

CPT & OPT – WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

WAKE FOREST INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES (ISSS)

	CPT: Curricular Practical Training	Standard Post-Completion OPT: Optional Practical Training
WHAT IS IT?	A form of work authorization for F-1 students who are still pursuing their degree (i.e., an internship completed before graduation).	12 months of work authorization, usually completed <i>after</i> an F-1 student completes her/his degree program.
HOW AM I ELIGIBLE?	Student must have been lawfully enrolled in a full course of study for at least 9 months*. <i>*Exception: Graduate students whose academic program requires all students to perform an internship before the required 9-month period.</i>	Student must have been lawfully enrolled in a full course of study for at least 9 months.
DOES IT HAVE TO DIRECTLY RELATE TO MY MAJOR?	YES!, AND: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must receive academic credit, <i>and</i> Maintain full-time enrollment while on CPT 	YES!
WHAT ABOUT MY MINOR?	No, F-1 students may not pursue work authorization outside of their major.	No, F-1 students may not pursue work authorization outside of their major.
DO I NEED WORK AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE?	Yes, final approval comes from the DSO (ISSS advisor), who authorizes your employment in the SEVIS system and updates your I-20.	Yes, final approval comes from USCIS and can take up to 90 days to approve.
IS THERE A DEADLINE TO APPLY?	No, but you must meet with an ISSS advisor <i>before</i> you can begin working.	Yes, can begin applying up to 90 days before the program end date listed on I-20, and until the end of the 60-day grace period.
WHO ADJUDICATES THE APPLICATION?	ISSS advisor in GPS	USCIS
WHEN CAN I BEGIN WORKING?	<i>After</i> you meet with an ISSS advisor to authorize your I-20 for CPT employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>After</i> your OPT application is approved by USCIS, <i>and</i> You have your EAD card in hand, <i>and</i> The OPT Start Date is current.

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HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BE APPROVED?	An ISSS advisor can approve your CPT and update your I-20 within a 30-minute appointment.	USCIS can take up to 90 days (sometimes more) to process, approve, and mail the EAD card.
DO I NEED A JOB OFFER TO APPLY?	Yes, you must submit your offer letter, along with the academic advisor form, to the ISSS advisor.	No, you have up to 90 days of unemployment beginning on your OPT start date.
HOW LONG DOES THE EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION LAST?	It varies, but the dates listed on the I-20 must be concrete: Employment may not begin before the approved CPT start date, and may not continue beyond the CPT end date listed on the I-20.	Up to 12 months of work authorization, provided the F-1 student finds employment within the 90-day unemployment period. If a student is unable to find work within 90 days, the student must exit the U.S.
WHAT SERVES AS MY PROOF OF WORK AUTHORIZATION?	Updated I-20 with work authorization on page 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated I-20 with work authorization on page 2, <i>AND</i> • EAD (OPT) card.
WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?	global.wfu.edu/iss/employment/cpt/	global.wfu.edu/iss/employment/opt/

NOTE: This document is meant to serve as a resource and should not be construed as legal advice.

If you have questions, please contact an International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) advisor in the GPS office at iss@wfu.edu.