

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR STUDENTS IN F-1 STATUS

Purpose

This handout is designed for students in F-1 status. It will provide you with information on the type of employment opportunity which the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) calls "Curricular Practical Training".

Definition of Curricular Practical Training

The Immigration Service defines "Curricular Practical Training" as employment which is an integral or important part of your 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. According to USCIS, the word "required" does not always limit this type of practical training only to work experiences, which are required parts of the curriculum. This clarification is discussed below in more detail.

Job Eligibility Requirements

To be considered Curricular Practical Training (CPT), the work must not only be related to your major field of study but must also be an integral or important part of your program of study. Training which is required by your degree program always meets the requirements for CPT, regardless of whether or not you receive academic credit for your work. Training which is not required by your degree program may meet the requirements of CPT if you receive academic credit for the employment experience and if it is an important part of your studies. If you have a training opportunity that will involve employment, check with ISSS to determine if it qualifies as CPT.

Student Eligibility Requirements

Employment Which Is a Required Part of Your Degree Program. If 1) you are a graduate student, 2) you are maintaining lawful F-1 status, and 3) if the proposed employment is a required part of your studies, you may apply for permission to engage in CPT whenever your program requires your participation, even if it is immediately upon beginning your studies. Undergraduate students must have completed nine months (one academic year includes fall and spring semesters) of full-time study in order to be eligible for any form of CPT.

Employment Which Is Not a Required Part of Your Degree Program. In order to be eligible to apply for permission to work in a job which is not required for your study program, you must 1) be in lawful F-1 status and 2) have been a full-time student for at least nine months (one academic year includes fall and spring semesters).

Part-time vs. Full-time Curricular Practical Training

Part-time Training. Employment for 20 hours or less per week while you are also enrolled in classes is considered "part-time" CPT. The employment authorization should therefore specify permission to engage in "part-time" training and you must be careful to limit your work to no more than 20 hours per week. There is not a limitation upon the length of time you may participate in part-time CPT but you must be simultaneously enrolled in order to maintain lawful F-1 status.

Full-time Training. Employment for more than 20 hours per week is considered “full-time” CPT and the employment authorization should, in this case, specify permission to participate in “full-time” training. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in full-time CPT but if you participate for twelve months or more, you will not be eligible for post-completion practical training (see next paragraph).

Curricular Practical Training and Eligibility for Post-Completion Practical Training

It is important that you understand that if you participate in twelve months or more of “full-time” CPT, you lose eligibility to apply for twelve months of Optional Practical Training after you complete your studies. Participation in “part-time” training programs does not effect your eligibility for post-completion practical training.

Application and Authorization Procedures

You should contact staff in ISSS so that they may evaluate your situation and the proposed employment opportunity to make certain that both you and the job meet the eligibility requirements. You will need the following information to apply for CPT:

- Offer letter from potential employer
- Letter from Academic Advisor (see attached example)

The ISSS Administrator will assess your eligibility for CPT and either authorize part-time or full-time CPT. You must be careful not to continue employment beyond the date authorized on your I-20 unless you apply for and are granted an extension of your permission to work.

Employment Eligibility Verification

When you work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (USCIS Form I-9), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission.

Note of Caution

While USCIS regulations provide a variety of opportunities for you to be employed during your time in F-1 status, working improperly or without authorization is a serious violation of your status. You should therefore consult with an ISSS staff member before taking up any employment. It is your responsibility to comply with all immigration regulations which apply to F-1 students. Staff in ISSS has responsibility for advising and counseling you regarding your responsibilities. If you fail to comply with your responsibilities, you may not be eligible for benefits normally granted to F-1 students.

Further Information

Additional information on F-1 employment is available from ISSS. Staff of that office are pleased to offer information, counseling and assistance on all federal regulations related to maintaining your student status.

EXAMPLE

Dear Academic Advisor or Employer:

It is essential that the following information be included in the letter recommending Curricular Practical Training.

- Beginning and end date
- Position student is serving in
- Full-time or Part-time
- Recommended as an integral part of the student's academic program
- On your letterhead

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sample of Academic Advisor's Letter

Please have this letter on letterhead from the advisor

Date

Barbara Jackson
University of Southern Mississippi
International Student and Scholar Services
118 College Drive, #5151
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I recommend that Ewa Selegat be allowed to participate in Curricular Practical Training as an Internet Marketing Specialist for MTI, Incorporated. Her responsibilities will include developing and implementing a Web page. MTI would like her to begin June 11, 2003 and continue through the summer quarter until August 13, 2003 as a part-time employee.

As Ewa's academic advisor, I certify this experience is an integral part of her Business curriculum. This training and experience will be an invaluable part of her education and is directly related to her Marketing major.

Sincerely,
Advisor's Signature
& Name