MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
Frequently Asked Questions
International Engagement

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So, how can I continue my job between semesters if I can't use CPT?

I think I understand CPT, and I want to apply. How should I proceed?

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I want to work full-time (over twenty hours per week) and take a full-time course load. Is this allowed?

Can I keep my on-campus job if I have CPT employment, even if my work will total more than twenty hours a week?

What if my course-related work opportunity is unpaid? Should I still apply for CPT?

May I apply for CPT and OPT at the same time?

I want to devote myself fully to my CPT work. Could I reduce course load in order to do CPT?

Can I count the CPT-related course towards my full course load requirement?

I am going to finish my degree one semester early, but my I-20 has an end date in a future semester. Can I stay on-campus taking courses in order to use more CPT time until my I-20 ends?

Could I extend my I-20 in order to do a CPT-related class?

I am a graduate student who has completed all required credits and am just working on my thesis/dissertation. Can I do CPT?

What is CPT?
The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations defines Curricular Practical Training (CPT) as employment which is an integral part of an established curriculum, including: "alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school" [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(i)].

What is the difference between CPT and OPT?
In short, CPT is employment that is directly related to the student's major and required to successfully complete a course. OPT is employment that is directly related to the student's major but not part of the student's curriculum.

How does an F-1 student become eligible for CPT?
- Be a full-time student in F-1 status for at least one academic year (one fall and one spring semester)
- Be in lawful F-1 status at the time of the CPT application
- Get approval from academic advisor
- Be enrolled in a course necessitating CPT employment or the Cooperative Education Program (Co-op)
- Have a job offer

How much CPT employment is allotted to each student?
Students can be approved for either part-time or full-time CPT. Part-time CPT allows you to work 20 hours or less per week, while full-time CPT is required for any work that will be more than 20 hours per week. Doing full-time CPT for one year or more (365 days and up) will cancel one's eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Part-time CPT does not affect one's eligibility for OPT.

Does CPT-related coursework have to be credit-bearing?
Yes.

What is the minimum credit requirement for a CPT-related course?
One credit.

Could a student link any class to CPT employment?

No. A CPT-related course is one that requires employment in order for a student to successfully complete the course, so all students in the class will also be employed. Eligible courses include Independent Study; courses that require fieldwork, a practicum, etc.; and the Cooperative Education Program. Please note that Cooperative Education has its own set of requirements for participation in the program; for specific requirement information, please contact Career Services and refer to this site.

Can I drop a CPT-related course?

Not if you have already begun your CPT employment. Since CPT employment requires registration in a course or Cooperative Education, dropping the course would render that past employment illegal and would result in the loss of your immigration status. A student may take an incomplete in a Practical Training course, but he or she is still required to complete the CPT-related course assignments and receive a grade prior to graduation. Students should keep in mind that failure to receive a grade in a CPT-related course prior to graduation will be reflected on the academic transcript, which may be requested by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) as part of the application for certain immigration benefits (such as OPT or H-1B), and could adversely affect a student's ability to receive such benefits.

What if I change my mind and decide not to do CPT work after International Engagement (IE) authorizes me?

If you decide not to participate in CPT before the authorized employment start date listed on your I-20, please contact your international advisor to request cancellation of your CPT authorization in SEVIS.

If you decide not to participate in CPT after the employment start date on your I-20 but before you have actually begun your work, you must contact your international advisor immediately so that International Engagement can contact Immigration and Customs Enforcement on your behalf to request removal of the CPT authorization. This can be a lengthy process, so please be sure to inform IE as quickly as possible so you may be advised as to the documentation that is required.

CPT employment authorization **cannot** be cancelled once you have begun working—even if you work only a few days—so consider this carefully if you have concerns about your ability to work and handle your academic responsibilities at the same time.

If I am already taking a full-time course load, could I get CPT employment without registering for the related coursework?

No.

My employer wants me to have uninterrupted employment, but I can only register for CPT-related coursework during the semesters. Could I work between semesters?

Not unless your class requires this. CPT work must be done in conjunction with eligible coursework, so typically, no CPT will be approved outside of the semester's start and end dates.

So, how can I continue my job between semesters if I can't use CPT?
You should apply for pre-completion OPT employment.

I think I understand CPT, and I want to apply. How should I proceed?
- Talk with your academic advisor to discuss your proposed employment, and find out if there is a CPT-related class you may take. If you are interested in doing CPT via Cooperative Education, contact Career Services for more information and for participation requirements.
- Talk with the professor of the CPT-related course to discuss the work you will do and the academic requirements you will need to meet to successfully complete the course.
- Follow the "Application Procedure" on the CPT Application. Then, bring the form and a copy of your job offer letter to the IE office to be processed three weeks before your proposed employment start date.

What happens after IE approves my CPT?
An IE staff member will process your application, and if it is approved, issue you a new I-20 with your CPT employer and work start and end dates listed on the third page. This I-20 authorizes you to work only for the employer listed and the dates designated. You cannot start your CPT job before the work start date or without the I-20, so you must apply two weeks in advance of your proposed start date to be sure you can work when your employer expects you to.

I want to work full-time (over twenty hours per week) and take a full-time course load. Is this allowed?
Yes, but IE advises you to use caution when making this decision as it can be stressful to balance a full-time course load with a full-time job. Please talk with your academic advisor and CPT-related course professor about this. If they think you can handle this load, they may sign your CPT Application recommending this. If full-time CPT is approved, your academic advisor, professor, and IE will monitor you throughout the semester. If you are not attending your classes or your academic work is suffering because of your job, your CPT work authorization may be canceled by IE. Please keep in mind that having your CPT canceled could adversely affect your ability to maintain F-1 status.

Can I keep my on-campus job if I have CPT employment, even if my work will total more than twenty hours a week?
U.S. regulations do not explicitly restrict on-campus employment while participating in CPT. Therefore, IE recommends that students who wish to work on-campus while engaging in CPT should apply for part-time CPT and not exceed 40 hours of work combined between their on-campus work and CPT work. As a reminder, you cannot work more than 20 hours per week on campus while school is in session.

IE cannot guarantee that students who choose to do full-time CPT while working on campus will encounter no questions or problems in the future (i.e., as part of an H-1B or other immigration

petition). Students who choose to do full-time CPT alongside on-campus work must understand that they do so at their own risk.

What if my course-related work opportunity is unpaid? Should I still apply for CPT?

Yes, CPT is for any work done as an integral part of the curriculum and directly related to your major. It doesn't matter if the work is paid or unpaid.

May I apply for CPT and OPT at the same time?

Yes. CPT is processed by the IE office, and OPT is processed by both IE and USCIS. Applying for both at the same time or one while the other is pending will have no detrimental effect on either. However, you will not be approved for CPT that will push you beyond the 364-day full-time CPT limit if you have pending OPT with USCIS.

I want to devote myself fully to my CPT work. Could I reduce course load in order to do CPT?

No. CPT is meant to be directly related to your academic program, which means that it happens as part of your other coursework—not in place of it.

Can I count the CPT-related course towards my full course load requirement?

This depends on how many other courses you are taking and for how many credits the CPT-related course is worth. In a semester in which you must be enrolled full-time (minimum 9 credits for graduates, 12 credits for undergraduates), a 3-credit CPT-related course may count towards the full-time minimum as long as the course is required for your degree (as either elective or core credits).

I am going to finish my degree one semester early, but my I-20 has an end date in a future semester. Can I stay on-campus taking courses in order to use more CPT time until my I-20 ends?

No. Once you can or have completed all degree requirements, you must do so and move on to the next phase of your F-1 status (apply for OPT, change degree levels, etc.) regardless of when your I-20 end date is. You may not continue taking courses that are not required to complete your program; to do so would negatively affect your F-1 status.

Could I extend my I-20 in order to do a CPT-related class?

Only if you need the CPT-related class in order to graduate.

I am a graduate student who has completed all required credits and am just working on my thesis/dissertation. Can I do CPT?

Yes, but only if participating in CPT does not delay completion of your studies and the proposed CPT employment is integral to your thesis or dissertation research. Your academic advisor will need to explain to IE how the CPT work will contribute to your thesis/dissertation. Failure to make normal progress on your dissertation/thesis as a result of CPT work may result in the cancellation of your CPT or the denial of a future program extension request.

My prospective employment is not related to my major. Could I do this work as CPT?

No. All CPT and OPT jobs have to be directly related to your major.

I am interested in a job that would take me out of the NY/NJ area. Can I do this job on CPT if my professors agree to allow me to complete the rest of my coursework online or via email?
No. As an F-1 student, you are required to actually participate in on-campus coursework, not just enroll in on-campus courses and work remotely. IE will only approve CPT during the fall and spring semesters for jobs located within a reasonable commuting distance from Montclair State's campus.

If you wish, you may choose to pursue long-distance CPT opportunities during the summer, provided the summer will not be your last semester of study, in which case the above rule applies.

I would like to change jobs on CPT. Is this possible?
Yes, but only under certain circumstances and with faculty recommendation. In order to change jobs, you must submit a new completed CPT Application along with your new job offer letter. You are not eligible to work for a new employer unless IE reviews your request and creates a new I-20 for you with your new employer's information on the second page, and until the start date of your second CPT authorization arrives.

If I begin a new program of study at Montclair State right after finishing post-completion/STEM OPT, or after graduating from another degree program, will I be eligible for CPT right away?
No, you will need to spend one semester in your new degree program before you will be eligible for CPT again.