CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT) FOR F-1 STATUS INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Rules for Holding a Paid Internship in the United States
An international student in F-1 status can obtain permission from ISSO to undertake a paid internship in the US if the paid internship is considered Curricular Practical Training (CPT). CPT, in the context of the MIA and MPA degree programs, is authorization for paid employment that fulfills a degree requirement.

Eligibility and Requirements to Engage in CPT
An international student in F-1 status cannot receive pay for off-campus work in the US unless and until the ISSO has processed the appropriate application and granted permission on a new I-20. It is your responsibility to understand the rules of your status and have the proper documents in order by proactively consulting with the ISSO. For more information, please visit the ISSO website at https://isso.columbia.edu/content/f-1-cpt-curricular-practical-training or contact them at isso@columbia.edu or 212-854-3587.

F-1 students must be enrolled full-time for two consecutive semesters and be a full-time student in F-1 status at the time of CPT application before they can accept paid internships in the US. Exceptions: A student in a formal dual degree program with SIPA and a school overseas (e.g., Sciences Po, London School of Economics, etc.) is eligible for CPT only if he/she has spent the first year overseas and will complete the final year of the program at SIPA.

You must be offered a paid internship in the US that satisfies the SIPA internship requirement expected of students in two-year MPA and MIA programs (see OCS website) and necessary for completion of your degree.

You CANNOT begin work until your CPT form has been approved by both OCS and ISSO. Therefore, the start date listed on your CPT form must be post-dated. You should allow at least 10 business days for ISSO processing. CPT approval cannot be granted retroactively.

CPT + INTERNSHIP START + END DATES
You must begin your internship by the Monday of the seventh week of the fall or spring semesters or by the last day of July for the summer semester. During the academic terms, you must work a minimum of 10 hours per week and a maximum of 20 hours per week. During the summer break, you may work full-time. The internship start/end dates must fall within the following academic term dates:

CONTINUING STUDENTS
Fall semester: September 1 – December 31
Spring semester: January 1 – May 31
Summer semester: End of final exams period – August 31

GRADUATING STUDENTS
Fall semester: September 1 – Official last day of semester (refer to Academic Calendar)
Spring semester: January 1 – Official last day of semester (refer to Academic Calendar)
CPT APPLICATION PROCESS

* The application process does not apply to students in the PEPM program. The PEPM department will approve CPT forms for students in this program.

**STEP 1:** If you are applying for CPT for the first time, determine whether you will register for internship credit.

Students may earn a maximum of 3 credits during their degree program, which includes any credits associated with CPT. When registering for credit that is tied to CPT, you must have completed the first 1.5 credit internship and received a grade BEFORE you will be allowed to register for a second 1.5 credit CPT.

First Semester of CPT: You are not required to register for credit for your first CPT since the internship will fulfill a degree requirement. Students may register internship credits in the semester of completion of their first CPT or in a future semester. Registration exception: For summer internships, if you are registering your first CPT for credit, you must pre-register in the prior spring semester or upcoming fall semester, as there is no summer registration.

Second or Third Semester of CPT: If a second or third CPT is secured, you MUST register for credit, as these will count as electives since the degree requirement has already been fulfilled. If registering for credit, you must register during the semester in which the internship will be completed. Registration exception: For summer internships, you must pre-register in the prior spring semester.

To register for internship credit, students should register during the standard registration period in SSOL or by visiting the Office of Student Affairs.

**STEP 2:** You must complete Part 1 and Part 2 of the CPT Request Form and bring it to SIPA OCS with a letter offering internship employment from your employer printed on employer’s letterhead including:

- beginning and ending dates of employment
- how many hours you will work weekly
- a description of duties in sufficient detail to clearly show them as appropriate to meeting the requirements for your degree
- location of the company or organization where employment will take place

OCS will not sign the CPT form without all of the above information stated clearly in the offer letter. If OCS can approve your CPT application, we will complete Part 3 of the CPT Request Form and return it to you so that you can submit your application in its entirety to ISSO for authorization (see Step 3 of application process, below.)

**STEP 3:** Submit the below documents in-person to ISSO during ISSO walk-in hours or email to ISSO as a single PDF file at ISSO-opt@columbia.edu for processing as early as 90 days but no less than 10 days before you wish to begin employment.

- CPT Request Form completed by you and signed by SIPA OCS
- your complete offer letter with all required information
- your passport and most recent I-94 card
INTERVIEW TYPES

Screening Interview:
The screening interview does just that—screen out candidates whose qualifications don't meet the job specifications. The first interview is typically conducted by a human resources professional and will probably focus more on your resume and qualifications than anything else. Screening interviews may be conducted in person, by telephone, or by video conferencing (see Telephone Interview and Video or Skype Interview sections).

• Articulate your skills and what you accomplished at each previous job experience.

Second Interview:
Second round interviews are often more difficult to prepare for because their purpose is more subtle—to determine which candidates will best “fit” with the company. Second interviews may be comprised of behavioral and competency-based questions (see Behavioral Interview and Competency-based Interview sections).

• Ask questions about the work environment.
• This stage may also include reference checks and testing.

Case Study Interview:
Consulting firms and certain financial institutions may include a case study or word problem based on a real-life or simulated consulting situation as part of their interview process. In this instance, the interviewer will present you with a case study and ask how you would approach and solve the dilemma at hand. The interviewer is simply trying to determine your analytical abilities through this interview method, so try not to get flustered!

• You can usually ask relevant questions in your efforts.
• There are a number of online and hardcopy resources available through the Office of Career Services to help you prepare for these types of interviews.
• It is also imperative to be part of a student study group and practice together since these interviews are very demanding.

Behavioral Interview:
In these interviews, the interviewer will ask you to talk about a real situation you've encountered and your response to that situation. A sample question could include, “Tell me of an incident when you failed,” instead of a hypothetical question such as “How you would handle a mistake or failure?” The employer assumes this will be a good indicator of how you would handle situations in the future.

• Stay calm and answer the question as completely as you can, using the SAR formula as your guide:
  o S – What was the situation or problem that you were presented with?
  o A – What action did you take? (Specifically highlight the skills used.)
  o R – What were the results of your actions? (Be specific and quantify results when possible.)

The International Students and Scholars Office staff will then:

 o Review your application for eligibility.
 o If you are eligible, update your SEVIS record to authorize your CPT, print a new SEVIS I-20 form indicating the approved employment and give it to you. Your employer will need to see this authorization along with your passport and I-94 form to put you on the payroll.

You may engage in CPT only after your SEVIS record has been updated by an ISSO adviser to reflect CPT authorization and a SEVIS I-20 has been printed, indicating the approved CPT. The endorsement will indicate the precise details of the authorized training, including the name and location of the employer, the specific dates of the training period, and whether it is full-time or part-time.

We encourage you to contact an adviser at the ISSO at https://isso.columbia.edu/content/contact if you still have questions.

ADDITIONAL FAQ

What if my US Internship is unpaid?
Unpaid internships do not have to be approved by the ISSO, so you do not have to fill out the CPT Form.

What if I still need to apply for a Social Security Number to be paid for my internship?
After receiving CPT authorization, you will be eligible to apply for an SSN number with a Social Security Office. Please review the information under the Social Security Number Application section of the ISSO website at: https://isso.columbia.edu/content/social-security-number-application. If you still have questions, you may contact the ISSO.