

Curricular Practical Training

Curricular practical training (CPT) is an academically-related work and learning experience for international students studying in the United States on an F-1 visa. CPT is defined as alternative work-study, internship, cooperative education employment, or other type of practicum. CPT is a required component of each of the Master of Science degree programs offered at Harrisburg University.

An F-1 student must be authorized by a Designated School Official (DSO) prior to employment. A minimum of two (2) semesters of participation in an internship/work experience is required for each student while enrolled and attending the program. Immediate participation is required for the eligible student. A student with a pending I-539 Change of Status request or an individual that recently obtained an approved F-1 Change of Status following a B-1/B-2 or F-2 I-539 COS request may not participate in CPT immediately. The internship/work experience is an integral (essential) part of the established curriculum within each program of study, and immediate participation in CPT may commence at the beginning of the initial semester of enrollment if the required request for DSO approval and the employer offer letter are submitted timely. A student who has recently arrived in the U.S. within forty-five (45) days prior to a program start date will not be authorized to participate in CPT until at least one (1) semester of coursework has been successfully completed with a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.00 or better. An individual that recently obtained a F-1 Change of Status from B-1/B-2 or F-2 visa may not participate in CPT until at least one (1) semester of coursework has been successfully completed.

A first-time student at the master's degree level may only participate in 12 months (<364 days) of Full-Time CPT during the program of study to remain eligible for OPT. Upon completion, the student is then eligible to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) for an initial period of 12 months and a 24-month extension of OPT for the STEM-approved programs offered by the University. A student who has previously completed Optional Practical Training (OPT) at the master's degree level has exhausted OPT eligibility and is permitted to complete up to 24 months of CPT for the entire program of study.

A student's CPT internship experience or employment must relate to the program of study and may be part-time (20 or less hours per week) or full-time (21 to 40 hours per week).

Referred to as experiential learning, work experience permits the student to take lecture and textbook learning and apply that knowledge in a real-world setting to the workplace to research and prepare for the capstone Thesis or Applied Project.

CPT is available to the eligible student during the graduate degree program. Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a continuation of practical training employment for the eligible student that occurs following completion of the degree requirements of the program. OPT is optional and is available only once to an eligible student at each educational degree level. A student who has completed OPT at the master's level at a prior institution has exhausted OPT eligibility and may not re-apply for OPT through Harrisburg University.

Harrisburg University defines full-time enrollment status as six (6) semester hours of academic credit per semester in the Master of Science degree programs. An F-1 student must remain full-time throughout the entire program of study. A student enrolled on an F-1 visa may not register for more than one (1) online [distance learning] course each semester. A student who holds an H-1B or H-4 visa is permitted to take more than one course online each semester. Courses offered in the graduate program are not self-paced. Readings, writing assignments, and testing are often conducted weekly throughout the semester. All courses require 6 to 8 hours per week of study and applied project work outside of the classroom.

A completed CPT Verification Form signed by the employer and an employment Offer Letter are required to be submitted timely to the Office of International Students for participation in CPT. Following approval by a DSO, an updated active SEVIS Form I-20 is processed that should be presented to the site supervisor with the Cooperative Agreement. The period of eligible CPT employment is extended to the semester break periods, in accordance with University policy, if the student is pre-registered for any subsequent semester of enrollment.