International Students and the Job Search

In this handout...
  U.S. Employment Regulations
  Challenges and Misconceptions
  Common Cultural Barriers
  Strategies for Seeking Employment in the U.S.
  Finding Opportunities and Applying to Jobs in the U.S.
  Searching for Opportunities Outside of the U.S.
  Frequently Asked Questions
  UCS Resources
  What Employers Should Know About Hiring International Students

This handout is designed to assist you, the international student, with the job search process. This guide is particularly targeted towards students in F-1 or J-1 visa status. However, other foreign nationals or those with newly acquired American citizenship may find some of the information included to be both relevant and useful.

In addition to this handout, international students should also contact the International Studies Office (ISO) before seeking any form of employment (paid or unpaid) whether as a student or in preparation for graduation so that you are aware of all applicable restrictions, requirements and deadlines. Remember it is your responsibility to connect with ISO to obtain the most current information as the rules are constantly changing.

International Studies Office
Minor Hall 208
Walk-In Advising Hours: [http://www.virginia.edu/iso/issp/staff.html](http://www.virginia.edu/iso/issp/staff.html)
U.S. Employment Regulations

Employment While a Student: As an international student you may have the opportunity to gain experience On- and in some cases Off-Grounds. Before you begin seeking employment, it is extremely important that you connect with the International Studies Office to ensure that you are aware of all applicable restrictions, requirements and deadlines. If you are unsure if an opportunity you are pursuing constitutes as employment, visit the International Studies Office for more information. There are many types of training that allow certain international students to gain experience: Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Academic Training. It is important as you begin to pursue these that you plan ahead. Some approvals to work can take anywhere from 30-120 days. In preparation for your meeting with ISO review their webpage on student visa statuses: http://www.virginia.edu/iso/issp/issp-overview.html

Employment after Graduation: There are many types of visas that provide international students the opportunity to work in the U.S. after graduation. Below are a few of the more common work visas pursued by international students and employers.

H-1B Visas/Non-Immigrant Temporary Work Visa – Some F-1 and J-1 visa holders may be eligible to change their status in the U.S. and acquire H-1B status. In order to qualify for H-1B visa status, you must first have a job offer with an employer who is willing to file an H-1B petition on your behalf with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. H-1B visa status is reserved for individuals in "specialty occupations" which are jobs requiring at least a Bachelor’s degree. An attorney is usually hired by the employer, in order to file the H-1B petition on your behalf. Every fiscal year, the U.S. government allows approximately 65,000 new foreign nationals from around the world to gain H-1B status in the U.S. This limit on new H-1B holders is known as the “H-1B cap”. There are a separate 20,000 H-1B visas available for foreign nationals who earn at least a Master’s degree from a U.S. institution. Some employers are exempt from the H-1B cap such as institutions of higher education and non-profit research organizations associated with those institutions. New H-1B petitions may be filed as early as April 1 with requested start dates of the following October 1, which is the first day of the new fiscal year. In recent years, the H-1B cap has been reached as quickly as possible, and about double the allotted number of petitions were filed. For current information about the number of petitions received and deadlines visit http://www.uscis.gov.

TN, H-1B1 and E-3 classifications – Citizens of Canada, Mexico, Singapore, Chile and Australia can often find opportunities in these classifications. If you will work in a specific occupation and are Canadian or Mexican, you may qualify for TN status. Citizens of Singapore and Chile are given an allotment of H-1B numbers that is separate from
other foreign nationals and has never been exhausted. Australians who qualify for H-1B status also qualify for E-3 status and this quota has also never been exhausted.

**Permanent Residents (green card holders)** – If you are a permanent resident you are eligible to work in the United States without restriction. The application process to become a permanent resident is time-consuming and complicated. If you believe you are eligible to apply for permanent residence, contact an immigration attorney for a consultation.

**Challenges and Misconceptions**

There are challenges you as an international student face when conducting a job search in the U.S. Some commonly experienced challenges are listed below. Many of these are employer misconceptions that you can help to change as you begin your own job search.

**Visa Quotas:** Because work in the U.S. is not guaranteed, nor promised, to international students entering the country on a student visa and quotas are set on the number of skilled foreign workers legally permitted in the country you may experience challenges trying to find employment.

**Hiring Complexities:** Employers are unfamiliar with the process of hiring an international student and therefore believe it to be complicated and expensive.

**Lack of Commitment to the Job:** Employers fear that international students will return to their home country after a year or two and are reluctant to invest time and resources into training them.

**Communication:** Employers are concerned about international students’ ability to communicate effectively in verbal and written English with their clients and internal personnel.

**Employment Restrictions:** In general, as an international student you cannot work for the U.S. federal government, for most U.S. state and local government agencies or for private companies contracted by the government. That said, your visa status will be less of an absolute barrier with other industries and employers.
Strategies for Seeking Employment in the U.S.

While challenges and misconceptions exist, there are strategies for overcoming many of these barriers as you conduct your job search.

**Be Informed:** Recognizing that employers may have misconceptions about hiring international students can provide you the opportunity to best articulate why you are the right fit for an employer in a manner that helps alleviate potential misconceptions. For example, if you know that employers may be hesitant to hire international students because they perceive the process to petition for a visa as too complex, during an interview you can take the opportunity to educate an employer on the steps it takes to file a petition helping them to see that it is not as difficult of a process as they may think. Be sure to read the last section of this handout “What Employers Should Know About Hiring International Students.” Likewise, if you know that employers may be concerned about an international student applicant’s commitment to the job, you can emphasize in your interview your intention for wanting to learn and grow over time with that particular company.

**Perfect Your English Skills:** If you have concerns about your ability to effectively communicate (both oral and written) in English with employers, take steps to practice and increase your English language abilities. Look for organizations and resources at the University where you can continue to hone your speaking and writing skills. Consider participating in the Volunteers with International Students and Scholars, and Staff Program (VISAS). More information can be found here: [http://www.virginia.edu/provost/caelc/volunteer.html](http://www.virginia.edu/provost/caelc/volunteer.html) Also consider ways you can incorporate practice into your everyday life: joining a student organization, speaking during class discussions, joining a study group or volunteering in the community are great ways to increase your skills.

**Employers with an International Focus or Presence:** Strong employment prospects may be with organizations that have an international focus (for ex: World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, or World Bank). You may also find success with U.S. companies that have an international presence/office in other countries. Keep in mind that U.S. institutions of higher education may be an option. Your international experience, language and cultural fluency make you very attractive to these organizations. In addition, if your U.S. work authorization is delayed, you may be able to continue to work at one of their branches outside of the U.S. The UCS library has several print resources that name American companies with divisions throughout the world.

Here are a few:

*Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries*
*Directory of Foreign Firms Operating in the U.S.*
Seek Exposure to Industries in Demand: As an international student you may find the job search process less difficult if you study or gain exposure to subjects in demand. Currently firms in the U.S. desire skilled workers, particularly in the areas of Systems Analysis and Programming, Engineering, Accounting, Computer Science, Hospitality, Business, Finance and some Healthcare Fields. If you are not majoring in one of these areas, at least consider developing computer skills (programming, word processing and spreadsheet design), quantitative skills (accounting, statistics and economics) and/or scientific skills (lab research) through elective classes, independent studies or extracurricular activities to make yourself more marketable.

Articulate the Unique Benefits of Hiring an International Student: Because you are searching for employment in the United States, you may feel that in order to be successful in your job search you will need to assimilate to be more like U.S. applicants. While there are some customs and cultural barriers that you will need to consider (see the next section), your experience as an international student is just as important in articulating your fit to an employer. Consider how you might convey to an employer the unique advantages you can bring to a company as an international student. For example in a resume, cover letter or in an interview, discuss your language skills as well as your ability to adapt to new cultures and environments as you have done in attending a university in another country.

Common Cultural Barriers

The first step in designing an effective job search strategy which will lead to employment in the United States is to clearly understand the setting in which you are operating. As a student, you may not have had much experience job-hunting in your home country. Even if you have, you are likely to find job-hunting in the U.S. a different process.

The differences are culturally based and, therefore, you may have to work at overcoming the natural inclination to conduct yourself as you would if you were looking for a job in your home country. Different cultures have different sensibilities. Be aware of the setting in which you are interviewing.

UCS has several books in the library to introduce you to the American job search process. Take time to read some of this material before you begin your search. The Complete Job Search Handbook is a great resource with which to start. Below is a list of common cultural barriers you as an international student may experience in your job search. Please note that these factors are not indigenous to one particular society, but represent a cross-section of countries and continents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Expectations in U.S.</th>
<th>Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Promotion</td>
<td>✤ Assertiveness, openly discussing personal strengths and job fit</td>
<td>✤ Unless presented as part of a group activity, citing achieved goals, accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving and too individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries, thank you notes, etc.)</td>
<td>✤ Asking employers directly about status of application may be viewed as rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directness in Communication</td>
<td>✤ Open and direct responses to questions</td>
<td>✤ Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g., employer/interviewer), is disrespectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture, and other appropriate nonverbal behavior</td>
<td>✤ Appearance of criticism must be avoided to save face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Discussion of salary and benefits only when initiated by interviewer or at time of job offer</td>
<td>✤ Asking open-ended questions about the job may be seen as rude and inappropriately direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Candidate asks questions about the job at the end of the interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>✤ Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses are common</td>
<td>✤ Personal questions about likes, dislikes, etc. are considered an invasion of privacy and are discussed only with close friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Answers to questions related to personality (e.g., leadership style and problem solving abilities)</td>
<td>✤ Or, these kinds of questions sometimes are seen as irrelevant to a candidate’s qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✤ Revealing outside interests may be considered a threat to time, energy and other resources invested by a candidate into the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Expectations in U.S.</td>
<td>Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Self-Awareness</td>
<td>❖ Demonstration of knowledge of self, career goals and how they relate to job</td>
<td>❖ Questions about role in company indicate potential disloyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Discussion of long-range career plans</td>
<td>❖ Jobs are assigned by government or family or determined by school or test score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Ability to be self-directed in one’s career development</td>
<td>❖ Individual must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available without regard to their own career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Responsibility in Finding Employment</td>
<td>❖ Use of a wide variety of resources in identifying jobs (e.g. friends, family, contacts, associations, career services, faculty, etc.)</td>
<td>❖ Jobs are found for the individual by government, school or family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Networking by candidates; personal referrals can carry great weight in evaluating a candidate’s potential</td>
<td>❖ Dependency relationships in job search are fostered. One resource (e.g. academic advisor or employment agent) will find work for job seeker with little proactive action on the part of the seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informality in the Interview Process</td>
<td>❖ Congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking and exchange of information</td>
<td>❖ Sitting with a person of higher status requires deference. The job applicant is very polite and does not ask questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer’s position. Handshaking, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>❖ Arrive 5-15 minutes before appointment</td>
<td>❖ Personal relationships are more than time. Anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours lateness from agreed meeting time is not insulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Letters of Application and Resumes</td>
<td>❖ One page, error-free, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experience, skills, academic credentials and accomplishments</td>
<td>❖ Resumes are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Expectations in U.S.</td>
<td>Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Equality</td>
<td>❖ Race, sex, and age are legally not supposed to affect the interview process</td>
<td>❖ Males and older persons may expect to assume dominance in interactions with females and younger persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❖ Politeness and respect are shown to all employees a candidate meets, whether</td>
<td>❖ Level of organizational hierarchy may determine the amount of respect an individual is given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>receptionist or CEO</td>
<td>❖ Attitudes on gender, race, and other individual characteristics and how they impact hiring decisions vary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from culture to culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Organization Prior to Interview</td>
<td>❖ Obtain as much information as possible about the company before the interview. Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application and during the interview</td>
<td>❖ Research about organization may indicate excessive and undesirable initiative or independence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Finding Opportunities and Applying to Jobs in the U.S.**

Looking for a job while working hard to finish a degree can be rather overwhelming. The best way to approach this dilemma is to start organizing and utilizing your resources the year before you graduate. Your job search strategy should include:

- **Exploring Resources**
- **Gaining Experience**
- **Networking Your Way to a Job**
- **Preparing Country-Specific Resumes and Cover Letters**

**Exploring Resources**

University Career Services is a great place to start your research. UCS has a large number of resources online to assist you in researching various industries, generating a list of prospective employers and finding actual job listings. Come to UCS during walk-in hours or make an appointment with a counselor for an orientation to any of the resources available.
listed below. To schedule an appointment, please call UCS at (434) 924-8900. For up-to-date information on walk-in hours, please call or visit our website at www.career.virginia.edu.

**CAVLink** – Database which includes externship, internship, part-time and full-time job postings and provides access to On Grounds Interviewing (OGI).

**My UCS** – Portal to protected resources ([https://www.career.virginia.edu/MyUCS/](https://www.career.virginia.edu/MyUCS/)). Below are some of the resources available to you:

*Career Insider by VAULT* - Includes an internship database which lists opportunities open to international students. Also a great resource for industry overviews, profiles of top career paths and tips on resumes/cover letters and interviewing.

*Going Global* - Provides information on domestic as well as international employment opportunities, to include guides for working in over 20 countries. Also a great resource for researching U.S. companies who have filed H1B visa petitions in the last year.

*UCAN (University Career Assistance Network - hoosonline.imodules.com)* - Searchable database of U.Va. alumni available for advice, networking and informational interviewing. The alumni contacts represent various career fields and are searchable by location, major while at U.Va., industry and company name. To learn more about how to use the alumni database, schedule a meeting with a UCS staff member or read the handout “Networking and Informational Interviewing.”

## Gaining Experience

Gaining relevant work experience, in addition to your degree, will make you a more competitive job candidate. **Internships** during the summer are a great way to build skills and augment your classroom experience. Your internship should be related to your declared major or your principal field of study. If you plan to work in the U.S. after graduating and decide to use some of your OPT to do an internship in the U.S. while still a student, you should seek out internship opportunities with companies that have a history of sponsoring employees who are on a work visa. That way, you will be building a relationship with an organization that is more likely to hire you for a full-time position upon graduating. Many employers favor applicants for their entry-level positions who went through their internship programs.

UCS has extensive resources for researching internship opportunities. Internship opportunities may vary tremendously depending on your area of interest, and may be paid or unpaid. For more information on obtaining an internship, see the UCS handout called “Internships, Externships, Summer Jobs and Other Ways of Gaining Experience.” Please note that Ferguson’s *Career Resource Guide to Internships and Summer Jobs* is extremely helpful and
*Princeton's Internship Bible,* which is also available in the UCS library, includes an index of internships open to international students.

**Externships** are short-term job shadowing experiences (one day to three weeks in length) which enable students to clarify their career goals, gain “real world” experience and get their foot in the door for competitive internships and jobs. Students participating in externships are not paid by the employer and must supply their own housing, food and transportation; however, the networking opportunities provided by this kind of experience make them highly valuable. More information on externships is available on the UCS website.

Faculty may be in a position to provide work opportunities during the academic year and summer months through grants or their departmental budgets. Check with your faculty advisor to see if there are any opportunities in your department.

**NOTE:** In exploring any of the opportunities mentioned above, always check with the International Student Advisor to confirm your eligibility for work authorization. Unlawful employment can also include engaging in unpaid work.

**Networking Your Way to a Job**

In seeking advice from any career counselor in the United States, you will undoubtedly be advised about the benefits of interviewing for information and networking as a means to finding a suitable job. Indeed, it is common to find employment as a result of having the right connections. The ability to make connections with people, or *networking,* is a skill you can begin developing while on *Grounds* (refer to the UCS handout on “Networking and Informational Interviewing” for a more in-depth discussion of the process).

Begin talking with faculty members and fellow students. Many faculty members have worked outside of the university context and maintain professional contacts with their former colleagues. In addition, start building relationships with upperclassmen and attend networking functions where alumni will be in attendance. It will prove to be helpful for you to connect with people who have already successfully found employment here in the U.S. and can provide you with insight about the process. The best way to find companies that are willing to hire international students is to talk to other international students and alumni, since companies who have hired international students in the past are likely to continue to do so.
Utilize the University Career Assistance Network mentioned above as well as consider creating a LinkedIn Profile to also connect with alumni. Need assistance with creating your profile? Check out the handout “Using LinkedIn Effectively.”

Joining a professional association related to your field of interest is also a wonderful way to make connections with those who can provide you with sound advice about how to find jobs in a particular field. Visit the websites of these organizations to request information on their publications, student rates, chapters and conferences. For the names of professional associations, speak with a faculty member in your department or also utilize the MyUCS resource “What Can I Do With This Major?” to find professional association listings by major.

Many international students are discouraged because they believe that they have no network in the United States, as their connections are with people in their home countries. It is important to understand that in the U.S. a network is actively developed and does not connote long-standing, life-long relationships based on family ties or status in the community. Anyone can develop a network with some knowledge of the process. Be as creative as possible in developing your network. Do you have a community host or language partner who can provide you with information or a referral? Have you joined a student organization related to your field of interest? Have you attended a career fair or asked an employer for her business card?

**Preparing Resumes and Cover Letters**

A well-prepared resume and cover letter are essential to getting a job interview. For a U.S. job search, your resume and cover letter must conform to basic, generally accepted standards.

The U.S. resume is succinct, including only information which is relevant to an employer's needs. Personal information is usually excluded. The resume is also limited to one page in most cases.

UCS has several resources, which can assist you. If you are creating a resume or cover letter for the first time, utilize the UCS handouts on “Writing Resumes” and “Cover Letters and Other Correspondence.” Finally, the library maintains a collection of books on the subject, as well as, sample resumes and cover letters.

Remember, it is your responsibility to ease the concerns that employers may have about hiring you. This means you should provide the following information on your resume and/or cover letter:

- Test scores (TOEFL and/or SATs, particularly verbal or writing scores)
- Writing and English courses completed
- Descriptions highlighting your communication skills (where applicable)
“Translated written and spoken English daily for 2 years.”
“Tutored other international students in reading, writing and speaking English.”
“Gave 15 minute PowerPoint presentation on paper entitled _______ before an audience of 50”
Frame of reference for foreign employers and schools:
# 1 research institution in India
Second largest technology manufacturer in Europe
A $10 million marketing firm

On the other hand, it is also your responsibility to highlight the qualities that make you unique.

International experience
“Lived in Ghana for 10 years and U.K. for 7 years.”
“Traveled extensively throughout South and Latin America.”
“Developed a solid understanding and appreciation for Russian culture and customs.”
Language skills
Fluent in English, native speaker of Chinese and proficient in French

Your resume should be free of spelling and grammatical errors. After you have developed a resume, bring it to UCS to have a career counselor review it with you. You should also have your cover letters reviewed by a counselor to ensure that the writing style, as well as, the content conforms to employers' expectations.

Preparing for an Interview
The interview is your opportunity to convince the employer that you are the right person for the job. In most instances, an employer is expecting you to articulate your future career goals and past accomplishments. The interviewer is assessing you according to values such as self-confidence, initiative, directness, and individualism. You must learn to become comfortable with the idea of marketing yourself to an employer.

Non-verbal behavior may also be a barrier to successful communication with an interviewer. Eye contact, physical distance, personal appearance and manner of dress all communicate things about you to an interviewer. It is important that you understand exactly what you are communicating.

Understanding and mastering appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication before an interview is essential. UCS offers programs, books and videos on interviewing. Once you are feeling more comfortable with the process, schedule a mock interview with a counselor. The counselor will make suggestions for improving your technique.
Remember, the more practice you have, the more prepared and relaxed you will be when the time comes for an employment interview.

Preparation for an interview always includes doing research about the employer. Also, the interviewer will expect you to have questions about the job or the organization. It is helpful to have those prepared in advance.

Check the UCS library for other resources in preparing for the interview process:
UCS handout on “Interviewing for Employment”
Knock 'Em Dead
Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed
Interview for Success

NOTE: Always consult with the International Student Advisor to make sure that you understand the parameters of your visa status. Not only is this essential information for you to have as you determine your goals for employment, but you will have to clearly and accurately explain your status to most employers during the interview process.

Following Up With Employers
After having an interview, it is always appropriate to follow-up with a thank-you note. In this follow-up correspondence, you can reiterate your interest in the position and emphasize the skills and abilities you would be bringing to the employer. This type of correspondence is not considered being pushy. In fact, if an employer does not hear from you after an interview, the assumption may be that you are not sincerely interested in the job. See the UCS handout called “Cover Letters and Other Correspondence” for an example of a thank-you letter.

Frequently Asked Questions
Should I list my visa status on my resume?
Your visa status does not have to be included on your resume. Your permanent address, educational background and work history will display that you are an international student. Hiring managers should ask appropriate questions during the recruitment process to identify if you will require work authorization. Always answer these questions honestly – whether in an application or in an interview.

Are there questions that are illegal for an employer to ask me?

An employer MAY NOT ask:
What is your visa type, nationality, place of birth? or, Of which country are you a citizen?
What is your native language? or, What language do you most often speak?

An employer MAY ask:
Are you legally authorized to work in the United States? or, Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa?
Which languages do you read, speak or write? (provided that foreign language skills are job related)

What steps can I take to enhance my candidacy?
Get your resume and cover letters reviewed by a UCS counselor, employer and/or alumni
Become thoroughly familiar with immigration regulations and benefits attached to your visa status – visit the International Studies Office for detailed information
Research the employers and the positions in which you are interested
Participate in a mock interview
Practice speaking confidently about your skills, interests and career goals and articulate in the interview how your international experiences make you uniquely
If you need to, improve your English skills by speaking up in class, making presentations and expanding your circle of native English speaking friends

**Searching for Opportunities Outside of the U.S.**

Given the shortage of U.S. work visas, it would be wise of you to at least consider looking for employment in your home country or another country outside of the U.S. The international job search strategy includes the same elements as the U.S. job search:

- **Exploring Resources**
- **Gaining Experience**
- **Networking Your Way to a Job**
- **Preparing Country-Specific Resumes and Cover Letters**

**Exploring Resources**
The UCS library has a large number of print and electronic resources, which relate to finding a job in the global marketplace. Some of the material is designed for American students who are searching for employment abroad; however, much of the information is just as relevant for an international student seeking employment abroad.

**International Employment Weekly** is another great resource that you can sign-up for through [MyUCS](http://www.career.virginia.edu) and be sure to check out the UCS Handout “Finding Employment Overseas.”
The **International Studies Office** can provide information on a variety of organizations that assist international students in seeking employment outside the U.S. Stop by the ISO periodically to see if new information is available.

**Gaining Work Experience**

Use the numerous international resources and directories available through UCS to identify a company with a subsidiary in your home country. The International Division at company headquarters can identify the Regional Manager of the subsidiary who in turn can provide you with information on summer work opportunities or internships. Also, The *Directory of Overseas Summer Jobs* and the *International Directory of Voluntary Work* list information on 50,000 opportunities worldwide.

**NOTE:** If you are contemplating summer work overseas, it would be to your benefit to check with the International Student Advisor regarding your visa status for re-entry into the United States to continue your academic program.

**Networking Your Way to a Job**

Begin talking with faculty members about your career plans. Many faculty members have worked or studied abroad and maintain professional contacts with colleagues overseas. U.Va. hosts visiting faculty from abroad who arrive with current information and contacts in their home countries.

U.Va. alumni living overseas can be valuable resources for information on employment opportunities. You can also utilize **UCAN (University Career Assistance Network)** and **LinkedIn** to contact alumni overseas. Consider joining the following LinkedIn groups: “*University of Virginia Networking Community*” and “*Global Career Community*.” Also, the U.Va. Alumni Association has developed 20+ alumni chapters overseas. Visit [http://uvaclubs.virginia.edu](http://uvaclubs.virginia.edu) for a complete list and contact information. While you should not contact alumni to "ask for a job," it is certainly appropriate to ask for information, advice and/or referrals.

Many professional associations have an international membership. Visit the websites of these organizations to request information on their publications, student rates, and overseas chapters. These links may lead you to knowledgeable people and, possibly, job opportunities.

Finally, don’t forget to write home. Not only will your family and friends be happy to hear from you, but you can ask them for information on the job market. Family, friends, and former employers can all provide you with job leads while you are busy studying in the United States. In addition, these contacts may also be in a position to serve as references. References from the U.S., unless internationally known in their field, will not lend as much weight to your application as a well-known figure in your home country.
Preparing Country-Specific Resumes and Cover Letters

A well-written resume and cover letter is critical in any job search. However, when searching for a job in your home country, your resume must conform to the local standards and not reflect U.S. styles and standards in resume writing. Just as American students come to UCS for help in writing an appropriate American-style resume, you may need some advice in designing a resume appropriate for use in your home country or another country. Dr. Frank Klein of the University Placement Center at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale offers the following advice:

"For job searches in the U.S., the resume is most often chronological, functional, or a combination of the two. However, with regard to resume format requirements, differences exist from continent to continent, country to country. Working in the European Countries: A Guide to Graduate Recruiters and Job Seekers by A.J. Raban of the University of Cambridge Career Services, makes an excellent case for a country-specific resume. In Denmark, according to Raban, extracurricular activities are defined as work experience rather than student activities and, consequently given much attention by the employer. In Germany, where extracurricular activities are defined as student activities, they receive little attention. If a single resume category, extracurricular activities, is important in Denmark, unimportant in Germany, is secondary to academic performance in Italy, and is given special attention by employers in the United Kingdom, enough cannot be said on the importance of country-specific resumes."

Resumes targeted for some countries require more personal data than is appropriate in a U.S.-style resume. Birthdate, birthplace, citizenship, passport number and even a photograph may be appropriate. Often employers from these countries are more interested in the applicant's sales ability than in the specific undergraduate or graduate degree. In many countries, transcripts, with an official university stamp or seal, or even actual photocopies of degrees, are required with the resume. Additionally, a photocopy of your degree may be required if you are applying to a university position.

In addition to the resource mentioned above The Global Resume and CV Guide (available in the UCS library) outlines recommendations for country-specific resumes and cover letters. Going Global within MyUCS also provides country-specific sample resumes and cover letters for 40 different countries. Use your faculty contacts (especially the visiting faculty) to make sure that you are constructing an appropriate resume. Send a draft of your resume home in correspondence with family and friends. Ask them to critique your resume or find someone in your career field at home who has the knowledge and background to evaluate your resume style and content.
UCS Resources

Finding employment can be a long, time-consuming process. The information contained in this handout is meant to get you started in the process. It is important that you begin early to prepare yourself for competing in the job market after graduation. If you are having difficulty understanding any part of the job search process, make an appointment to speak with a UCS counselor, your faculty advisor, the International Studies Office, or all three. Don’t give up!

The UCS library has a plethora of print and electronic resources, many of which you will find helpful in conducting your job search. Make it a point to familiarize yourself with these resources as soon as possible. The following abbreviated list of UCS resources will get you started:

*The Global Resume and CV Guide*

*How to do Business in Sixty Countries: Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands*

*The Global Etiquette Guide (series)*

*The Big Guide to Living and Working Overseas*

*Directory of Foreign Firms Operating in the United States*

*The Immigrant’s Guide to the American Workplace*

*Careers in International Business*

*Careers in International Affairs*

*Careers for Foreign Language Aficionados and Other Multilingual Types*

*International Jobs: Where They Are and How to Get Them*
What Employers Should Know About Hiring International Students

Many employers are concerned about liability related to the employment of international students in the United States due to changes in federal laws governing non-citizens, particularly the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMIGRA90). This brochure addresses concerns employers might have about international students and work.

Getting permission for international students to work in the U.S. is not as difficult as many employers think. Most international students are in the U.S. on non-immigrant student visas (F-1 and J-1), and these international students are eligible to accept employment under certain conditions.

Practical training for F-1 students
Practical training is a legal means by which F-1 students can obtain employment in areas related to their academic field of study. Students, in general, must have completed one academic year (approximately nine months) in F-1 status and must maintain their F-1 status to be eligible for practical training. There are two types of practical training:
- Optional Practical Training
- Curricular Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) must be authorized by the Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) based on a recommendation from the designated school official (DSO) at the school which issued the form I-20, a government document which verifies the student's admission to that institution. The term "optional" means that students can opt to use all or part of their total practical training allotment of a maximum of 12 months. OPT can be authorized by the CIS: (1) during vacation when school is not in session; full time employment is allowed; (2) for part-time work, a maximum of 20 hours per week, while school is in session; (3) after completing all course requirements for the degree; or (4) full-time after completion of the course of study. Students who have received OPT permission will be issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by the CIS. Their name, photo and valid dates of employment are printed on the EAD. Employers should note that the average processing time for CIS to issue the EAD is two or three months, and students may begin employment only after they receive the EAD which will indicate the starting and ending dates of employment.

Curricular Practical Training may be authorized by the institution (NOT by CIS) for F-1 students participating in curricular-related employment such as cooperative education, work study, practicum and internship programs. Authorization is written on the back of the I-20 student copy and will include the name of the company, beginning and ending date, and signature of the designated school official (DSO). Since each institution has different policies related to curricular-related employment, students should speak to the DSO at their institution.
Processing time for the authorization of CPT varies at each institution. Employers should check with the student’s institution for an approximate turn-around time. International students on F-1 visas are eligible for both curricular practical training before finishing their studies, as well as 12 months of OPT. However, students who work full-time on curricular practical training for one year or more are not eligible for OPT. Those engaging in OPT prior to graduation may work for a maximum of 20 hours per week during their school term and 40 hours during their break period.

**Academic training for J-1 students**
Exchange students enter the U.S. on a J-1 visa. Practical training is called “academic training” for J-1 visa students. International students on J-1 visas are eligible for up to 18 months of academic training. Post-doctoral students are permitted three years. Some J-1 program participants are also allowed to work part-time during the academic program. Academic Training is granted in the form of a letter by the Responsible Officer (RO) or Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO). Students should consult with the RO or ARO at their institution.

**Minimal paper work for the employer**
Fortunately, there is little paperwork for an employer who hires F-1 or J-1 students. All paperwork is handled by the students, the school, and CIS. For curricular practical training, the school will make a notation on the students’ copy of the I-20 form indicating that curricular practical training has been authorized, and specifying the duration and place of employment. Students authorized for optional practical training are required to apply to CIS (through the school) for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

**Continuing employment after the practical/academic training period**
Federal regulations require that employment terminate at the conclusion of the authorized practical or academic training. However, students on an F-1 visa, or students on a J-1 visa who are not subject to a two-year home residency requirement, may continue to be employed, if they receive approval for a change in visa category-usually to H-1B. Students must have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in order to qualify for H-1B status.

Individuals may work in the United States for a maximum of six years under an H-1B visa. This visa is valid only for employment with the company that petitioned for them. They must re-apply to the CIS if they wish to change employers. As soon as the initial job offer is made, they should petition for an H-1B visa if employment is likely to extend beyond the practical training period.

**What about taxes?**
Unless exempted by a tax treaty, F-1 and J-1 students earning income under practical training are subject to applicable, federal, state, and local income taxes. Information on tax treaties may be found in *Internal Revenue Services Publication 519, U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens, and 901, U.S. Tax Treaties*.

Generally, F-1 and J-1 students are exempted from social security and Medicare tax requirements. However, if F-1 and J-1 students are considered "resident aliens" for income tax purpose, social security and Medicare taxes should be withheld. Chapter 1 of *Internal Revenue

More information on social security and Medicare taxes can be found in Chapter 8 of Internal Revenue Services Publication 519, U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens and in Section 940 of Social Security Administration Publication No. 65-008, Social Security Handbook.

For your reference
The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 8 and Title 22 citation numbers for regulations governing practical training are as follows:
F-1 students: 8CFR 214.2 (f) (9) & (10)
J-1 students: 22CFR 62.23 (f)

CFR Title 8 citations governing IRCA requirements are:
F-1 students: 8CFR 274a.12(b)(6)(iii) and 8CFR 274a.12(c)(3)(i)
J-1 students: 8CFR 274a.12(b)(11)

Copies of Code of Federal Regulations are available from the Superintendent of Documents in Washington D.C. or from the web site:
http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html

Frequently Asked Questions

Isn't it illegal to hire international students because they do not have a green card?
No. Federal regulations permit the employment of international students on F-1 and J-1 visas within certain limits. These visas allow students to work in jobs related to their major field of study. F-1 students can work on "practical training." J-1 students may work on "academic training."

Even if it's legal to hire international students, won't it cost a lot of money and involve a lot of paperwork?
No. The only cost to the employer hiring international students is the time and effort to interview and select the best candidate for the job. The international student office handles the paperwork involved in securing the work authorization for F-1 and J-1 students. In fact, a company may save money by hiring international students because the majority of them are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare tax requirements.

How long can international students work in the United States with their student visa?
F-1 students are eligible for curricular practical training before completing their studies, as well as an additional 12 months of optional practical training, either before or following graduation, or a combination of the two. However, if they work full-time for one year or more of curricular practical training, they are not eligible for Optional Practical Training. Students with a J-1 visa are usually eligible to work up to 18 months following graduation. They may also be eligible to work part-time during their program of study. The Responsible Officer (RO) or Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) will evaluate each student's situation to determine the length of time for which they are eligible to work.

Don't international students need work authorization before I can hire them?
No. International students must have the work authorization before they begin actual employment, but not before they are offered employment. In fact, J-1 students must have a
written job offer in order to apply for the work authorization. Many F-1 students will be in the process of obtaining work authorization while they are interviewing for employment. Students can give employers a reasonable estimate of when they expect to receive work authorization.

**What does the work authorization look like?**
For Optional Practical Training, F-1 students receive from CIS an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), a small photo identity card that indicates the dates for which they are permitted to work. For Curricular Practical Training, F-1 students receive authorization from the school (NOT from CIS) on the back of the student's I-20. "No Service endorsement is necessary" - per 8CFR 274a.12(b)(6)(iii). J-1 students receive work authorization in the form of a letter issued by the RO or ARO at their institution.

**What if I want to continue to employ international students after their work authorization expires?**
With a bit of planning ahead, an employer can hire international students to continue to work for them in the H-1B visa category for a total of six years (authorization is granted in two three-year periods). The H-1B is a temporary working visa for workers in a "specialty occupation." The application procedure to the CIS is straightforward. The job must meet two basic requirements: 1) The salary must meet the prevailing wage as defined by the Department of Labor 2) A bachelor's degree is a minimum normal requirement for the position.

**Doesn't an employer have to prove that international students are not taking jobs from a qualified American?**
No. American employers are not required to document that a citizen of another country did not take a job from a qualified American if that person is working under an F-1, J-1 or H-1B visa. Employers must document that they did not turn down a qualified American applicant for the position only when they wish to hire foreign citizens on a permanent basis and sponsor them for a permanent resident status ("green card").

**Can I hire international students as volunteer interns?**
Normally, if the internship involves no form of compensation and is truly voluntary, the students may volunteer without having to do any paperwork with the CIS. If, however, the internship provides a stipend or any compensation, students must obtain permission for practical training or academic training prior to starting their internship. Students should check with their employers to ensure that the company is allowed by law to offer unpaid internships.

---

This document was originally published in 2000 with a grant from NAFSA: Association of International Educators Region XII. 2004 revision by Laurie Cox, University of Southern California, and Co-Chair of SCICC (Southern California International Careers Consortium); co-editors: Lay Tuan Tan, California State University Fullerton, and SCICC Board member and Phil Hofer, University of La Verne.