What Employers Need to Know about F-1 Student Employment

Students in F-1 status can be eligible for some types of work authorization, and may accept some types of employment. All students must complete two full semesters at the University of Central Oklahoma before they are eligible for any off-campus employment. Long-term jobs, as well as internships, co-ops, externships, practicums, etc. will generally require work authorization, and any of these employment types may be used with any of the work authorizations outlined below.

Main Types of Employment Authorization

Curricular Practical Training: CPT is training that is done as part of a student's program of study. It is work for which the student gains academic credit in his or her major. For CPT, the student must enroll in an internship course, and can be authorized for CPT during the term when he or she is enrolled in the course. The CPT authorization is job specific; the authorization cannot be transferred to another position or company. The student needs a detailed job description when applying (please view our sample letter). Applying for CPT takes 1-3 weeks.

Optional Practical Training: OPT is training that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. It is intended to provide a student with practical experience in his or her field of study during or upon completion of a degree program. Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT per degree level. This authorization is not job specific; students may switch jobs while on OPT. Applying for OPT takes about 3 months.

Pre-Completion OPT: Pre-Completion OPT is done during the student's program of study. Students can be authorized to work part-time during semesters or full-time during summer, unless the student is a graduate student working on thesis/project only. In that case, the student may work full-time during the semester.

Post-Completion OPT: Students who have completed their degree, or graduate students with only project/thesis remaining, can be authorized for Post-Completion OPT. This is always authorized full-time.

24-Month STEM Extension: STEM extensions, as of May 10th 2016 STEM extensions are extended to 24 months. In the past students could only do a STEM extension once, but now the government is allowing students to apply for a STEM extension 2 times total. After a student receives a STEM bachelor's degree they are able to get OPT for one year and they apply for STEM resulting in 3 total years of working. Once they go for a master's degree they can repeat the process.

Below is a link to government approved STEM majors:
 https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2016/stem-list.pdf.

Cap-Gap Extension: For students with an H-1B application approved or pending, the Cap-Gap extension

allows a student to remain in F-1 status between the date when his status and work authorization would otherwise end, and October 1, the first day of H-1B status. If the H-1B application was filed before the student's OPT expired, this is an extension of both status and work authorization. It is an automatic extension; the student does not need to apply.