Curricular Practical Training

What is Curricular Practical Training?

There are two types of practical training available to F-1 students: curricular practical training (CPT) and optional practical training (OPT). CPT is an alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education or other type of required practicum that a sponsoring employer offers through agreements with a student's college or university.

Here’s what students and school officials need to know about CPT:

- Occurs before a student's program end date on the Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status.”
- Must relate directly to the student’s major area of study and be an integral part of the school’s established curriculum. Can be full-time (more than 20 hours per week) or part-time.
- A student's designated school official (DSO) authorizes CPT in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).
- Students must secure the training opportunity before CPT can be authorized.
- One year or more of full-time CPT eliminates students' OPT eligibility at the same educational level.
- Student can have more than one CPT authorization at the same time. However, CPT authorization is needed for each employer and each time period.
- CPT requires a signed cooperative agreement or letter from the employer.

For more information on the rules and regulations applicable to CPT, visit the Practical Training page on ICE.gov. For case-specific questions, please contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program Response Center.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: May a school authorize a student to participate in CPT instead of OPT?

A: No, CPT and OPT are not interchangeable. CPT accommodates individuals enrolled in a program of study that requires participation in an internship or practicum. It is not a supplemental training experience but rather an “integral part of an established curriculum” meaning it is a required part of the degree or program of study. The regulation makes this clear by defining CPT as an “internship, cooperative education or any other type of required internship or practicum....” In contrast, OPT accommodates students who have fulfilled the requirements of an academic or vocational program and provides an opportunity to augment the student’s learning with real-world experience.

Q: May a student participate in CPT related to the student’s minor or general graduation requirements?
A: Federal regulations require CPT to be directly related to a student's major area of study. This means CPT cannot be authorized based on a student’s minor or general graduation credits. CPT participation may only be approved if the training opportunity is directly related to the major program of study.

Q: Whom do I contact to ask further questions about my CPT participation?

A: Students may contact the SEVP Response Center, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET, except holidays, by calling 703-603-3400 or 1-800-892-4829.