

# U.S. Employment Opportunities for International Students

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Currently, U.S. immigration laws allow international students to be employed in the country during and after a course of study, but there are restrictions. If you want to work in the U.S. you must plan ahead and familiarize yourself with the rules and regulations that accompany the immigration laws. Regulations change constantly, so you must be aware that even if you are offered an employment opportunity, you may not be legally able to accept it. Take time to look through the provided resources in order to better understand your position as an international student.

## **I don't have U.S. citizenship or permanent residency. Will this matter to a prospective employer?**

In general, not being a U.S. citizen or permanent resident adds a level of difficulty to a job search, but there are employers who are not only willing to hire foreign nationals, but are also specifically looking for these individuals. Naturally, it will depend on the industry as well as the employer. Practical Training offers students who have studied in the U.S. on an F-1 visa the opportunity to work for up to twelve months in a field related to their studies. In general as a foreign national you cannot work for the U.S. federal government, for most other U.S. state and local government entities, or for private employers who receive government contracts.

If you hope to remain in the U.S. for longer than the period of your Practical Training, it is important to look into acquiring an extended visa such as the H-1B visa. An employer must sponsor you for an H-1B visa, and thus you will impose more paperwork and cost on an employer than will a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

Since internships usually count as Optional Practical Training (OPT) time, make sure the internship you're looking at is what you want to put your valuable time into. OPT is a period during which undergraduate and graduate students with F-1 status who have completed their studies are permitted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to work for twelve months per educational level (an extension of seventeen months is available for graduates from a government-designated STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics]) on a student visa without needing to acquire a work H-1B visa towards getting a practical training to complement their field of studies. That being said, it isn't uncommon for international students to receive job offers from the sponsoring American company after completing an internship with them, so this may be great opportunity to seek employment.

## **Cultural differences in the job search & interviewing process:**

Almost all U.S. job searches require you to write resumes and cover letters. You may want to look through our guides on Resume and Cover Letter writing or speak with someone at the Becker Career Center to help you develop documents to better fit the U.S. style. Many international students may find interviews to be the most culturally different aspect of the job search. *Making eye contact* with even the most senior person will be seen as a *sign of confidence*, not of disrespect. Some of these differences may challenge you, but console yourself that many Americans do not find the job search easy, either. The Becker Career Center offers workshops on the job search and interviewing. Take advantage of these workshops!

### **International Interview**

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

## U.S. Interview

- Be punctual. Arrive five to fifteen minutes prior to appointment
- Eye contact is expected and shows confidence.
- Interviewer styles vary, and some may begin with direct questions or minimal small talk.
- Interviewer may do most of the talking or may expect the candidate to do most of the talking.
- Questions regarding age, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin and marital status are illegal.

### **When should I tell an employer about my visa status?**

It's hard to give an exact moment to alert an employer, but it should be before an employer offers you a job. Some employers aren't necessarily aware of work permission issues, and if someone offers you a job and only then learns that they'll have to apply for an H-1B visa in order to keep you, the employer may be put off by the fact that you didn't provide this information up-front. *You may want to raise the issue sometime near the end of a positive first interview*, so the employer feels that you are being open about your work situation. However, if you know that you will be receiving permanent residency status in the near future, share that information as early as possible. That way you will assure your employer that he or she will not need to worry about work permission.

### **English**

*The more a position requires extensive contact with others, the more important it is that your English is clear.* If it is not, some last minute tutoring may be helpful. Employers may use your written English to assess your spoken English, so edit and reedit your cover letters to make sure you are as clear as possible. Unless you're fluent in English, it's a good idea to have a native speaker review your work.

### **What can I do to maximize my chances?**

Don't procrastinate or expect to do it all in a day. Learn everything you can about the process through which an employer can obtain an H-1 visa for you. They may be unaware of the steps in which case you will need to clearly explain the process. Don't downplay its importance, either. In the long run it's better to discuss the process and seriously assess the situation before both you and your potential employer have gone too far, only to find that you are ineligible. There may be some advantage to involving a lawyer familiar with the process to help with the paperwork. If you're willing to pay any associated fees, let the employer know that.

### **Internet Resources for International Students:**

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> - U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States.

<http://online.goinglobal.com/default.aspx> - Career and Employment Resources providing worldwide job openings, internship listings, industry profiles and country specific career information, work permit/visa regulations, resume writing guidelines and examples, employment trends, salary ranges, networking groups, cultural/interviewing advice, HI-B searchable employer database and more.

[www.H1VisaJobs.com](http://www.H1VisaJobs.com) – Information about occupations, employers, and companies with a history of H1-B sponsorship

[http://www.myvisajobs.com/H1B\\_Visa.aspx](http://www.myvisajobs.com/H1B_Visa.aspx) - Searchable database of employers with a history of H1-B sponsorship

<http://www.immigrationdirect.com/index.html> - Information on regulations related to international students and working in the US

## **Internet Resources for International Students (Continued):**

[www.usvisanews.com](http://www.usvisanews.com) - Information on converting F-1 Visa to U.S. Employment

[www.culturalvistas.org](http://www.culturalvistas.org) - Council on International Education Exchange; short-term visa sponsor

<http://www.aipt.org/> - Association for International Practical Training; global training services; J-1 visa sponsor

[www.jobsearch.org](http://www.jobsearch.org) - Job database

<http://www.flcdatacenter.com/CaseData.aspx> - US Department of Labor (DOL) H1-B Labor Certification Database. This is a government website that contains H1-B applications submitted to the US Department of Labor over the last 3 years.

## **How to Identify Potential Employers:**

According to the Immigration Reform Control Act of 1986, employers are permitted to specify that they will not consider any individuals with a non-immigrant visa (i.e., F1 or J1) who are eligible to work only for practical training purposes. This may be problematic for international students attempting to identify employers who may be interested in hiring them. How do you go about identifying employers who are willing to consider you for practical training and/or full-time employment? Here are some potential strategies:

- Use the Becker Career Center's networking system to reach out to people in your field. They may be more willing to help a student from their alma mater despite the visa difficulties
- Look for a company that has international relationships and/or offices. They tend to be more open to employing international employees for their language skills, diversity, knowledge of international policy, etc.