines and considerable waits. If you are rushed, it is easy to become impatient and frustrated with the process.
3. **If you have an appointment, be on time.** Personnel working in these offices often have full schedules. Punctuality is valued and is a

way of being respectful – you will make a better impression if you are on time. If you miss an appointment you may have to reschedule for another day.

4. **Know the rules** that protect you. Show a copy of the Social Security Publication No. 05-10096 if needed to prove that you are ineligible for a SSN. (<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10096.pdf>)

Banks have a special form, called a W-8 that internationals use in place of Social Security cards. For more information on Form W-8 BEN, go to <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/iw8ben.pdf>.

The **Tennessee Department of Motor Vehicles** has an official memo to their employees listing all visa types that are not required to show SSN for driver's certificate. There is a Social Security Number Affidavit form that you will need to complete and use at <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/forms/ssnaffidavit.pdf>.

5. **Remain calm and polite.** Usually front desk staff will be helpful and willing to work with customers as long as the customers are respectful. Losing your temper, yelling or showing other displays of anger rarely achieve progress. However, it **is** appropriate to ask to speak with a manager or supervisor if you believe it would help the situation, especially in regards to company policies as front desk staff may not have the authority to make adjustments or changes.
6. When all else fails, **leave and come back later with reinforcements.** If no one can help you at the time you visit a business or agency, come back when a higher-level authority is available

or ask to speak to someone with experience with internationals. If the ESL coordinator can be of assistance, ask for an official letter on your behalf. There are always other paths to achieving your goal. A well-meaning but untrained person may turn away a qualified international student, simply because the staff person is not familiar with all of their company's seldom used policies.

7. Open a bank account at the bank's **main office** instead of a branch office as staff may be more familiar with working without a SSN. (See ESL Institute office for a list of local bank main offices.)
8. Be **patient** and **flexible**. Most businesses use computer systems that run on Social Security numbers. Not using a SSN is not impossible but can take more time. Showing proof to the person you are working with that you are not eligible for a SSN could be helpful (see Tip 4). Ask if they will accept a driver's license number (if you have one) or passport number or other form of identification.

