According to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR):

Curricular practical training is defined to be alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school. Students who have received one year or more of full time curricular practical training are ineligible for post-completion academic training. Exceptions to the one academic year requirement are provided for students enrolled in graduate studies that require immediate participation in curricular practical training. A request for authorization for curricular practical training must be made to the Office of International Services. A student may begin curricular practical training only after receiving his or her Form I-20 with the Office of International Services' endorsement. [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(i)]

Eligible F-1 students can learn more about curricular practical training (CPT) by visiting the OIS website and downloading the CPT application form. You can also schedule an appointment with an OIS Advisor to discuss any questions or prepare to apply for CPT.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about CPT

1. Can I get CPT authorization first and then register for the internship course and/or find a job?

No. CPT authorization is granted for a specific training experience with a defined employer and for a specific period of time corresponding to an academic term. You must secure the internship, practicum, or fieldwork offer first and then apply for CPT based on those details.

2. Do I need to be enrolled while doing my CPT?

Yes. The regulatory basis for a CPT authorization is that the training experience be tied to the defined educational goals of the academic program listed on your I-20. Therefore, your program’s written curriculum must either require the training experience (e.g. internship, fieldwork, practicum, rotation, etc.) for graduation or, if the training is not a degree requirement, you must earn academic credit for the experience during the term in which you are authorized for CPT.

3. Can I have CPT in my final semester?

Maybe. If your academic program offers a training experience and your curriculum has you completing that training experience in your final semester, then CPT authorization can be granted if all other eligibility requirements are met. However, remember that to continue as an active F-1 student you must be enrolled in courses that are required for completion of your degree. If your training experience is an optional part of your curriculum or the credits you earn for the experience are not going toward degree requirements, it cannot be the only course you enroll for in your final semester.

4. Can I be employed full-time while on CPT?

You can apply for full-time CPT during vacation academic terms which at UIC is summer session I and II. During the fall and spring semesters, which at UIC are required academic terms, only part-time CPT authorization (20 hours or less per week) may be granted.

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5. Do I have to pay for CPT work authorization?

There is no fee to obtain CPT authorization from OIS. However, there may be tuition and fee charges associated with your enrollment in the required internship, practicum, or fieldwork course. The type and credit level of the corresponding course can vary between program curriculums. Please see your academic advisor or career center advisor for more information.

6. I heard that CPT is for any off-campus job. Is that true?

No. As stated above, the regulatory basis for a CPT authorization is that the training experience be tied to the defined educational goals of the academic program listed on your I-20. Even if the job is related to what you are studying, CPT authorization cannot be granted if your academic program does not have a defined training experience written into the curriculum (i.e. you cannot earn academic credit for participating in the training). Furthermore, if the learning objectives (i.e. job duties) of the training experience are not related to your academic program, CPT authorization cannot be granted.

If your primary goal is to gain practical work experience in your field of study rather than an academic pursuit, you may qualify for a pre-completion optional practical training (Pre-OPT) authorization. Please contact an OIS Advisor for more information.

7. I have a great internship opportunity. Can I start working tomorrow?

Unfortunately, no. You must obtain authorization on your I-20 from OIS before beginning any off-campus work. CPT authorizations are typically completed within five business days provided complete and accurate documentation is submitted to OIS. You may schedule an appointment with an OIS Advisor to review your CPT application prior to submission and discuss likely processing timelines. Some students find this helpful so that they can accurately negotiate a start date with employers. Please note that expedited processing is not available for any requests submitted to OIS.

8. I am working this summer at "Company X" and OIS approved my CPT until the end of the summer term. How can I get it approved so that I can work through the end of fall semester?

CPT authorizations are granted one academic term at a time. If your academic program supports subsequent training experiences, consult with an OIS Advisor to verify that you are eligible for additional CPT. Your OIS Advisor can also explain the process for reapplying for CPT. You cannot work beyond the CPT end date currently listed on your I-20.

9. The company where I will be doing my summer internship wants me to turn in the CPT approval ASAP. I am not enrolled for summer yet. Can you approve my summer CPT?

Unfortunately, no. CPT authorization can only be granted if you are enrolled in the corresponding internship, practicum, fieldwork, etc. course required by your academic program. If you need help completing your CPT application, or accurately communicating processing timelines to your employer, please reach out to an OIS Advisor for guidance.
10. Do I need an 1-94 Arrival/Departure Record?

Yes. Your employer will need to see either your 1-94 record from www.cbp.gov/i94 or paper 1-94. If you are unable to find your 1-94, please email OIS at ois@uic.edu.

11. My academic department does not want to recommend CPT. In this case, can I still apply?

Unfortunately, no. CPT authorization can only be granted for training experiences that are tied to the defined educational goals of the academic program listed on your I-20. If your department cannot confirm that the training experience is required for graduation or that you will earn course credit that goes toward your degree, then the experience is not CPT eligible.

12. My professor got me a job with "Company X" This is a great opportunity for me that will build my resume and help my job search after graduation. Can I use CPT for this?

Maybe. While CPT authorization cannot be granted based solely on the job being a “great opportunity,” if your academic program’s curriculum requires a training experience for graduation, then CPT might be a good fit. If your academic program does not require a training experience, then you could consider applying for pre-completion OPT. That said, there are some significant drawbacks to pre-completion OPT, such as the lengthy processing time with USCIS and its impact on post-completion OPT. You are welcome to discuss your options with an OIS Advisor. Please note that both CPT and OPT require that the job be related to your field of study,

13. Can I do full-time CPT and still be eligible for OPT?

Maybe. If you participate in 12 months or more of full-time CPT you are not eligible to apply for post-completion OPT. Participating in fewer than 12 months of full-time CPT, or in part-time (20 hours or less per week) CPT does not impact your eligibility for post-completion OPT.

14. Can I have CPT after I finish my studies and during my grace period?

No. CPT authorization can only be granted to an actively enrolled student. You are no longer eligible for CPT after you have completed all requirements and have entered into the 60-day grace period following your official UIC program completion date. There are rare exceptions to this rule, including PhD students who have completed all course requirements but need to continue collecting data at an off-campus location in order to complete a thesis or dissertation.

15. Do I need CPT authorization if my job is unpaid?

Yes. All qualifying off-campus internships, practicums or research opportunities require CPT authorization, even if they are unpaid.