

A Guide to Cooperative Education (Co-op) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for International Students

What is co-op?

Co-op or Cooperative Education is one type of Curricular Practical Training (CPT). It is full- or part-time paid employment related to your academic major that is part of your educational curriculum. It is a **required** or **integral** part of the degree program or of a specific course and occurs before the completion of a program of study. Co-op is an important component of study at Northeastern, but one for which authorization from the ISSI is required for international students.

What are other types of Curricular Practical Training?

Co-op is one type of Curricular Practical Training. Other types of CPT are Internships or Externships, Practicums and Clinicals. As with co-op, these types of CPT may be full- or part-time employment related to your academic major and must be part of your academic curriculum. Full-time is defined as over 20 hours per week and part-time as 20 hours or fewer.

Where does co-op or CPT take place?

The student may engage in training only for the specific employer, location and period approved by the co-op advisor and authorized directly through SEVIS by the ISSI. International students may participate in co-op in their own countries. Students may arrange their own co-op positions, including co-op abroad, provided these positions are approved by the co-op faculty in their college. Whether a student is engaging in co-op locally, in their home country or abroad, they **must see an ISSI advisor to receive the proper authorization**. It is important to remember that any change of the student's address must be reported to the ISSI within 10 days.

Who is eligible?

The student must hold an F-1 or J-1 visa. **F-1 undergraduate students** must have been present in the U.S. in valid full-time student status for at least **one academic year** in order to receive authorization for curricular practical training. Graduate students are not required to have been in the U.S. for a specific period of time prior to engaging in mandatory curricular practical training, but will need to comply with their graduate school policies concerning the timing of any training to be authorized during the academic program.

Can study abroad count towards the “one academic year of study” requirement for undergraduates?

Enrollment in a study abroad program will count towards the “one academic year of study” requirement for undergraduates if the student spent one full term enrolled in a full course of study before studying abroad and the study abroad experience has been approved for credit by Northeastern.

Does engaging in co-op or CPT make one ineligible for Optional Practical Training or Academic Training?

Remaining eligible for other training options, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Academic Training (AT) for F-1 and J-1 students respectively depends on the amount of time authorized for co-op or CPT or Academic Training. If an F-1 student has done 12 months or more of co-op or full-time CPT within the U.S., he/she is **not** eligible for OPT. OPT is temporary employment for students in F-1 visa classification with the purpose of gaining practical experience directly related to the student's field of study (see *An International Student's Guide to Optional Practical Training: ISSI Form 202* available at the ISSI). For a J-1 student, if co-op is mandatory, Academic Training (AT) may be granted for as long as necessary to complete the degree requirement. However, if total time spent on co-op exceeds 18 months or the length of the student's program--whichever is less--a student will not be able to pursue any further AT after completion of studies. Also, any AT granted for participation in co-op is subtracted from the total amount of time for which the student is eligible. If co-op is not mandatory, then the student may opt to “save” his or her AT for after completion of studies (see *J-1 Student: Guidelines and Procedures for Academic Training/ ISSI Form 301* available at the ISSI).

Is a Social Security Number required for co-op? Does one have to pay taxes on co-op earnings?

All paid employment in the U.S. requires a Social Security Number. Information on how to obtain a number is available at the ISSI (see Form 111). Please keep in mind that it may take 4 to 12 weeks to receive a Social Security Number. The student may not have obtained the card by the start of co-op employment. In this case, the student must inform the employer that he/she has applied for a Social Security Number and give the employer the date the application for a number was submitted. For further information on beginning work without a Social Security Number, please refer to the discussion of this situation at www.ssa.gov/employer/hiring.htm. In general, international students who have been in the U.S. less than five years are exempt from Social Security tax (F.I.C.A.). However, co-op earnings are subject to federal and state taxes. The ISSI offers annual tax seminars before the April 15th tax deadline so that students may determine what their individual tax status is.

What are the consequences of unauthorized co-op?

Unauthorized employment, i.e. co-op or CPT, will place the student in serious violation of their legal status. According to immigration regulations, students who engage in unauthorized employment are not eligible to apply for reinstatement. The student may be forced to leave the U.S. and apply for a new visa in his/her home country in order to regain legal status. However, there are no guarantees that a student will be successful in re-acquiring status.

How does a student receive co-op authorization?

There are several steps involved for international students to obtain authorization for co-op or other types of CPT.

Step 1

The first step towards obtaining authorization for co-op is to obtain and complete the student's section of the ***Co-op Authorization Form for International Students: ISSI Form 152*** available from the student's Co-op Faculty Advisor, at the ISSI or the ISSI website. The second section of the form must be completed and signed by the student's Co-op Faculty Advisor. **The student must inform the Co-op Faculty Advisor that he/she is an international student.**

Step 2

The student must bring the completed ***Co-op Authorization Form for International Students: ISSI Form 152*** along with two additional documents to the ISSI. These documents are:

- 1. Passport (valid)**
- 2. Form I-94 (white card in passport)**

The ISSI Co-op Specialist will examine the student's documents to determine whether or not the student is eligible to participate in co-op. The Co-op Specialist will issue a new I-20 with the authorization dates—both beginning and ending—of the co-op period to the student. The ISSI Co-op Specialist will complete and sign the third section and then mail a copy of the completed Form 152 back to the Co-op Faculty Advisor to document that the student's co-op has been authorized. A student applying for CPT that is not co-op (Internships, Practicums and Clinicals), should obtain and complete ***Non-Co-op CPT Authorization for International Students: ISSI Form 105***. This form should then be brought to the ISSI with the other documents (listed above) required for co-op.

Step 3

The student will need to give their employer a copy of his/her endorsed I-20 or DS-2019. For F-1 students, the 3rd page of their newly endorsed I-20 lists their specific work authorization information. For J-1 students, the specific work authorization does not appear on their DS-2019, but on the enclosed letter from the ISSI, 153J. The student will give their employer the ***International Student Eligibility for Cooperative Education Employment: ISSI Form 153F or 153J*** (for F-1 and J-1 students respectively). It should be noted that the work authorized is "employer specific" that is, the name and location of the position will be noted on the I-20. The student will also need to review the ***I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification: Guidelines for International Students (ISSI Form 155)*** to become acquainted with the regulations guiding their employment eligibility verification by their employer.