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 internship or practicum that a sponsoring employer offers through agreements with a student’s school.

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). A DSO may not backdate the authorization and accordingly, SEVIS will not allow backdating.
- Students must secure the training opportunity before CPT can be authorized.
- A student may begin curricular practical training only after receiving his or her Form I-20 with the DSO endorsement and not before the CPT start date indicated on the form.
- One year or more of full-time CPT eliminates students’ OPT eligibility at the same educational level.
- Students can have more than one CPT authorization at the same time. However, a separate CPT authorization is needed for each employer and each CPT segment.
- 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 (SRC).

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: Does a student need to receive authorization from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to participate in CPT?

A: No; however, a student’s DSO must authorize CPT in SEVIS. Please note that SEVIS will not allow DSOs to backdate the authorization.

Q: Can a student begin participating in CPT while waiting on their school official to authorize the training in SEVIS?

A: No; a student’s DSO must authorize the student’s CPT in SEVIS before the student can participate. Participating in practical training without the necessary authorization could violate the student’s status.

Q: Can a student have more than one CPT authorization at the same time?

A: Yes; however, a separate CPT authorization is needed for each employer and each CPT segment.

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

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