

Employment Opportunities for F-1 Students

Students attending school in the United States on an F-1 visa have several employment opportunities to supplement their academic experience and personal funds. Although there are a variety of options from which to decide, it is vital that students have the appropriate form of work authorization before beginning employment as well as avoid exceeding the maximum number of hours per week authorized for work. Working without authorization or working too many hours will result in a loss of F-1 status. A student who loses their F-1 status is thereafter in the U.S. illegally and is no longer eligible for benefits offered under the F-1 student visa status. Upon loss of visa status, a student must exit the country immediately.

On-Campus Employment

This option is open to all students, both new and continuing, attending Coastal Carolina University on an F-1 visa so long as they continue to properly maintain F-1 status. Students are permitted to work on campus for a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session during the academic year. During times when school is not in session (i.e. winter break, summer vacation, etc.), students may work full-time. Students may hold one or multiple jobs on campus; however, the student is still restricted to working a maximum of 20 hours total per week. For example, a student works at Job #1 for 12 hours per week and can then only work eight hours at Job #2. Upon accepting an offer of employment for on-campus work, the student must visit the Office of International Programs & Services (OIPS) with the written offer of employment from the hiring department or office. This form of employment will be authorized internally by the OIPS.

Off-Campus Employment

In order to be eligible for off-campus employment opportunities, a student must be continuously enrolled at Coastal Carolina University for a full academic year (nine months / two semesters). During this time, the student must continue to properly maintain their visa status and as well as make forward progress in their degree program. Below are the forms of employment that are considered “off-campus”. All forms of off-campus employment, with the exception of Curricular Practical Training, require proper authorization from the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services before employment can begin.

- **Economic Hardship:** F-1 students are eligible for off-campus employment based on economic hardship provided that the student (1) is in good standing and is carrying a full course of study; (2) can demonstrate unforeseen economic hardship; (3) employment opportunities on campus are unavailable or insufficient; (4) has been in F-1 status for one academic year; and (5) acceptance of employment will not interfere with their studies.
- **International Organization:** This work authorization allows F-1 students to be employed by a select group of international organizations. Students must continue full-time enrollment during the period of employment. This work may occur at any time throughout the duration of the student’s studies, but not after completion of studies.

- **Curricular Practical Training (CPT):** CPT is defined by the United States government as employment "that is an integral part of an established curriculum. Curricular Practical Training is to be alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school." Students who have engaged in one year or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training are ineligible for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training. To engage in CPT, a formal request must be submitted to the Designated School Official using the "Curricular Practical Training Request Form". A student may begin Curricular Practical Training only after receiving his or her new Form I-20 showing the CPT information with the DSO's authorization and endorsement.
- **Optional Practical Training (OPT):** Optional Practical Training is work authorization that is designed to provide F-1 visa students opportunities for employment in their fields of study before or after graduation. You may be entitled to a maximum of 12 months of OPT per educational level (i.e. Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, etc.). Students continue to maintain F-1 status while on Optional Practical Training since it is considered part of the program of study. Applications are submitted to the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services Texas Service Center. The cost to apply for work authorization is \$340. Applications and instructions are available in the OIPS. Upon approval, students will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) which shows the dates of authorized employment. **DO NOT**, under any circumstances, begin working until you have received the EAD. This is a violation of your status and you could be both terminated in SEVIS as well as deported.

Please note that Optional Practical Training requires authorization from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which could potentially take approximately three (3) months to obtain. We strongly recommend that you apply about three months prior to the date you wish to begin employment.

There are two forms of Optional Practical Training:

- **Pre-Completion OPT** takes place before the completion of the requirements of a degree program. Students may apply for part-time OPT, which allows them to work up to 20 hours per week while school is in session. Students may work part-time or full-time during CCU's scheduled vacation periods (i.e. Spring Break, Winter Break, Summer Vacation, etc.). Pre-completion OPT is deducted from the 12 month limit at 50% for part-time work and 100% for full-time work. For example, two months of part-time OPT during the school year would deduct one month from the 12 allowed months, thus leaving 11 remaining months of OPT.
- **Post-Completion OPT** occurs after all of the requirements of a degree program have been fulfilled. Post-Completion OPT truly puts a student's learned knowledge to practical use. When completing the application, it is vital that all of the information is current and accurate. Although a job offer is not necessary when submitting the application, any employment the student engages in must be related to their field of study. The student may choose their employment start date but it must be within 60 days from the program end date.

New Rules Affecting Optional Practical Training!

The following new regulations went into effect on April 8, 2008:

- **17-Month Post-Completion OPT Extension for Certain STEM Grads:** The new rule makes recipients of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields eligible for a one-time 17-month extension of Post-Completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months). To be eligible for the extension, the student's employer must be registered in E-Verify, and agree to report to the DSO when the student is terminated or leaves employment.

All students must now make periodic reports to the DSO with the following information:

- Employer Name
- Employer Address
- Interruption of employment
- Start date of employment
- Change in student name
- Change in student address
- Absence from the U.S.
- Interruption of employment*

***Unemployment time:** The time spent without a qualifying job during post-completion OPT. Except as noted in the section on what counts as time unemployed, each day that the student is not employed in a qualifying job, is counted toward the limit on unemployment time. The limit is 90 days for students on post-completion OPT, including those with a cap gap extension, except that students with a STEM OPT extension are given an additional 30 days of unemployment time for a maximum of 120 days.

What counts as time unemployed?

Each day during the period when OPT authorization begins and ends that the student does not have qualifying employment counts as a day of unemployment. The only exception is that periods of up to 10 days between the end of one job and the beginning of the next job will not be included in the calculation for time spent unemployed.

For more information about the new regulations affecting Optional Practical Training, please go to http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/opt_policy_guidance_pdf.pdf.

PLEASE REMEMBER to NEVER begin working off-campus without authorization from the Office of International Programs & Services or USCIS!! This is a serious violation of your F-1 visa status.

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