

International Students Seeking Employment in the U.S.

International students who seek summer internships and jobs after graduation must familiarize themselves with the "common culture" of the professional world in the United States. Conducting a job search for employment in the U.S. requires a great deal of persistence.

Many international students want to work in the United States after they graduate. According to U.S. immigration law, international students with F-1 visas are eligible to work full-time for one year after they graduate as part of their "practical training." After completing practical training, international students must be sponsored by an employer to obtain an H1-B visa, which allows them to work in the U.S. for an additional 1-6 years.

Stop by the GSD Career Services Office to pick up your copy of the following two brochures. Together, these guides provide important information for students and employers.

"The Job Search Process in the U.S.: a practical guide for international students"

"It's Easy to Hire an International Student"

Harvard International Office

The first step in the job search for international students is to ensure that you have employment permission. The Harvard International Office is a resource dedicated to helping Harvard's international students with these issues. Please visit the Harvard International Office's online at www.hio.harvard.edu. Look under "**Employment Permission**" to learn about the requirements.

You may also make an appointment to see **Ivana Hrga-Griggs in the Harvard International Office (617-495-2789, Holyoke Center, Room 864)**. The more you know, the easier it will be for you to persuade a prospective employer to hire you for a period of "practical training." Unfamiliarity and discomfort with the U.S. job search process may put you at a disadvantage when competing for jobs. The following information is intended to help you understand, and thereby overcome, some of the obstacles associated with seeking employment in the United States.

Hiring Complexities

Hiring an international student requires the following process:

- petitioning the government for an H1-B
- obtaining approval from the Labor Department
- hiring a lawyer
- absorbing some fees

The state of the job market impacts the willingness and ability of employers to sponsor international students. During a recession, employers tend to be more reluctant to serve as sponsors. In a thriving economy, employers may bring up the topic of a H-1B visa during a job interview and offer to sponsor a student.

Working for International Companies

The best employment prospects for international students may be with international companies. International students are great assets to global organizations desiring language skills, respect for diversity, and/or knowledge of overseas economies.

Approaching the Topic of H1-B Visas with Employers

Many employers are intimidated by the U.S. immigration process and are reluctant to sponsor H1-B visas, or simply have a policy against it.

Do not begin an employment interview or letter with an inquiry regarding H1-B sponsorship. Discussions about H1-B sponsorship should come later, either when the employer brings it up or when the applicant is offered a position.

The applicant's first task in an interview is to convince the employer of his/her suitability for the job. Only later, when an employer is close to making or has made an offer, should the applicant raise the H1-B sponsorship issue.

An effective interview approach requires preparation. You need to know the benefits and restrictions of your particular status, and be able to discuss optional practical training, temporary status, and permanent residence. The more knowledgeable you are about the employment options available, the more confident you will feel about the discussion. Practice responses to potential questions such as "Are you authorized to work in the US?"

Emphasize the positive. It is an advantage to many employers to have a bilingual employee and/or an employee familiar with work abroad. The fact that you have lived and studied abroad shows tenacity and resourcefulness. Convey to the interviewer challenges you have faced and overcome in this process. Be prepared to explain to your potential employer how hiring you offers more advantages than disadvantages.

You may want to contact the employer's Human Resources office prior to an interview. Inquire about the organizational policies on hiring non-citizens or permanent residents. Ask if the employer will help a qualified non-citizen obtain work authorization. Seek out companies that have a history of H1-B sponsorship.

Additional Advice for International Students

Generally speaking, there are major differences between resumes for employers in the United States and resume formats for employers in other countries. These differences do not apply to all countries and do not attempt to account for individual differences or for changes over time.

U.S. Resume

- The U.S. resume is a concise, attractive marketing tool. It summarizes your jobs, skills, accomplishments and relevant academic background.
- The length of the resume is limited to 1-2 pages maximum.
- Age, marital status, race, and religion are not included in the resume.
- A photograph of the job seeker is not included.

International Resume

- Chronologically details academic and formal work experience.
- Sometimes exceeds two or more pages in length.
- May include age, marital status, race, and/or religion.
- Often includes a photograph of the job seeker.

Resume Tips for International Students

- We encourage you to provide a frame of reference to help American employers understand your experience in foreign companies and schools. Here are some examples:
 - ◆ A \$10 million marketing firm.
 - ◆ One of the top five universities in China.
 - ◆ Second largest technology manufacturer in Europe.
 - ◆ MIT of Turkey.
- Emphasize strong English skills on your resume. For example: "Translated written and spoken English on a daily basis for two years."
- Check to be sure that your resume is free from grammatical and spelling errors as well as any awkward use of language.
- Meet with a GSD career counselor for a resume critique to achieve the best possible display of your skills and background.
- Maintain an up-to-date copy of your resume in the format and language of your native country. This will serve as a back-up for employment options in your home country.

Interview Tips with a U.S. Company

- Be punctual. Arrive **5 - 10** minutes prior to your appointment.
- Eye contact is expected and shows confidence.
- Interviewers may begin with direct questions or minimal small talk. He or she may do most of the talking or may expect the candidate to do most of the talking.
- Prepare for direct questions regarding your training, competency and experience. Your open discussion of accomplishments and skills shows confidence.
- Specify clear self-knowledge, career goals, and long-term plans.
- The employer may seek a two- to five-year commitment.
- Self-disclosure of strengths, weaknesses, personality, leadership style, problem-solving abilities, etc. may be appropriate.
- Research the organization and demonstrate that knowledge during the interview. It is expected; this shows your initiative and interest in the firm.
- It is acceptable to ask an employer at the close of the interview where they are in the interview process. You might ask "When can I expect to hear from you? May I call you to follow up?"
- We encourage you to make that follow up call to inquire about the status of your application after the interview. This demonstrates your enthusiasm for the position.
- NOTE: Questions regarding age, race, sex, and marital status are illegal in the U.S.

Cultural Differences When Interviewing Internationally

Be aware of the following cultural differences which may impact interviews with internationally based firms.

- ◆ Personal relationships may be more important than time. Arriving late may not be a problem.
- ◆ Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status, may be perceived as disrespectful.
- ◆ Interviewers commonly begin with small talk and look for information regarding character or personality.

- ◆ The interviewer may talk for the majority of the interview.
- ◆ Age, race, sex, or marital status may be issues in the interview. Males may be expected to dominate interactions with females. Younger people may be expected to show deference to older people.
- ◆ Expect indirect questions regarding competency and experience.
- ◆ Citing accomplishments and skills may be considered boastful, self-serving, or too individualistic.
- ◆ Jobs may be assigned by government or family. Questioning one's role in a company may be seen as disloyal. Companies sometimes assign work and expect individuals to accept what is available.
- ◆ The employer may not expect immediate competence; may instead be seeking a long-term employee.
- ◆ Researching an organization in advance may be perceived as too much initiative/independence.
- ◆ Asking during an interview where the employer is in the interview process/when you can expect to hear back may be seen as too forward.
- ◆ Inquiring about the status of your application may be seen as rude.

Interview Skill Preparation for International Students

- Enhance your communication skills by attending career workshops at the GSD.
- Study commonly asked interview questions; write answers to those questions; practice your responses in front of a mirror as well as with friends.
- Schedule a mock interview with a GSD career counselor to receive feedback on interview skills, telephone interviews, on-campus and firm interviews.

World Wide Web Resources

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) - The official website of the administrative arm of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) provides helpful information about visas, employment options, and legal advice for foreign nationals. www.uscis.gov

U.S. Department of State – The Bureau of Consular Affairs provides information about international travel, visa updates, passport information, and U.S. Embassy information. www.state.gov

American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) - Founded in 1946, the AILA is a national bar association of 6,000+ attorneys who practice and teach immigration law. Member attorneys represent tens of thousands of U.S. businesses and industries, foreign students, entertainers, athletes, and asylum seekers, some on a pro bono basis. AILA is an affiliate of the American Bar Association. www.aila.org

VisaNow - This organization allows foreign students/workers to process their visa applications online by providing online documents that need to be completed, providing a review by an immigration attorney, and submitting the application to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. www.visanow.com

Succeed in America – Succeed in America is a consulting firm that helps individuals and organizations with workplace-based communication, customer service, English language skills, career counseling, employability, cultural understanding and relocating spouse adjustment and employment. www.succeedinamerica.com

Print Resources

Check the following books in the GSD Career Services Office for more information:

“Amerispeak: A mini-dictionary of the most common words and phrases you need to know to communicate effectively in American business” by Nara Venditti, PhD, Succeed in America Books, 2006

“How to Get a Job in the USA” by Nara Venditti, PhD, Succeed in America Books, 2006

** This handout is adapted from an article by [Caprice Lantz](http://www.NACEweb.org) on www.NACEweb.org (National Association of Colleges and Employers website); University of Baltimore at <http://www2.etoyn.edu/career/International/application.html>