

Hiring International Students (F-1):

What Employers Should Know

Many employers are concerned about liability related to the employment of international students in the US due to changes in federal laws governing non-citizens, particularly the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT90). This quick sheet highlights some of the employer concerns and FAQs.

CPT – Curricular Practical Training

What?

- Curricular Practical Training is required for Int'l students if they want to “work” off campus. There is no cost to the employer for the visa application.
- Presumes work is indeed “practical training,” such as an internship, directly related to field of study.
- Student **needs to have offer of position** before they can apply for CPT
- CPT needs to specifically be for full-time (>20 hrs/week) or part-time work (≤ 20 hrs/week)

When?

- Employer can make internship offer whenever, but student cannot work on CPT until after they have completed one full year of courses at UW (this is usually mid-June).
- Students **must** be registered for academic credits for CPT – no exceptions. Each iSchool program allows 1-5 credits to be registered per quarter for internship.
- Due to the need for academic credit, internship **offers should be given well in advance of the academic quarter** the student will be working (reference “Instruction Begins”). This varies by program, but ideally a student will have CPT authorization 2+ weeks before they start.

Where?

- Students are responsible for applying for CPT. The employer needs to give them an “offer letter.” The iSchool allows students to submit a screen shot of an offer via email.
- It usually takes about **2 weeks** or slightly more for CPT to be authorized. This is needed before the student can start work.

How?

- Students are responsible to submit all paperwork. **Minimal paper work for the employer!**

Why?

- The government views this type of employment as “practical training” i.e. an extension of their academic learning and field of study. That is why academic credit is required and why students can't start this before they finish one year of academic study.



OPT – Optional Practical Training

What?

- Government authorization allowing students to work in a field related to degree. There is no cost to the employer for the visa application.
- 12 months in field with additional 24 months for STEM fields (INFO, MSIM, PhD, but not MLIS)
- Students can use OPT before they complete their degree but this is rare and not recommended (CPT is recommended)
- **Job offer not required**, but helps on determining what date a student should start OPT
- Not available to students who have worked 12+ months full-time CPT (rare)
- Not available to students who have already used OPT at the same academic level (rare).

When?

- Students typically file all paperwork ~3 months before graduation, usually mid-March. Students need to choose an employment “start date” when they are applying.
 - If they already have an employment offer, this is helpful since they know their start date
 - For students without job offers by March, they still need to request an anticipated employment start date. **This can’t be changed after a student submits it.**
- If using OPT after graduation (most common) student needs to start authorization within 60 days of their graduation date
- The US Government is currently taking 3.5-5.5 months to process OPT applications. Employers should be aware that this could affect the start date of a recent graduate.

Where?

- Students are responsible for applying for OPT. They do not need an offer letter from an employer, although this is helpful since they do need to request their start date for employment 3+ months in advance.

How?

- Students are responsible to submit all paperwork. **Minimal paper work for the employer!**

Why?

- The government views this type of employment as “practical training” i.e. an extension of their academic learning and field of study. Ideally, employers will petition for a [work visa](#) while the employee is on OPT so that they can secure them as a worker for a longer period of time.

Adapted from a document which was originally published in 2000 with a grant from NAFSA, Region XII. Revisions made in 2004, 2010 and 2016. Editors: Laurie Cox, University of Wisconsin, Madison; 2010 coeditors: Lay Tuan Tan, California State University Fullerton, Phil Hofer, University of La Verne & Junko Pierry, Stanford University; 2016 coeditors: Junko Pierry, Stanford University & Laurie Cox, Ball State University.

