

CPT vs OPT: Options for Off-Campus Work Authorization

At a glance

The biggest difference between CPT and OPT is timing and process: CPT is authorized by your school for work during your academic program, while OPT is authorized by USCIS for work before or after graduation.

COMPARISON POINT	CPT	OPT
Full Name	Curricular Practical Training	Optional Practical Training
When	During your academic program	Before or after graduation (most use post-completion)
Who Authorizes	Your school (DSO)	USCIS
Cost	\$0 (tuition for course credits)	\$470 USCIS filing fee
Processing Time	Days to weeks (school-level)	90–180 days (USCIS)
Employer Requirement	Must be specific employer, specific role	Any employer, as long as work relates to major
Duration	Per-semester authorization, renewable	12 months (+ 24-month STEM extension)
Part-Time Allowed	Yes (≤ 20 hrs/week)	Yes during pre-completion; full-time for post-completion
Affects the Other?	12+ months full-time CPT = no OPT	Does not affect CPT eligibility

Eligibility

- Complete one academic year by the time the practical training starts (CPT, OPT)
- Find a job or internship that is directly related to your major (CPT, OPT)
- Connect the practical training to a required course in the major/program (CPT)

Talk to your international advisor if you have questions about eligibility or how to apply