

# CPT/OPT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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<https://internationalservices.ncsu.edu/curricular-practical-training/>

<https://internationalservices.ncsu.edu/student-employment/optional-practical-training/>

Any CPT/OPT questions should first be directed to NC State's Office of International Services since they are in charge of CPT/OPT processing

# What are CPT and OPT?

**CPT:** Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a type of employment authorization for students in F-1 status that allows students to engage in off-campus employment\* in their field of study when it is a required component of their curriculum, integral to their thesis or dissertation research (e.g., collecting data or testing hypotheses in a real world industry environment), or part of a co-operative education program in their field of study.

**OPT:** Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a type of employment authorization for students in F-1 status who wish to engage in off-campus employment in their field of study during and/or after their course of study. No job offer is necessary to apply, but students must meet the eligibility requirements and obtain a new Form I-20 from OIS with an OPT recommendation before being able to apply.

## **CPT vs. OPT:**

- CPT is semester-long and for current students
- OPT is year long and typically starts once a student graduates



# CPT FAQs

**When should I apply for CPT?** We recommend that you apply for CPT as early as possible. Each semester, OIS generally begins accepting applications the same day the university registration/enrollment period for the consecutive semester opens. Please refer to the [CPT website](#) where OIS posts each semester's application dates.

**How long will it take for my CPT application to be processed?** Please allow 2-3 weeks for processing after submitting completed application materials to CDC. You will receive a notification email once the application has been transferred over to OIS, then another once the I-20 is ready for pickup. If OIS needs to correspond with you during the review process, an advisor will send you an email directly. Otherwise, please do not make status inquiries with OIS, as this only slows the review process for all.

**What details must my job offer letter contain?** Your job title, job description, salary, start and end dates, number of hours you will work per week and your actual physical work address. If you will be working remotely, your offer letter must state that the work will be performed remotely and include the remote work location.

**Can I work more than 40 hours per week if I am authorized for full-time CPT?** Yes, during the summer term. But, even though USCIS does not restrict you from working more than 40 hours, labor laws and insurance-related university policies may prohibit this, so please check with your employer to make sure you are in compliance.

**Can I work on-campus and off-campus at the same time during the summer session?** Yes

**Can I work out of the country on CPT if my internship is remote?** Maybe. You will need to check with your employer since you may be required to work in the U.S. for tax purposes.

**When are summer CPT applications due?** Typically by the middle of June, but check the [CPT website](#) for posted due dates.

# OPT FAQs

If I don't get a job, but I already submitted my OPT application and start date, what kind of work can I do to make sure I don't lose unemployment days? All OPT employment is required to be in a job that is directly related to the student's degree program. Employment under pre- or post-completion OPT may include:

- Paid employment. When on post-completion OPT, students must work at least 20 hours per week .
- Multiple employers. Students may work for more than one employer, but all employment must be related to each individual student's degree program and for pre-completion OPT cannot exceed the allowed per week cumulative hours.
- Short-term multiple employers (performing artists). Students, such as musicians and other performing artists, may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The students should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- Work for hire. This is also commonly referred to as 1099 employment where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested by DHS, students should be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract periods and the name and address of the contracting company.
- Self-employed business owner. Students on standard OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student should be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to his or her degree program.
- Employment through an agency or consulting firm. Students on post-completion OPT should be able to provide evidence showing they worked a total of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- Unpaid employment. Students may work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this practice does not violate any labor laws. The work should be at least 20 hours per week for students on post-completion OPT. A student should be able to provide evidence, acquired from the student's employer, to verify that he or she worked at least 20 hours per week during the period of employment.

**How do I choose my OPT start date?** For post-completion OPT, your start date must fall within 60 days after your program completion date. The date within that window is up to you to decide. Neither Career Services nor OIS will be able to tell you when you should set your start date. It is your choice to make on your own. However, we can tell you that students who have not yet found a job tend to choose a later start date that may fall between late May and late June.

**Can I be unemployed while I am on OPT?** Yes, temporarily. You have an allotment of 90 days to be unemployed in the U.S.

**If I can't find a job before my OPT start date, can Career Services get me a research position?** No. We can help you reach out to professors and we can help connect you with labs that are in need of volunteers, but we cannot guarantee you a research position.

**How long will it take for my OPT to be processed?** USCIS usually takes 3-5 months to process your OPT application, though it can also take less time. Generally, the earlier in the semester you apply, the faster your application is processed due to the fact that at the end of each semester USCIS is swamped with OPT applications.





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Services for your  
questions!

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