Pre-arrival Webinar: International Students Employment

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you recommend an on-campus job for international students?
A: We do recommend that you work on-campus. However, as a new student, you would want to strike a good balance in your time for school and work. Work is not the primary purpose of your immigration status. On the other hand, students who have on campus job tend to have a higher GPA average and you can learn to better plan your time.

What is a good job for new student?
A: For undergraduate students, they typically begin their employment experience working in the residence halls, or in the dining halls. Later on, when your language or computer or other proficiencies improve, you can apply for working in various University offices. For graduate students, the good fit depends on their time availability and professional interests.

How can I find job at the University of Iowa? Does the UI help me find jobs?
A: No, but we have Pomerantz Career Center (PCC) that hosts a very useful web site called Handshake. Here, you can browse a lot of on-campus job postings: https://careers.uiowa.edu/handshake. If you did not apply for a job before, you can schedule an appointment with an advisor at PCC and they will be happy to provide some guidance.

Do you need to submit a resume to apply on Handshake for an on campus job? What if you don’t know how to write a resume?
A: Please review the PCC web site for guidance on resume writing. With any questions, please contact PCC staff to schedule an appointment with their advisor.

My graduate department wants me to start working right away after my arrival to the University, but I don’t have a Social Security Number (SSN). What can I do?
A: A student is eligible to start working on campus immediately. You need to have a Social Security Number (SSN) in order to get paid. New students to the University are not be able to apply for SSN until about 2 weeks after the start of the semester. You CAN begin working without SSN, you will just need to apply for it soon after. For more details, please refer to ISSS web site on SSN: https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/social-security-number-itin-information-students

Can I apply for my SSN before I get there?
A: No. You have to be in the United States and be employed in order to apply for SSN.

Does the on-campus job has a time limit? Can I work more than a year?
A: No, there is no time limit to the on-campus employment. However, there is a limit to how many hours you can work per week during semester and during official university breaks. Please refer to ISSS web site for details: https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/campus
Am I allowed to work at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics? Is it considered a part of the campus?
A: Yes, the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics is a campus unit where there are many job opportunities for students.

Can students have a job in the International Student and Scholar Services?
A: ISSS looks for new student assistants at different times. Please look at student job postings in Handshake: https://careers.uiowa.edu/handshake

Can I work in more than one on-campus job?
A: Yes, as long as you do not work more than 20 hours per week during the semester, or 40 hours during the official University breaks.

How do I get a teaching assistantship?
A: You need to contact your graduate department for teaching assistant positions.

If I have a TA, RA or GA, can I still have CPT?
A: Yes, teaching assistantship, research assistantship, or graduate assistantship are each considered an on-campus job. It is possible to have an off-campus position at the same time. Again, it is about good time management, and especially ensuring that you are making normal progress in your degree program. This is a requirement from the U.S. immigration law.

Do I have to have a permission to work off-campus?
A: Yes. For Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which can be done before graduation, you need ISSS authorization. For Optional Practical Training (OPT), which can be done after graduation, you need authorization from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), an agency of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For brief overview of either of these off-campus employment options, please refer to ISSS web site: https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/options

Is CPT compulsory and essential part in University for graduation?
A: Majority of academic programs do not require CPT as part of their graduation requirement. Internship/practical experience under CPT is typically optional, recommended. It depends on the program of study. Please discuss internship with your academic advisor to learn about the program-specific requirements for graduation.

Is there any time period for me to apply for CPT? Like at the start of the semester.
A: New students to the University are not eligible to apply for CPT until after they studied for one academic year at UI. When they become eligible, then it is best to apply minimum 2-4 weeks before the CPT employment start date.

Can I have on campus job and CPT at the same time?
A: Yes, as long as your primary focus remains your academic performance and you are making normal progress in your degree program. Please visit ISSS and discuss your employment situation with one of the advisors.
Do I need CPT if I volunteer?
A: No. But the U.S. Government has a very specific description of who is considered volunteer for employment purposes. Please refer to ISSS web site on further details of what constitutes volunteering: https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/volunteering, or speak with an ISSS advisor during walk in advising hours.

Do I need CPT to buy stocks?
A: No. ISSS cannot advise on buying stocks because that is outside of our advising scope.

Can I sell things online?
A: Please read carefully the eligibility criteria for CPT.

Can I start a business while I am on CPT or OPT?
A: On CPT, you cannot start your own business since CPT does not permit self-employment. If you are on OPT, the regulations do permit self-employment after you graduate. Please read carefully ISSS OPT Web site for details.

How can I know if my CPT job is directly related to my degree?
A: For CPT, we get inputs from your academic advisors who know whether the CPT jobs are related to the students’ degree program or not.

Is it true that if I have too much CPT, I cannot do OPT?
A: Yes, there is some truth to that. The government regulation indicates that if a student has worked 11-12 months on full-time CPT, he or she will not be eligible for OPT. There are part-time and full-time CPT employment positions. Part-time is 20 hours or less. Anything above 20 hours is full time. A 12-month full-time CPT will eliminate your chances of doing OPT.

Searching for internships, is it easier to be employed by a smaller or larger company?
A: We cannot advise you in this regard. Please discuss whether the internship/ CPT opportunity is directly related to your degree with your academic advisor, or college career center (TCOB, Engineering).

How long before graduation can I apply for OPT?
A: The earliest is 3 months before your graduation. Come to talk to one of our ISSS advisors 4 months before your graduation. It can take up to 3 months to get OPT approved. For more details, you are welcome to refer to the ISSS website: https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/opt/12-month

While on OPT, can I have a job on campus?
A: Yes. What matters is that the employment must be related to the degree you received.

Can I travel while on OPT?
A: Yes, you can travel if your OPT is approved. A signature on your I-20, EAD, a letter from employer are required for travel. If your F-1 visa has expired, you must go to a U.S Consulate to get a F-1 student visa before you can come back. When the OPT application is pending and you do not have a job offer, you should stay in the U.S. as you could be denied re-entry into the U.S.
If I do too much CPT and can't do OPT, can I still do two years of STEM?

A: Unfortunately, no. In order for student to be eligible to apply for STEM OPT Extension, they would have to do 12-month OPT first. If student is not eligible for 12-month OPT, they cannot apply for the STEM Extension either.

For more details on OPT, please visit ISSS website:
https://international.uiowa.edu/isss/current/employment/opt