

Career Advising for International Students

In addition to technical knowledge and skills gained from their degree programs, international students can contribute several valuable benefits to their workplaces, including various language abilities, cross-cultural skills, global perspectives, and overseas networks.

Some barriers to employment for international students may be due to a perceived lack of adequate English skills and/or lack of understanding American business culture. The complexity of the visa process and the desire to hire domestic students over international students are other possible obstacles. This guide provides some tips on how to help international students navigate their job/internship search and addresses some of these barriers to employment.

Choosing a Career

Balance family/cultural expectations. Many international students feel a great deal of pressure to secure a job upon graduation because their family usually has to invest a lot of money in order to send them to the US.¹ Therefore, some international students will feel particularly obligated to consider their family's opinion. These students may need assistance in pursuing a career that balances family/cultural considerations with their passion.

Think strategically. Help students think strategically about the types of businesses or organizations that would be interested in them – businesses trading in their home country or expanding within a geographic region is an obvious example.²

Provide resources specifically tailored to international students. Help students to develop their job search strategies and direct them toward resources that may be more applicable to them such as [GoinGlobal](#) or [MyVisaJobs](#). GoinGlobal provides students with cultural guides and employers most likely to sponsor H-1B visas based on state and metro area. Students may also be able to look for positions in their home country. MyVisaJobs also provides up-to-date lists of top H-1B employers in the U.S.²

Starting the Job Search

International students may need extra help with concepts such as 'small talk,' networking, American business attire, creating a resume, and interviewing since they may come from a country with different cultural norms regarding these aspects of job searching.

Creating a Resume

There may be differences between the concept of a resume in the US and abroad. Although a resume is used for industry and a curriculum vitae (CV) is used for academia in the US, there is often no distinction abroad. A CV is used for multiple purposes rather than a resume. Some possible differences include:³

United States' Resume	International CV
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Customized marketing document	Generic list of credentials
One page	May be two or more pages
Does not include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Marital status • Race • Religion • Picture of applicant 	May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Marital status • Race • Religion • Picture of applicant

Preparing for the Interview

Be aware of cultural factors – lack of eye contact, projecting self-confidence, networking, speaking directly, or providing strong opinions in the U.S. This American style may all be deeply challenging to international students. Sometimes simply acknowledging the root of the challenge helps the student to feel more comfortable.²

Many international students are worried about their communication skills. Reassure the student that you can understand them but encourage them to practice interviewing with others.²

A non-native English speaker may have trouble understanding interview questions – whether the language, the intent of the question, or sometimes figuring out the right answer. Assure them that it’s okay to ask for the question to be repeated, as long as they don’t ask so often that the interviewer begins question their language abilities. Provide them with alternative ways to clarify a question or to buy time to think.²

Possible Interview Differences³

United States	Abroad
Punctuality is important.	Cultural norms may allow tardiness.
Handshake is customary & expected.	Greetings may vary.
Eye contact is a sign of confidence.	Eye contact may be disrespectful.
Personal space is important.	Too much distance implies disinterest.
It is appropriate to be friendly, smile, and occasionally utilize humor. “Small talk” is common and often expected.	You may be expected to present yourself in a serious manner to appear professional. “Small talk” may be uncommon.
The interviewer may do most of the talking or may expect you to do most of the talking.	The interviewer may do the majority of the talking.
Questions about age, race, sex, and marital status are illegal.	Age, race, sex, and marital status may be issues in the interview.
A discussion of your individual skills and accomplishments demonstrates competence.	Citing your accomplishments and skills may be considered boastful.
It is perfectly acceptable for you to inquire about the interview process.	Inquiring about the hiring timeline may be considered rude or forward.

Explaining Visa Requirements

Although international students are responsible for being able to explain their own visa restrictions/requirements, some information about the main requirements for visa compliance and temporary employment opportunities are provided below. Educating potential employers about CPT and OPT could increase their willingness to hire an international student. **Please note, this is a basic summary only; have students contact [International Student and Scholar Services](#) if they have questions about what is permitted with their visas.** Their options may be different depending on their program of study and other factors.

Basic Requirements for Students on F-1 and J-1 Visas:

1. They have to be enrolled full time. Their last semester is the only exception.
2. Classes must be taken on-campus.
3. They can only take ONE online class per semester.
4. They are only allowed on-campus employment. However, internships are allowed if they are required for their program. Once that is determined, they can come to the OGE for further advice on the process.

Internship/Work Authorization Opportunities:

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is required for F-1 students who intend to engage in a practical training experience such as an internship during their program of study. CPT is intended to provide temporary work authorization so students can gain hands-on, practical work experience in situations where the work serves as a required or otherwise integral part of a student's academic program prior to graduation. More information can be found [here](#) on the ISSS website.

To be eligible for Curricular Practical Training, the following conditions must be met:

1. You must have been in F-1 status and in your program for one academic year.
2. You must have a job or internship offer for a position that directly relates to your degree program or major field of study.
3. Your degree program/major field of study must require practical training as a condition of graduation or your academic program must offer a credit-bearing training opportunity that is an important, but optional, part of the program of study.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is defined as: “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.” OPT may be authorized to an F-1 student who has lawfully enrolled in an academic program on a full-time basis for one full academic year. The student may apply for OPT employment authorization for work that is directly related to his or her area of study. It is intended to provide hands-on practical work experience complementary to the student’s academic program. English language training students are not eligible for OPT. More information can be found [here](#) on the ISSS website.

Sources

¹Kisch, Marian. "[Helping International Students Navigate Career Options.](#)" *NAFSA*, 2014.

²"[Career Advisor Guide to Helping International Students.](#)" *Michigan State University*, 2018.

³Roskamp, Monica, and Maurice Traylor. "Guiding International Students in the U.S. Employment Search." MAIE, 2020, Traverse City. Presentation.