

# Year-round Internships and Co-Ops for International Graduate CS Students

Updated June 1, 2020

Dear Graduate students,

As you know, we have been contemplating how and if students can go on some form of an internship or employment during the fall/spring semesters (sometimes called a “co-op”). Many of you coming back from past summer internships have asked for this. Now, the global pandemic is forcing us to accelerate these plans in the hope of helping you secure a better future. We have consulted with VIS and the graduate school, and here are the rules that we have found out. Note that these are the steady state rules -- meaning they won't likely change. That said, during the Spring 2020 semester we have already seen loosening of rules: but these changes come from the U.S. government, passed on to University officials; we in the department merely follow the rules but cannot change them.

Here's what the rules say regarding students on an F-1 Visa. The first thing to note is that summers and academic year semesters (fall and spring) are treated *very* differently. Summers are much more flexible. The assumption here is that the company you are interning for is located outside the physical grounds of the campus (otherwise you'd be doing an on-campus internships and the rules are simpler, but not discussed in this email).

At the end of this document we list COVID-19 exceptions and the set of rules and procedures the Computer Science Department has defined for students to go on a Fall/Spring time internship.

## 1. Common Rules to Any Internship

An internship has to be related to one's course of study, which is why you must register for a 1-credit internship course. And at the end of the internship, your employer has to provide a brief report (short email ok) to your adviser (or graduate adviser/director) stating that you completed the internship satisfactorily and very briefly what you worked on; this is just to verify that your internship was indeed related to your course of study, Computer Science.

VIS will not approve a CPT if your GPA when you apply is less than 3.0. They will wait until end of semester grades are posted then check to see if your GPA is at least 3.0.

Each time you go on such an internship, you need to secure a new CPT.

You need a CPT if the company is located outside the campus. It doesn't matter where you are physically and whether you work remotely or locally: if the company is off campus, you need a CPT.

You need a CPT whether the company pays you or not. So even if you volunteer to work for free (an unpaid internship), even just one hour a week, you still need a CPT.

Once you have a CPT issued, there are situations where you will need to have it updated or re-issued: if the start/end dates of the internship has changed, if your effort level has changed from part-time to full-time or vice versa (i.e., going above/below the 20 hours/week threshold), or if the employer's address changes. In that case, you will need an updated letter from the employer with the new dates, effort levels, and/or employer address. In all such cases, contact VIS immediately to update or re-issue your CPT.

If you are canceling an internship, you must inform VIS so a Designated School Official (DSO) will cancel your CPT.

Lastly, if your home address has changed (whether in the US or outside), you are required to update it in Solar within 10 days of the change.

## 2. Summer Internships

A graduate student can go on one or more internships during the summers. This means you can do one internship every summer; or in any one summer, you can have two internships concurrently (very rare, but permitted).

The internship start/end dates must be wholly within the start/end dates of the summer sessions: your internship start/end dates may not overlap even one day with the end of spring semester or start of fall semester (else you need another CPT for the fall/spring semester).

During the summer, you can work full time, defined as anything over 20 hours a week. There is no upper limit during the summer, so you can work more than a total of 40 hours per week.

You can intern for more than one employer (e.g., 20 hours paid internship for company X, and 15 hours/week an unpaid internship). In that case, you need a separate CPT for each company.

## 3. Fall and Spring Semesters

Your F-1 visa places many more restrictions on you during the academic year. That is the main difference between fall/spring and summers.

You may intern for a company during a fall and/or spring semester. You need a CPT as above. Again, the CPT for fall semester cannot "spill" into the adjacent summer or spring semesters; similarly for spring semester CPT.

If you secure an internship for both fall and spring, even if for the same company, you will need two separate CPTs, one for each term.

You may *not* work for more than 20 hours a week in total during a single fall/spring semester, across all your employment opportunities. So, for example, you cannot do a 15 hours a week internship and also a 10 hour TAship, as that would exceed the maximum of 20 hours/week.

You *must* maintain full time enrollment status during the fall/spring terms. That means 12 credits of coursework for G1/G3 students; and 9 credits of coursework for G2/G4 students.

Recall that if this is your last semester, you can apply for "underload" (a special part time status that still satisfies full-time enrollment status requirements for VIS office purposes). But be aware of the risks of not passing your classes on your very last semester: you won't be able to graduate, have a visa, or continue to take classes/ Also note that the last semester is often quite busy as students are intensely interviewing for full-time jobs.

When you do an internship during the fall/spring semesters, you must be "local." This means you have to attend all classes in person. In normal times, you can only attend at most one class (3 credits) remotely, assuming the class is offered in an online fashion. This means that you can only work for companies that are in close proximity to the campus, or companies you can work for remotely. See also the "COVID-19 Exceptions" section below.

When you do an internship during the fall/spring terms, you still need to register for the appropriate 1-credit internship course (as part of your 9-12 credits you need to maintain full-time enrollment status).

Only G5 PhD students are allowed to intern full time (defined >20 hrs/week, up to 40) during a fall or spring semester. They need adviser and graduate program approval, and the work has to be directly related to the students dissertation/thesis: so there has to be a very strong reason. However, the U.S. government may consider such full time employment as part of the student's OPT (not CPT), and hence your OPT time period may be cut down! An OPT gives you 12 months to work full time after graduating and secure a permanent work visa. So if a G5 student does a 4-month full-time internship before graduation, then after graduating your OPT may be issued for only  $12-4=8$  months. This is a risk you have to consider very seriously.

Internships are supposed to enhance professional preparation, and not interfere with the normal academic progress. So, at the department level, we will require any student to have permission from their project/thesis advisor for Fall/Spring internships (in addition to the usual GPA rules, no incompletes, etc.).

## 4. COVID-19 Exceptions

During the Spring 2020 semester, the U.S. government (and hence VIS and graduate school) had allowed students to be physically located anywhere in the world and take all classes remotely, and still maintain good standing with respect to your F-1 visa status. Normally, you have to be in the country, physically on campus, and take no more than 3 credits remotely. Moreover, whenever courses are taken remotely, usually the program itself has to be designed for "online education" and designated as such; in other words, normally you cannot take a program that was designed to be delivered in person, and decide to deliver it remotely. This exception has been made for the Spring 2020 semester. And, as of May 20, 2020, this exception has now been extended to the Fall 2020 semester as well.

Finally, for now, the University is preparing for the real possibility of holding all Fall 2020 classes either fully online or in hybrid mode: ~10-20% of students allowed to attend in person, with strict social distancing, and all others attend remotely. The University President will provide actual details as to the Fall 2020 term by June 30th, 2020.

## 5. Computer Science Department Process and Restrictions

The rules for summer time internships have not changed (e.g., GPA  $\geq$  3.0, no “I” grades, all proficiencies completed, etc.). See the Graduate Handbook for more details. The rules for Fall and Spring time internships are as follows:

1. You can go on as many internships as you want/can during your studies here: Fall, Spring, and/or Summer terms. Practically speaking, MS students will rarely do more than two internships. PhD students can have 4-5 internships during their studies.
2. You must comply with Grad School and VIS rules as listed above: for example, no more than 20 hours a week during Fall/Spring internships.
3. If your internship starts in one semester (or summer) and spills over into the next term (or summer), then you will need a separate CPT for each instance. And you will need to be in compliance with the CPT rules for each semester. For example, if you have a summer internship but it ends one week into the next Fall semester, you will need a CPT for the summer and another CPT for the Fall; and during that one week you’re working on your internship during the Fall, you cannot work more than 20 hours a week.
4. For students asking for an internship during the Fall/Spring, we will need permission from your project advisor: they should know and agree that you are planning to spend as much as 20 hrs/week on an internship. If you don’t have an advisor, then you will need permission from the Graduate Directors (Profs. CR and Zadok).
5. For students asking for an internship during the Fall/Spring, your GPA should be at least 3.2 (for summer we require only 3.0). The 3.2 GPA is designed to ensure that you can handle an internship as well as full-time courseload, as you will need to have full-time enrollment (12 credits for G1, 9 credits for G2).
6. If this is your last semester and you are approved for “underload” (part-time status), we will not permit you to also go on an internship at the same time. It is too risky to work up to 20 hours a week, take some classes that you must need to graduate, and all at the same time job-hunting (which alone can be as much work as 6-9 credits). See warning regarding “underload” above.
7. If you are approved for an internship during Fall/Spring, you cannot work more than 20 hours. You will be asked to sign a document certifying that you have no other employment and that the **total number of weekly work hours, across all employments, does not exceed 20 hours/week**. If you violate this rule, your Visa may be impacted.
8. If you are approved for an internship during Fall/Spring, you have to be “near” campus and take all classes on campus. That means that your internship has to be remote (e.g., you live at Stony Brook but intern remotely for a California company); or that your internship company is nearby and you can get to it quickly (e.g., short commuting distance). If you violate this rule, your visa may be impacted.
9. Finally, when the time comes, we will disseminate a Google Form for students to apply for Fall/Spring internships, asking you to fill out all the usual information: offer letter, time period, etc.