

Pre-Completion OPT & CPT Workshop

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE

MEET THE TEAM

PRESENTERS

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AGENDA

01. Pre-Completion OPT

What Is It? / Why Now? Eligibility / Trade Offs & Considerations / Who Might Benefit? / How To Apply

02. CPT

Curricular Practical Training overview, eligibility requirements, and application procedures.

03. Q&A

Open floor for questions and advisor clarifications.

SECTION 01

PRE-COMPLETION OPT

01

What Is It?

Understanding Optional Practical Training rules and authorization duration.

02

Eligibility & Trade-Offs

Evaluating part-time vs. full-time work and impact on Post-Completion OPT.

03

Who Might Benefit?

Identifying key student scenarios where Pre-Completion OPT is advantageous.

04

How To Apply

Step-by-step application procedure, timeline, and USCIS filing tips.

SECTION 01

WHAT IS PRE-COMPLETION OPT? WHY NOW?

OPT Basics

OPT stands for Optional Practical Training.

12 months of total OPT authorization per degree level (not including STEM extension).

Two Kinds of OPT

Pre-Completion OPT

Off-campus work **before** graduation; can be PT or FT.

Post-Completion OPT

Off-campus work **after** graduation; almost always FT. **(Different workshop!)**

Why Now?

Historically, Pre-Completion OPT has been much less utilized.

Involves significant trade-offs.

But it’s having a moment and that’s why we’re talking about it!

SECTION 01

APPLICATION VOLUME COMPARISON

USCIS receives significantly fewer Pre-Completion OPT applications compared to Post-Completion OPT applications.

Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
All Receipts, Approvals, Denials Grouped by Eligibility Category and Filing Type
Fiscal Year 2019

EAD Eligibility Category	EAD Category Description	Application for EAD-Initial			
		Receipt[1]	Approval[2]	Denial[3]	R
Total		1,019,466	841,921	130,253	1
A02	TEMPORARY RESIDENT 245A	29	3	17	
A03	ADMITTED AS REFUGEE SEC. 207	30,826	27,385	528	
A04	PAROLED AS A REFUGEE	559	3	452	
A05	GRANTED ASYLUM SEC. 208	47,761	41,288	1,586	
A06	FIANCE K-1 OR K-2 NONIMMIGRANT	214	27	107	
A07	N-8 OR N-9 NONIMMIGRANT	65	16	55	
A08	ALIENS FROM PACIFIC ISLANDS (FREELY ASSOC STATES)	1,894	1,348	305	
A09	K3/K4 NONIMMIGRANT	168	8	86	
A10	GRANTED WITHHOLDING/243(H)	2,402	2,101	244	
A11	GRANTED DED/EVD	9	9	3	
A12	ALIENS GRANTED TPS	193	235	72	
A13	GRANT VOL DEP UNDER FAMILY UNITY BENEFIT	20	-	19	
A14	LIFE ACT FAMILY UNITY GRANTEE	8	1	11	
A15	V NONIMM-SPOUSE OR CHILD OF CERTAIN LPRs	44	13	20	
A16	ALIENS GRANTED T-1 NONIMMIGRANT STATUS	105	3	96	
A17	SPOUSE OF E-1/E-2 NONIMMIGRANT	4,384	3,971	109	
A18	SPOUSE OF AN L-1 NONIMMIGRANT	15,089	13,839	276	
A19	GRANTED U1 NONIMMIGRANT STATUS	8,514	184	1,173	
A20	DEPENDENT OF U1 NONIMMIGRANT	10,451	8,067	1,070	
C01	DEPENDENT OF A-1 OR A-2 GOVT OFFICIAL	874	808	15	
C02	E-1 DEPENDENT OF TECRO	48	31	8	
C032	STUDENT: INTERNATIONAL ORG. MUST SPONSOR	16	18	10	
C033	STUDENT: OFF CAMPUS/SEV ECONOMIC HRDSHIP	494	348	219	
C03A	STUDENT: PRE-COMPLETION OPT	2,029	1,816	392	
C03B	STUDENT: POST-COMPLETION OPT	148,754	150,753	5,040	

Pre-Completion OPT (C03A)

~2,029 Receipts

Represents a tiny fraction of total annual OPT filings.

Post-Completion OPT (C03B)

~148,754 Receipts

Accounts for the vast majority of student filings.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDELINES

WHAT IS PRE-OPT? (CONT.)

WORK ALIGNMENT

Field of Study

Strict Requirement

Off-campus work must be directly related to your field of study, at your specific level of study.

OFFER REQUIREMENTS

Job Offer Status

NOT Necessary to Apply!

However, for pre-completion OPT, it is **strongly recommended** to have a target job offer in-hand before applying.

DURATION LIMITS

Maximum Usage

PART-TIME (PT)

Up to 24 months total

FULL-TIME (FT)

Up to 12 months total

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDELINES

PRE-COMPLETION OPT ELIGIBILITY

STATUS REQUIREMENT

1 Full Academic Year

Lawful Student Status

Must be enrolled full-time (or with an approved RCL) for at least 1 full academic year (past 2 semesters, excluding summer).

- **Strict Rule:** No exception or discretion possible.
- **Change of Status:** Cannot apply until official F-1 approval.

APPLICATION TIMING

Early Application Option

Apply Before Completion

You can apply for Pre-Completion OPT before completing your second academic year semester.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO

If Spring 2027 is your 2nd semester, you can submit your application within Spring for Summer 2027 Pre-Completion OPT.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT CONSIDERATIONS

TRADE OFF #1: OPT TIME DEDUCTION

DEDUCTION RULE

Authorized periods of Pre-Completion OPT get deducted from the amount of time that a student is eligible for for Post-Completion OPT

FULL-TIME PRE-OPT

3 Months FT

1:1 Deduction Rate

Student subsequently retains only **9 months** of Post-Completion OPT eligibility.

PART-TIME PRE-OPT

6 Months PT

50% Deduction Rate

Deducted at half speed. Student loses **3 months** of Post-Completion OPT.

STEM FIELD WARNING

12 Months FT

Severe Impact

Loses all 12 months Post-OPT **AND** loses ability to apply for 24-month STEM extension.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT CONSIDERATIONS

TRADE OFF #2: PROCESSING TIMES & FEES

APPLICATION TIMING RULE

Cannot apply more than **90 days before requested job start date**... or USCIS may deny the application.

REGULAR PROCESSING

7+ Months

$470 Standard Fee

USCIS regularly takes 7+ months to process Pre-Completion OPT applications…unless filed with Premium Processing (PP).

PREMIUM PROCESSING

+$1,780

PP Additional Fee

Filing with Premium Processing (PP) avoids lengthy delays but significantly increases total cost.

HIGH RISK WITHOUT PP

Lost Time & $$

Severe Impact

Without PP, EAD may not arrive in time for employment, leading to a complete waste of OPT time and money!

PRE-COMPLETION OPT CONSIDERATIONS

TRADE OFF #3: ACADEMIC YEAR LIMITS

WORK HOUR LIMITATION

Total employment **cannot exceed 20 hours per week** when school is in session (normal F-1 limits apply).

20-HOUR MAXIMUM

20 Hrs / Wk

School in Session

Normal academic year limits on F-1 employment apply strictly whenever school is actively in session.

NO "STACKING"

Combined Cap

Pre-OPT + On-Campus

Prevents "stacking" of Pre-Completion OPT and on-campus employment. Combined hours cannot exceed 20/wk.

FULL-TIME OPT RISK

Loss of Post-OPT

Severe Penalty

FT Pre-OPT during AY cannot be used beyond 20 hrs/wk, but still deducts Post-Completion OPT at the full-time rate!

PRE-COMPLETION OPT CASE STUDY

TRADE OFF #3 EXAMPLE: NORM THE NINER

THE SCENARIO

Norm the Niner applies for a full-time internship with proposed dates from **April 1st, 2027 to August 15th, 2027**. He applies for FT Pre-Completion OPT for this full duration.

PART-TIME RESTRICTION

<20 Hrs / Wk

4/1/27 – 5/7/27 (End of term)

Despite having **FT work authorization**, he can only work part-time while school is in session.

If working 20 hrs on Pre-OPT at this time, he **cannot hold on-campus employment** during this same time window.

OPT TIME PENALTY

-4.5 Months

Post-OPT Loss

Because full-time Pre-OPT was authorized across the entire span, he **loses 4.5 months** of valuable Post-Completion OPT time at the full-time rate.

A BETTER IDEA

Summer Only

(Start of summer) 5/8/27 – 8/15/27

Do the FT internship **only during the summer term**.

This avoids academic year limits, maximizes work hours, and preserves Post-OPT time.

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDANCE

TRADE OFF & CONSIDERATION SUMMARY

DEDUCTION RULE

Post-OPT Loss

Automatic Deduction

Periods of authorized **Pre-Completion OPT** get directly deducted from what you can do after you graduate on **Post-Completion OPT**.

Every month used now reduces your time available post-graduation.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Timeline & Cost

High Friction

- **Cannot be started early**
- Process is **lengthy without Premium Processing (PP)** – possibly so long it's not worth it
- Premium Processing is **$$$$**

EFFICIENT STRATEGY

Term Planning

Best Practices

Avoid requested periods spanning across summer & academic terms:

- **Academic Year:** Should be Part-Time (PT) only
- **Summer Term:** Can be Part-time (PT) or Full-Time (FT)
- **Year-Long Internship:** Trade-off between multiple Pre-OPT applications (more $$) vs. losing Post-OPT time

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDANCE

WHO MIGHT CONSIDER IT?

IMMIGRATION STATUS

Pending Petition

Independent Work Rights

Students with a separate, pending (but possibly soon-to-be-approved) immigration petition that ensures post-graduation work eligibility (if approved by then):

- Personal National Interest Waiver (NIW)
- Asylum
- Family / Marriage-based Green Card

EMPLOYER OFFER

High-Value Role

ROI & Sponsorship

- **Fee Recoupment:** Compensation easily covers Premium Processing fees
- **Visa Sponsorship:** Highly likely to sponsor post-grad visa (e.g. H-1B)
- **Fee Trade-off:** Willing to trade upfront fees ($$) for long-term career value

STRATEGY & TIMELINE

STEM & Exit Plans

Extended Runway

STEM OPT Eligible:

3 Months FT Pre-OPT + 9 Months Regular OPT + 24 Mo STEM OPT = **still pretty good**

Clear Departure Plans:

Planning to return home or pursue definite post-graduation plans outside U.S. OPT

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDANCE

APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 01

Secure Job Offer

- Job related to field of study (ISSO cannot assist, but Career Center has resources)
- Try to set employment dates as early as possible

STEP 02

Consult ISSO Advisor

- Speak with an ISSO advisor regarding your offer
- Review proposed dates and overall application plans

STEP 03

Request Pre-OPT I-20

- Apply for Pre-Completion OPT I-20 via ISSO Portal
- Submit job relevance info (verified by academic advisor)

STEP 04

Submit Form I-765

- Prepare Form I-765 application for USCIS
- Pay required application fee(s) and submit

STEP 05

Biometrics & EAD

- Attend Biometrics appointment if scheduled
- Await decision and delivery of EAD card

STEP 06

Begin Employment

- Verify receipt of physical EAD card
- Start work once you have the EAD and the approved start date arrives

PRE-COMPLETION OPT GUIDANCE

SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

KEY PURPOSE

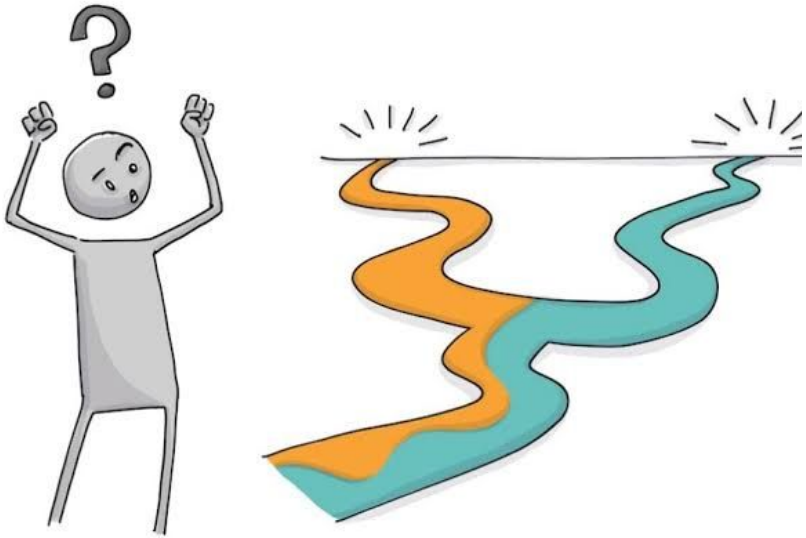
Valuable Work Experience

Pre-completion OPT is an F-1 off-campus work authorization type that enables students to gain practical employment experience prior to graduation.

DECISION MAKING

Evaluating Individual Goals

While beneficial in specific scenarios, it may not align with every student's goals and needs.



SECTION 02

Curricular Practical Training

01

What Is It?

Understanding Curricular Practical Training regulations.

02

Eligibility

How to determine if you are eligible for CPT.

03

How to Apply

Step-by-step application procedure, timeline, and other tips.

DEFINITION

WHAT IS CPT?

Excerpt from F-1 Visa Regulations

"CPT is off-campus employment/training programs that are an **integral** part of an **established curriculum**; defined as alternate work/study, **internship**, cooperative education or any other type of required internship/practicum, which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school."

REQUIREMENTS

CPT ELIGIBILITY

01. Status & Enrollment

Full-Time Student Status

Available for students who have been in lawful **student status** and **enrolled full-time** (or with an approved RCL) for **1 full academic year** (past 2 semesters, excluding summer) and currently hold valid **F1 status**.

Strict Rule:
No exception or discretion possible.

02. Academic Standing

Good Academic Standing

Must maintain good academic standing throughout your degree program.

Requirement:
Must NOT be on academic probation.

03. Degree Progress

Normal Progress

Making 'normal' progress towards degree completion as outlined by university curriculum guidelines.

ISSO Note:
ISSO may use discretion in evaluating progress.

REQUIREMENTS

CPT ELIGIBILITY (CONT.)

04. Curriculum Requirement

Degree-Required Internship

CPT/internship CPT can only be authorized if the **University Catalog** explicitly states that an off-campus internship is a **mandatory requirement for all students in the degree program or dissertation track**.

Aug ‘26 SEVP Regulatory Clarification:
CPT cannot be used for elective (optional) internship experiences under any circumstances.

05. Approval Authority

DSO Discretion & Review

Regulations allow for DSO (university F-1 immigration advisor) discretion to approve or deny CPT applications.

Evaluation Factors:
Regulations allow for DSO discretion to approve or deny CPT applications based on catalog requirements, student’s academic progress, degree completion, and other considerations.

APPLICATION PROCESS

HOW TO APPLY FOR CPT

01. Portal Application

Submit CPT App

Submit the Academic CPT application online directly in the **ISSO Portal**.

02. Documentation

Upload Job Offer

Upload your CPT offer letter. See the template on our CPT webpage or use your own.

03. Academic Review

Advisor Details

Provide advisor's name & email. They receive an e-form to confirm the internship is degree-related & required.

04. Employer Review

Supervisor Details

Provide supervisor's name and email. They receive an e-form to confirm duties & supervision/evaluation plan.

05. College Sign-Off

Cooperative Agreement

Form routes to your college leadership (Dean / Assistant Dean) to sign the Cooperative Agreement.

06. Final Authorization

ISSO Approval

Form routes to the ISSO for final approval and official CPT authorization.

CPT TIMELINE

Looking to use CPT in SPRING 2027?

Application Opens

Nov 30th, 2026

Apply by this date to work on the FIRST day of the spring 2027 semester

Dec 11th, 2026

(Late submissions still accepted, but CPT will start after semester start date.)

Semester CPT Dates

Jan 11 – May 7, 2027

POLICY GUIDELINES

CPT AFTER OPT POLICY

1. APPLICABLE CONDITION

Enrollment Gap Created

When participating in OPT creates a gap of **one semester or more** in academic enrollment prior to beginning a new program level.

Example: Completing OPT during a gap period before transitioning to a Master's or Doctoral program.

2. MANDATORY REQUIREMENT

1 Full Semester Completion

The student **must complete 1 full semester** at their new academic level before becoming eligible for CPT authorization.

Status: CPT Ineligible during 1st Semester

CPT authorization can only be granted starting in the subsequent term following successful completion.

IMPORTANT CPT REMINDERS

1. PROCESSING TIME

~2 Weeks Required

Allow at least two weeks to gather all necessary signatures and complete processing.

2. AUTHORIZATION TIMING

Prior Approval Mandatory

CPT authorization must be granted **BEFORE** starting work and occurs prior to degree completion.

3. ACADEMIC STATUS

Full-Time Enrollment

CPT is not a sufficient reason to drop below full-time study, delay graduation, or impede academic progress.

4. EMPLOYMENT HOURS & SEMESTER EXCEPTIONS

Standard Rule: Restricted to Part-Time (max 20 hrs/week) during Fall and Spring semesters.

Authorized Exceptions to Full-Time CPT during Fall/Spring:

- **Master's Students:** Enrolled in ONE final course (in final term) that carries a mandatory full-time work requirement (e.g., internship class).
- **Doctoral Students:** In dissertation status, having completed all coursework and defended dissertation proposal, requiring an internship to advance research toward defense.

ADDITIONAL CPT REMINDERS

1. AUTHORIZATION DATES

Strict Term Validity

Valid **only for authorized dates**. Approved per term by Career Center and authorized by ISSO.

2. TEMPORARY NATURE

Temporary Internship Only

CPT is not to be used to secure permanent employment. For more permanent work, consider applying for **OPT**.

3. ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT & WORK HOUR LIMITS

Maximum 20 Hours/Week Total (CPT + On-Campus) during Fall & Spring Semesters

- **Combined Work Limit:** Students with on-campus employment must ensure CPT plus on-campus hours do not exceed 20 hrs/wk total.
- **GA/TA Contract Prohibition:** Graduate Assistant (GA) and Teaching Assistant (TA) contracts also strictly prohibit working more than 20 hrs/week.

IF I WORK ON CPT, AM I STILL ELIGIBLE FOR OPT?

FULL-TIME CPT

12 Months Limit

(365 Cumulative Days)

Completing 12 months or more of full-time CPT renders you **no longer eligible** to apply for OPT.

PART-TIME CPT

No Deduction

(Does Not Count)

Part-time CPT does **not count** toward the 12-month limit and will not impact OPT eligibility.

CAN I PARTICIPATE IN CPT REMOTELY WHILE OUTSIDE THE U.S.?

REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

Common Scenario

Ex. In a **summer term**.

ISSO Approval

Requires **written approval** from your employer prior to authorization.

MANDATORY OFFER LETTER STATEMENT

Your job offer letter **must verbatim include** the following text:

"The student will participate in a remote internship while remaining outside the U.S.

We acknowledge that it is up to the student and the employer to investigate and fulfill any taxation or U.S. or foreign country regulatory requirements due to the student's physical location."

ETHICAL JOB SEARCH POLICY

POLICY COMMITMENT STATEMENT

UNC Charlotte expects any student accepting a job offer to honor their commitment to the accepted position and company by ceasing their job search upon accepting an offer.

When faced with a job offer you are not sure about:

1. REQUEST TIME

Ask for 24 Hours

Ask the offering employer for 24 hours to consider.

2. CHECK FIRST CHOICE

Notify Other Employers

Inform any 'first choice' employers of your pending offer and ask if they have made their hiring decision yet.

3. DECIDE & COMMIT

Stick With Your Decision

Based on what you learn, make the best decision you can and **STICK WITH IT!**

For full policy details and resources, visit: https://career.charlotte.edu/policies

Can I do a remote internship/CPT for a company outside the U.S.?

- We highly recommend against this
- It does not count as CPT if the employer is not in the U.S.
- Lots of complicated tax issues for which you and your employer would be responsible.

At a Glance

	Curricular Practical Training (CPT)	Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Availability Post-Aug 2026	**Severely Restricted.** Only available if an internship/practical training component is a mandatory graduation requirement for **all students** in the degree program.	Broadly Available. Remains the primary legal route for non-required or elective internships off-campus
Academic Link	The internship itself is **essential to completeness**. Degree or dissertation **cannot be earned or completed without completing this practical training**, a requirement that applies equally to **all students** in the program. Optional or elective CPT is largely prohibited.	Relates to major field of study, but **no academic requirement** or course credit needed.
Authorization	University DSO (Under strict federal liability) / **No EAD Required**	USCIS (federal immigration agency) / **EAD Required**
Processing Time & Fee	A10 Business Days; **$0 filing fee** (tuition for required credits may apply).	3–7 months; **USCIS filing fee applies.**
Employer Requirements	Requires job offer and a **formal cooperative agreement** between the university and employer.	Does not require a job offer to apply, and no formal agreement between employer and the university is needed.
Post-Completion OPT Deduction	No deduction, provided full-time CPT stays **under 365 total days.**	**Directly deducted f**rom your 12-month Full-Time: Day-for-Day / Part-Time: 50% Rate

How to Choose:

1. **Check CPT Eligibility:** First, review the Academic Catalog to confirm whether off-campus employment is a required, non-elective graduation requirement for your program/dissertation. If you need clarification, check with your Academic Advisor. ISSO cannot approve CPT if the employment is optional or for elective credit under current SEVP guidelines.
2. Consider applying for Pre-Completion OPT if CPT is ruled out, Pre-Completion OPT is your main alternative for off-campus work during your academic program.
3. Factor in Post-OPT impact: Using Pre-Completion OPT uses up your post-graduation work time day-for-day for full-time work, or at a 50% rate for part-time work. Evaluate whether taking a mid-degree internship is worth shortening your post-graduation work allowance.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Pre-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HAVE CASE-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS?

For individual inquiries or specific questions regarding your application, please reach out directly to ISSO:

intlsso@charlotte.edu

Questions? Feedback?

Please give us your feedback on this event anonymously by scanning this QR code with your smartphone and completing the program evaluation form. (Select “CPT Workshop”)

Questions?