

Curricular Practical Training

General Information

What is CPT?

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is temporary authorization for practical training directly related to your major field of study. Your major field of study is listed on your I-20.

"Practical training" can include employment, internship experience (paid or unpaid), cooperative (co-op) education experience, practicum participation, etc. CPT is authorized by the DSO/PDSO in accordance with the F-1 regulations. You can apply for CPT during the regular academic year (you must remain registered full-time) and during your annual vacation quarter.

CPT may be part-time (20 hours per week or less) or full-time (more than 20 hours per week). If you accumulate 12 months of full-time CPT authorization, you lose your eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT), another type of employment authorization for F-1 students. Part-time CPT and fewer than 12 months of full-time CPT authorization does not affect your OPT eligibility.

Eligibility

You may be eligible for CPT if you:

- Are currently in valid F-1 status.
- Have been enrolled at a college or university in the U.S. on a full-time basis for at least one full academic year. ("One academic year" at WIU is defined as three full-time quarters per the academic calendar, including final exams week. An exception to the academic year rule is provided for graduate students whose programs require immediate participation in CPT. The program requirement must be for all students in the program and should be listed on the program's website in the curriculum description.)
- Are in a major (Pre-major students, who are not yet admitted into a major, are not eligible for CPT. CPT cannot be authorized based on a minor or certificate program).
- Will earn your degree from WIU (visiting exchange students are not eligible for CPT).

Credit Requirement

You may request authorization for CPT to participate in training that is integral to your established curriculum. Training may be required or optional for your degree. Required training must be clearly identified and described in the course catalog or similar publication.

If the training is not required by your major degree program, the PDSO/DSO requires you to receive academic credit from an internship, cooperative education program, practicum, or similar course through your academic department. Your academic department might not require you to earn credit for an optional training/work experience, but the PDSO/DSO requires academic credit be earned in order to authorize CPT. The credit must be earned in the same quarter for which CPT is authorized, though exceptions may be granted for students pursuing CPT during their vacation quarter. You must earn at least one CPT-related credit for each quarter of authorization granted. Graduate students may not use thesis or dissertation credit to fulfill the credit requirement.

CPT Application Procedures

Submit the following to the PDSO/DSO:

1. A letter from your academic adviser or professor requiring an internship.
2. A letter from the employer with a job offer showing the start and end date of the internship.

The letter from the advisor must:

- Describe the internship or cooperative education program and identify the work experience within the context of the regular curriculum in your program of study.
- State whether the training is optional or required and, if optional, state the course number, the number of credits to be awarded, and the quarter in which credit will be earned.
- State whether or not the department considers you a full-time student.
- Include the name and address (job location) of the employer.
- State the beginning and ending dates of employment.
- State the number of hours per week you will be working.

If you qualify for CPT, the PDSO or DSO will issue you a new Form I-20 endorsed on page 3 with details of your CPT employment. Do not begin working until you receive your I-20 endorsed for CPT. Be careful to comply with the restrictions on your employment as stipulated in the endorsement. Your endorsed I-20, together with your passport and I-94 card, is evidence of your eligibility to work and may be used to complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 that all U.S. employers are required to complete. Please allow one week for processing.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

CPT is employment that is an integral part of your major curriculum and allows you to participate in an internship, practicum or cooperative education program. CPT is employer specific and must be done before you graduate. OPT is optional for any student who meets the eligibility requirements and you do not need to earn credit. OPT is not employer specific and may be done before or after you graduate.

Do I have to be registered while on CPT?

You must maintain F-1 student status, which generally requires full-time registration. Most students are required to register as full-time students while on CPT. In some cases, graduate students may be considered as full-time students with fewer than 10 credits while on full-time CPT.

Does CPT usage affect OPT eligibility?

You may use as much CPT as is required for your degree program. However, if you use a total of 12 months or more of full-time CPT, you are not eligible for OPT. Part-time CPT does not affect OPT in any way.

Do I need to have a job to apply for CPT?

You must have an offer of employment to apply for CPT since the authorization is for a specific employer.

Can I change the number of hours I work?

You can change within the limits of part-time or full-time. For example, you may change from 10 hours per week to 15 hours per week without a new authorization. However, if you change from part-time to full-time (or vice versa) you must request a new authorization.

Can I change employers?

Since CPT is employer specific you must apply for a new CPT authorization before you work for the new employer.

Can I extend my CPT?

You are authorized for specific dates of employment on your I-20. You may not begin before the start date or continue after the end date. You must apply for an extension in sufficient time to allow the PDSO or DSO to issue a new CPT authorization before you can continue beyond the end date of your current CPT.

Do I need a Social Security number?

Yes, if your CPT is paid employment. You will need a Social Security number in order to receive payment from your employer.

Will I be required to pay Social Security and other taxes?

In general, as an F-1 student you will be exempt from Social Security (FICA) taxes for your first five years in the U.S. as long as you continue to declare nonresident status for tax purposes.

Unless you qualify under a tax treaty between the U.S. and your home government, your earnings as an F-1 student will be subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes, and employers are required to withhold those taxes from your paychecks. For more information on taxes, consult the Internal Revenue Service.

Will I receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD)?

No. The CPT authorization on page 3 of your I-20 is your proof of employment eligibility and together with your I-94 card may be used to complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 required by your employer.