CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING IN F-1 STATUS FOR 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 on an F-1 visa 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 your student status documents in order by properly consulting with the ISSO. If you need more information, please visit the ISSO office 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 application for CPT 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 internship requirement expected of all students in your program and necessary for completion of your degree.

Internship Credit Registration
F-1 students are not required to register for internship credits for their first paid US internship, as this internship will count towards the SIPA degree requirement. Students may register internship credits in the semester of completion of CPT or in a future semester.

If a second or third CPT is secured, registration of internship credit is required during the semester of the CPT and will count as an elective. If interning during the summer and planning to register that internship for credit, you must register for credit during the prior spring semester.

You can register for a maximum of 3 credits for CPT. When registering for internship credit, 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.

Employment Dates and Duration
During the academic terms, you must work a minimum of 10 hours per week and can work 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:

Fall semester: September 1 – December 25

Spring semester: January 15 – May 20

Summer semester: First business day after the end of the spring semester – August 31
NOTE: CPT cannot be done during winter break, as this is not an academic term.

Procedure to Process F-1 CPT
You may engage in CPT only after your SEVIS record has been updated by an ISSO adviser and a SEVIS I-20 has been printed, indicating the approved employment. 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.

Step 1: If you are applying for CPT for the first time, determine whether you will register for credit. If you are applying for CPT for the second or third time, you MUST register for internship credit. 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 if this is your second or third CPT. There is no registration in the summer.

Step 2: You must complete the CPT application found in the Forms section of the OCS website, and bring it to OCS with a letter confirming the internship on the organization's letterhead that includes the following information:

- start and end dates of employment
- number of hours you will work per week
- description of duties in sufficient detail to clearly show relevance to your concentration and degree, thereby meeting the SIPA internship requirement
- location where employment will take place.

IMPORTANT: OCS WILL NOT SIGN THE CPT FORM WITHOUT ALL OF THIS INFORMATION STATED IN THE EMPLOYER LETTER.

Step 3: Submit the following documentation to the ISSO as early as 90 days but no less than 10 days before you wish to begin employment:

1. CPT application signed by OCS at SIPA
2. Your current and all previously issued I-20s
3. Your passport and I-94 card

The International Students and Scholars Office staff will:

1. Review your application for eligibility.
2. If you are eligible, update your SEVIS record, print a 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.

IMPORTANT: You CANNOT begin work until your CPT application has been approved by both OCS and ISSO. Therefore, the start date listed on your CPT form must be future dated. You should allow at least 3-5 business days for ISSO processing. CPT approval cannot be granted retroactively.

We encourage you to contact an adviser at the ISSO at (212) 854-3587 if you have questions.

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.