

# CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING AND OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING



**MELTZER HELLRUNG**  
IMMIGRATION SOLUTIONS

# CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING AND OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

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Students on F-1 visa may engage in work experience through Practical Training during the school program or after graduation. The school's Designated School Official (DSO) is responsible for recommending and/or approving work authorization pursuant to Practical Training.

There are two types of Practical Training:

1. **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**
2. **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

## CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)

CPT employment must be an integral part of the student's major field of study and it must be a part of the school's established curriculum for the program. CPT occurs **before completion** of the student's degree program. Students must apply for CPT with the school's Designated School Official (DSO) and obtain a Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," that shows that the DSO has approved the student for CPT employment. The Form I-20 will serve as evidence of CPT work authorization for I-9 purposes. Students may only engage in CPT employment for the specific employer and time period approved on the Form I-20. CPT is available for full-time or part-time employment. However, if a student participates in **12 months or more of full-time CPT**, they will be ineligible for OPT.

## CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)

OPT employment must relate to the student's major or course of study. Twelve months of OPT employment is available at each education level (i.e., 12 months of OPT at Bachelor's level and another 12 months of OPT at the Master's level, Ph.D.). Students must obtain a Form I-20 from the school's DSO that shows the DSO's recommendation for OPT employment. With the issued Form I-20, the student must submit Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization," to USCIS and pay a filing fee. Once the application is approved, USCIS will mail an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card. Students must have the physical EAD card in hand to begin employment and must present it to the employer for I-9 completion.

**THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF OPT:**

	1 PRE-COMPLETION OPT	2 POST-COMPLETION OPT	3 STEM OPT
<b>Eligibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to completion of school program.</li> <li>• Completed at least one full academic year.</li> <li>• Graduate students may be eligible to start CPT during their first semester if their specific degree program requires immediate practical training for all students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After completion of school program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After completion of degree in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering, and math)</li> </ul>
<b>Employer requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment must relate to degree program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment must relate to degree program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer must be enrolled in E-Verify</li> <li>• Employment must relate to STEM degree</li> <li>• Student and employer must complete and sign a Form I-983, Training Plan for STEM OPT Students:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Specific goals of training opportunity, including knowledge, skills, or techniques that will be gained</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How employer intends to meet these goals</li> <li>• How training is related to STEM degree</li> <li>• Employer’s methods for evaluating success of training opportunity</li> <li>• How the employer will oversee and supervise the employment-based training</li> <li>• Compensation</li> </ul>

	1 PRE-COMPLETION OPT	2 POST-COMPLETION OPT	3 STEM OPT
<b>Employer requirements</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student must conduct regular self-evaluations of progress toward goals of training plan and employer must review for accuracy and sign them</li> <li>• Must be completed within first 12 months of STEM OPT and again at conclusion of STEM OPT</li> <li>• Student and employer must update any material changes to the training plan and submit a new Form I-983 to the DSO</li> <li>• Material changes include : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work hours</li> <li>• Reduction in compensation</li> <li>• Change in employer's EIN number</li> <li>• Any change or deviation from existing plan that would render training plan inaccurate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Self-employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May start a business and be self-employed</li> <li>• Must be able to prove that he or she has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to degree program</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, self-employment is not allowed</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteer work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May work as volunteers or unpaid interns, where this does not violate any labor laws</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not work as volunteers</li> </ul>

	1 PRE-COMPLETION OPT	2 POST-COMPLETION OPT	3 STEM OPT
<b>Hours permitted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part-time (20 hours or less) while school is in session</li> <li>Eligible for full-time while school is not in session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 20 hours per week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 20 hours per week</li> </ul>
<b>When can you apply</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can apply up to 90 days before completion of one full academic year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can apply up to 90 days before completion of the degree program, but <b>must apply no later</b> than 60 days after completion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must apply before the current OPT authorization expires</li> <li>Can apply up to 90 days before OPT expiration</li> </ul>
<b>Validity period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 12 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 12 months</li> <li>All period of <b>pre-completion</b> OPT will be deducted from <b>post-completion</b> OPT validity period</li> <li><b>Part-time</b> OPT will count as half the regular full-time accumulation</li> <li><b>Full-time</b> OPT will count as full i.e., 10 months of full-time <b>pre-completion</b> OPT, student eligible for only 2 months of full-time post-completion OPT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 24 months</li> <li>Occurs after completion of</li> <li>12 months of OPT</li> </ul>
<b>Limit on days of unemployment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No limit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No more than 90 days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No more than 150 days including any days of unemployment accrued during post-completion OPT</li> </ul>

	1 PRE-COMPLETION OPT	2 POST-COMPLETION OPT	3 STEM OPT
<b>Documents required for travel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valid passport</li> <li>• Valid F-1 visa stamp</li> <li>• I-20 with valid travel signature</li> <li>• Evidence of continued enrollment in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valid passport</li> <li>• Valid F-1 visa stamp</li> <li>• I-20 with valid travel signature</li> <li>• EAD card</li> <li>• Evidence of current employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valid passport</li> <li>• Valid F-1 visa stamp</li> <li>• I-20 with valid travel signature</li> <li>• EAD card</li> <li>• Evidence of current employment</li> </ul>

### CAP-GAP EXTENSION

F-1 students with a timely filed H-1B cap-subject nonimmigrant visa petition and whose OPT or STEM OPT employment authorization expires after H-1B petition submission, but before H-1B employment becomes effective may be eligible for a "Cap-Gap" Extension. "Cap-Gap" work authorization period starts when the F-1 student's employment authorization expires and typically ends on April 1 of the following calendar year, or the start date of an approved H-1B petition, whichever is earlier. International travel during the cap-gap period will terminate work authorization.



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