



Evaluating Major Connection to Employment: Tips for International Students

Students seeking Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment authorization must ensure that the job or internship experience is directly related to their major area of study. While concentrations or emphases may *enhance* the connection, the job or internship must directly connect to a declared major on its own.

Designated School Officials (DSOs) at St. Olaf can provide guidance and advice to help you determine if the employment is directly related to your major but they are not an official determination or ruling on behalf of the Government.

Off-Campus Work Authorizations Requiring a Direct Connection to Major

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is used for off-campus employment during the student's program of study. F-1 regulations state that a student may participate in a "curricular practical training program" that is "an integral part of an established curriculum" and "directly related to the student's major area of study." In addition to a direct connection to your major, *students must also receive academic credit for the off-campus job/internship experience*. A faculty member in the major department will endorse the major connection through their approval of the academic internship. A DSO may deny the CPT authorization if there is insufficient connection between the employer and major.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is primarily used after graduation. Employment conducted while on OPT does not require a curricular connection (credit), however the employment must still be directly related to the student's major area of study. Students can have multiple jobs while on OPT as long as each job directly connects to a declared major. Students do not need to have a job to apply for OPT.

Students with certain majors are eligible for a 24 month extension of OPT (STEM Extension). Students must be working in a job or have an offer from an employer, registered within the E-Verify* system, to apply for the OPT STEM Extension. The employment may only directly connect to a STEM OPT eligible major. Students must have a job in order to apply for the OPT STEM Extension.

* E-Verify is a web-based system that allows enrolled employers to confirm the eligibility of their employees to work in the United States.

STEM OPT Eligible Majors at St. Olaf:

1. Biology
2. Chemistry
3. Computer Science
4. Environmental Studies
5. Mathematics
6. Physics
7. Psychology
8. Quantitative Economics

Guidelines for Determining if a Job/Internship is Directly Connected to a Major

There is no formal or official measurement that can be used, however the following questions may guide you in evaluating if a particular job or internship is directly connected to your St. Olaf major. Job or internship titles may offer a clue but they are often too general and may differ between organizations. *It is the specific duties, responsibilities, and qualifications, as well as the overall industry of the employer, that are most important.*

Here are some guiding questions to help you:

- Would a reasonable person (e.g. a government official) reviewing the job or internship description agree that there is a direct relationship between your major and the duties of the role and/or the employer's industry? Is the connection clear and apparent without the need for a complex explanation or abstract rationale?
- Does the employment opportunity represent the type of role and/or industry that is typically understood to be a common outcome for students in a particular major?
- Does a substantial part (more than a little) of the job/internship require skills, competencies, or knowledge that is derived and/or obtained from within the major curriculum?
 - Example: A political science major working in a public policy internship.
 - Example: A theater major working as an actor or lighting tech.
 - Example: A math major working as an actuarial intern.
- Is the job/internship within an employer or industry that is clearly related to the major field of study, such that it would require an application of knowledge from the major to perform the role?
 - Example: An environmental studies major completing a public policy internship in an environmental advocacy nonprofit.
 - Example: A chemistry major working for a summer education program teaching chemistry.
 - Example: A math major working in a marketing analytics job.
- Does the job description specifically list your major (or a similar one) as qualification within the job or internship description?
- Is the employment role and/or industry listed on career websites that connect majors to careers and employment?
 - Examples: [What can I do with a major in...](#) or [What can I do with this major?](#)

Suggested Documentation to Help Prove the Connection

Whenever possible, it is recommended that you retain documentation in your immigration file to demonstrate the connection to your major. Here are a few suggestions for types of evidence you could retain for the future. While the Government does not typically require direct evidence for CPT or OPT (except for STEM OPT), some form of documentation can be especially helpful if you anticipate immigration applications to the U.S. Government (e.g. H1b, permanent residency, etc.) at any time in the future.

- A short statement, written by you, that highlights the ways in which the position is directly connected to your major. Essentially, you are creating documentation for the future to make the "argument" to the reader. This statement is typically required anyway when applying for academic internship credit.
- A copy of the job or internship description that includes relevant duties, skills, or competencies.
 - Postings often expire and will "disappear" - you should develop the habit of downloading and saving a copy of job descriptions so you have them later. This includes postings on Handshake, other job/internship sites, and the employer's own career page.

- Expired positions in Handshake *may* still be available to a member of the Piper Center staff but postings on other sites are not.
- If the job description isn't very clear, you could request a more detailed version from the employer that may provide stronger language to verify the connection to the major. Often employers will post a simpler version of a job description externally but have a more detailed version they can share if requested. Alternatively, you could request that the employer write you a letter describing how your role requires the knowledge, skills, and competencies from your major.
- In certain cases, you can request a letter from your major department that describes relevant courses and/or concepts that are taught and verify the connection to your job or internship. The letter can also verify that your job or internship represents a typical career pathway into a particular profession from your major.

Suggestions if the Employment-Major Connection is Weak

It's best to evaluate the connection to your major before you apply and/or if appropriate you can share this requirement with your potential employer during the interview process. However, sometimes the internship description is vague or unclear, or you may be interviewing for a general internship program and do not know the specific internship until you receive the offer. It's better to ask the employer for help than to proceed with an internship that is not sufficiently connected to your major

- If you have an offer, employers may be willing to slightly modify an internship description to create a stronger connection to your major. For example, the employer might add additional quantitative analytical duties to help solidify the connection to a quantitative economics major.
- Employers may be willing to offer you an alternative internship all together that is more in line with your major.

If you cannot modify the job or internship in a way that will solidify the connection to your major, then unfortunately you may not be able to accept the offer in order to avoid negatively impacting your F-1status. You are always welcome to discuss this situation with any of the DSO's on campus.