



International Students Guide - Successfully Gaining Employment

1. STRATEGIES FOR SEEKING EMPLOYMENTS IN THE U.S.

Start early. Because of the legal issues that may be involved with hiring international students, a job search in the United States could take as long as a year. Conduct a self-assessment – an honest, thorough evaluation of your values, your interests, your personal and financial needs, and your short- and long-term goals. To be able to clearly articulate your career goals to a potential employer ask yourself the following questions:

- What did I hope to gain from study in the U.S.?
- How have my goals changed?
- What are my short- and long-term goals?
- Am I restricted to specific geographic locations for any reason?
- Are finances a consideration?
- How do my personal needs (e.g., family considerations) fit my goals?
- What areas can I improve?
- What sets me apart from my peers?

Perfect your English skills. If you have concerns about your ability to communicate effectively in English (both oral and written), practice. Look for organizations and resources at the University where you can perfect your speaking and writing skills. Consider ways to incorporate English into your everyday life, such as incorporating discussions, participating in a study group, or volunteering in the community.

Consider employers with an international focus or presence. Your international experience, language, and cultural fluency make you a great candidate for positions in these organizations. Explore American companies that have an international presence/office in other countries, the World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, World Bank, or colleges and universities.

Pursue industries in high demand. For example, many American companies are seeking experts in systems analysis/programming, computer science, engineering, accounting/finance, business, and hospitality.

Share the benefits of hiring an international student. Communicate that you are the right fit for the organization by promoting that you know more than one language, you have an ability to adapt to new cultures and new environments, and how you have learned to be flexible and handle change effectively by assimilating to a different culture.

Network. Make connections with people, which is also known as “networking.” In the United States, networking is the single most effective method of advancing your career. Here are tips on how to build your network:

- Develop a contact list of people who can provide information, advice, and more contacts, such as: family, friends, faculty, staff, peers and alumni
- Start building relationships with upperclassmen
- Attend networking events where alumni will be in attendance
- Connect with people who have already successfully found employment in the U.S. as they can provide insight about the process and can help you to identify companies that are willing to hire international students
- Join a professional association related to your field of interest
- Be as creative as possible in developing your network
- Remember that in the United States a network is actively developed and does not imply long-standing, life-long relationships based on family ties or status in the community

2. COMMON CULTURAL BARRIERS

Differences are culturally based. So 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. Be aware of the setting in which you are interviewing. Below is a list of common cultural barriers that you may experience when conducting your job search. These factors are not inherent to one particular society, but represent a cross-section of countries and continents.

Value	Other culture's view	American view
Value self-promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless presented as part of a group activity, citing achieved goals, accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving and too individualistic • Asking employers directly about status of application may be viewed as rude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and direct responses to questions • Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture, and other nonverbal behavior • Discussion of salary and benefits only when initiated by interviewer or at time of job offer • Candidate asks questions about the job at the end of the interview
Being direct when communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (employer/interviewer) is disrespectful • Anticipate indirect questions regarding competency and experience • Asking open-ended questions about the job may be seen as rude and inappropriately direct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye contact is expected and shows confidence • Assertiveness, openly discussing personal strengths and job fit • Anticipate direct questions regarding competency and experience • Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries, thank you notes, etc.)
Self-disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal questions about likes and dislikes are an invasion of privacy and are shared only with close friends and family • Personal information is irrelevant to a candidate's qualifications • Revealing outside interests is a threat to time, energy, and other resources invested by a candidate in the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion about personal experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses are common • Answers to questions related to personality (e.g., leadership style and problem solving abilities) are appropriate
Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours later than the agreed meeting time is acceptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive 5 - 15 minutes before appointment • Tardiness shows lack of time management skills to be successful on the job
Letters of application and résumés	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Résumés are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One page, error-free, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experience, skills, academic credentials and accomplishments • Personalized to reflect strengths and capabilities
Research the organization prior to the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research indicated excessive and undesirable initiative or independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application and during the interview

Source: "International Students and the Job Search" Goodman, A.P., Hartt, M.K., and Terrell, K.P. Journal of Career Planning & Employment, Summer 1988

3. RÉSUMÉS AND COVER LETTERS

In the United States, a well-prepared résumé and cover letter are essential to getting a job interview. Be sure they follow the basic, generally accepted American standards.

Your résumé should:

- Be honest, positive and easy to read
- Concise (typically one page)
- Include jobs, educational skills, and accomplishments that are specific and relevant to the job which you are applying
- Highlight education at college and graduate/professional levels
- Exhibit and highlight your potential, skills, knowledge and experience
- Present to the employer that you are the best person for the job
- Do not include personal information – photo, age, health, marital status, race, or religion
- Be free of spelling and grammatical errors
- Be reviewed by several people, including a member of Career Services

Cover letters

The goal of the cover letter is to make a strong “first impression” on paper that grabs the reader’s attention and makes them want to read your résumé, and contact you for an interview. It is very common in the U.S. to include a cover letter with your résumé. If you are asked to submit a cover letter, you are required to do so. Even if not required, it is still recommended to include a cover letter as part of the application materials. Here are some basic tips for writing a cover letter:

- Be specific. Address your cover letter to a specific person or “Human Resources Manager,” rather than “To Whom It May Concern”
- Beware of creating a “one size fits all” cover letter. Include customized information about each company and position to which you are applying
- Show your personality. This is an opportunity to show your character, sell your expertise and discuss your interest and passion for the position for which you are applying

Visit the Career Resource Guide on the Career Services website at CareerServices.IllinoisState.edu for sample résumés and cover letters, and other tips and information.

4. INTERVIEWS

Interviews are your greatest opportunity to convince an employer that you are the right person for the job. However, because of cultural differences some international students may find the American-style of job interviews uncomfortable. Here are some tips on how to conduct a quality interview:

- Research the company. Go online to get familiar with the company’s industry, news, and annual reports, etc.
- Promote yourself. The interviewer is assessing you according to values such as self-confidence, initiative, directness, and individualism. It is good to market yourself to an employer. In the United States it is not viewed as arrogant or bragging, but rather expected and desired.
- Learn what is appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication before the interview. Start and finish interviews with a firm handshake, eye contact, and a smile.
- Be on time.
- It is important that you understand exactly what you are communicating.
- Be confident. Talk candidly about your career goals, strengths, weaknesses and how you are working to improve upon those weaknesses.
- Conduct a practice interview. Use InterviewStream, an online video tool available on the Career Services website that allows you to practice your interview while recording it. Afterwards, make an appointment with your career advisor to review the recording and get input on how you can improve.
- Prepare questions in advance to ask the employer regarding the position or the organization. Do not begin the interview with an inquiry regarding H-1B sponsorship.
- Wear professional business attire such as a business suit.

Type of interviews

There are several types of interviews that are commonly used by American employers:

Unstructured interview

The first question for the person conducting the interview is, "Tell me about yourself."

The rest of the questions after that are developed from your answer to this first question. This interview is highly unstructured.

To prepare for this interview, think about three or four things you would want the interviewer to know if this was the only question during the interview. Be prepared to discuss your work history, career goals, and other relevant information.

Highly-structured interview

In this type of interview, the person conducting the interview will often have a fixed list of questions that are asked of all candidates. The interviewer may frequently refer to a question sheet to identify what to ask. During this interview, the interviewer is unlikely to probe your answers or ask related questions.

To prepare for this interview, identify what you want the interviewer to know about you and plan to emphasize those points during the interview. Once in the interview, listen to each question carefully to understand what explicit and implicit question is being asked.

Case interview

In this type of interview, the person conducting the interview introduces questions that pose some stress to observe how you respond. For example, the interviewer may ask your opinion about a controversial subject and then disagree with you.

To prepare for this interview, anticipate when the interviewer will use case interview questions. Often, if you are interviewing for a position that is stressful or demands that you regularly think on your feet, the interviewer may use the interview to test how you will respond. Stay calm, do not take it personally, and remember that how you answer is more important than what you answer.

Group interview

Many organizations will use group or panel interviews as part of the interview process, to save time on multiple interviews.

To prepare for this interview, ask ahead of time who will be conducting the interview. Be sure to speak to all the people at the interview, not just to the person who asks a question.

Telephone interview

Some companies conduct interviews by telephone to screen candidates. It is often used to either reduce a large pool of highly qualified candidates, or to save on time and costs when a candidate is a far distance away from the interview site.

To prepare for this interview, agree to an interview time when you will be fresh and undistracted. Be aware of the time zone changes. (Ask which time zone applies.) Try to imagine the person on the other end of the phone to make the conversation feel more personal, and convey warmth and congeniality in your voice.

Skype interview

Skype interviews are common when employers interview candidates from a distance. With budget constraints, as well as global hiring, video interviews expedite the hiring process. Many companies also use video interviews to screen or conduct first-round interviews.

To prepare for this interview, ensure that you have the technology needed for the Skype or video interview, check that it is properly installed in advance, take time to practice using it, and become familiar with its features. Be sure to identify the time zone and find a quiet location to conduct the interview where you will not be interrupted. (The Career Service has Skype interview rooms available for students to reserve for interviews or practice.)

Before the interview silence your phone and eliminate background noises and other distractions. Make sure the interview space is clean and tidy and has ample lighting. Check to see what appears behind you, and eliminate any distracting pictures, objects, or clutter. Dress in business professional attire. Be sure to check your appearance. Then take a few deep breaths, remember to smile, relax and be yourself.

Meal interview

Employers may want to see potential candidates in a more social setting to see how one acts; particularly if the job requires participating in meals with clients and/or supervisors. This type of interview is very practical as interviews can last for several hours and may extend through meal times. The employer is serving as a gracious host by offering a meal.

To prepare for this interview, assess your table manners and use of etiquette during a meal. Sit up straight, keep your elbows off the table, maintain good eye contact, and don't forget to say "please" and "thank you."

Do some basic research on the restaurant including the location, menu, and noise level. Take some time to review the menu and pick out a few options you might order. Prepare for the interview by outlining and reviewing key points you want to get across during the interview. Dress for success and wear professional business attire. Remember, the meal is a time to visit and interact. This is always more important than the function of eating.

Interview agenda

The following outlines the agenda for how most interviews will be conducted and tips for what to do.

Icebreaker Most people who conduct interviews will begin the interview with a few minutes of small talk to help you to relax and to get a sense of your personality. This is an important part of the interview. The interviewers are getting a first impression of you. So this is a chance for you to develop rapport with them. The interview begins the moment you introduce yourself and shake hands.

Personal qualifications and interest in the position

The person conducting the interview will ask specific questions, such as when, where, and why. At this point, you have the opportunity to control the course of the interview with your answers. Be conversational, but concise. Answer behavior-based questions with the STAR approach (Situation, Task to be accomplished, Actions taken, and Results that were achieved.) Provide examples from internships, class and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience. Share anything that can positively showcase examples of your past experiences or skills.

Organization and position Once the person conducting the interview has a good sense of your skills and interests, the interviewer will share about the company and the specific position for which you are interviewing. Listen carefully, and try to comment or ask questions to show your interest in the company and position.

Candidate questions This is the time to ask questions about the company and position that haven't been answered.

Close and follow-up At the end of the interview, ask the person or people conducting the interview if you can provide any additional information. Ask about the next step in the interview process and when you can expect to hear from the company. Request business cards from each person conducting the interview.

After the interview

It is very important to send an email within 24 hours after the interview to thank the people who conducted the interview with you. Reiterate your interest in the position and emphasize the skills and abilities you bring to the organization and the position. 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 no longer interested in the position.

After you send the thank you email, the communication is now in the hands of the employer. Be patient and begin to plan for the next opportunity. Do not badger or contact the employer multiple times about the status of the position.

5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Should I list my visa status on my résumé?

A. Your visa status does not have to be included in your résumé. Your 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 an interview.

Q. How do I bring up sponsorship?

A. Your status doesn't have to be the first thing you mention to an employer. Allow the employer to get to know you first. Sell your skills and abilities. By doing this, the employer gets to know you and your skill set. Then, if you are seen as a strong candidate, the employer might offer to sponsor you.

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

A. Questions an employer is legally not allowed to ask include: your visa type, nationality, place of birth, which country you are a citizen, your religion, your native language or what language do you most often speak. An employer is legally allowed to ask: if you are authorized to work in the United States; will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa; which languages you read, speak, or write (if foreign language skills are job-related.)

Q. What steps can I take to enhance my chances of being hired?

A. To enhance your chances of being hired:

- Have your resume and cover letter reviewed by Career Services, an employer, or alumni.
- Become thoroughly familiar with immigration regulations and benefits attached to your visa status. Visit the International Studies Office for more information.
- Research the employers and the positions in which you are interested.
- Practice your interview skills, including communicating your skills, interests, and career goals. In the interview, articulate how your international experiences make you unique.
- If needed, improve your English skills by speaking up in class, making presentations and expanding your circle of native English-speaking friends.

Q. What if a company requests my national or social security number by email?

A. Reputable employers will not ask you for your social security or identification information in an email. You should never provide social security information or identification numbers in an email.

Q. Can an employer require me to verify my employment eligibility?

A. An employer cannot require you to verify your employment eligibility or produce specific documents, such as Permanent Resident (“green”) cards or Employment Authorization Documents. It is your choice as to which of the permitted documents to provide for employment eligibility verification. In addition, employment eligibility verification should be conducted only after an offer to hire has been made. Applicants may be informed of these requirements in the pre-employment setting by adding the following statement on the employment application, “In compliance with federal law, all persons hired will be required to verify identity and eligibility to work in the United States and to complete the required employment eligibility verification document form upon hire.”

Q. Can an employer ask me if I am a U.S. citizen before making a job offer?

A. Employers should not ask whether or not you are a United States citizen before making an offer of employment. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) makes it illegal for employers to discriminate with respect to hiring, firing, or recruitment or referral for a fee, based on an individual’s citizenship or immigration status. For example, the law prohibits employers from hiring only U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents unless required to do so by law, regulation or government contract; it also prohibits employers from preferring to hire temporary visa holders or undocumented workers over qualified U.S. citizens or other protected individuals, such as refugees or individuals granted asylum.

Q. What is the definition of a “non-eligible” U.S. citizen?

A. One is an eligible noncitizen if: a permanent U.S. resident with a Permanent Resident Card (I-551), a conditional permanent resident (I-551C), the holder of an Arrival-Departure Record (I-94) from the Department of Homeland Security showing any one of the following designations: refugee, asylum granted, parolee (I-94 confirms paroled for a minimum of one year and status has not expired), Cuban-Haitian Entrant. You are not an eligible noncitizen if you are in the U.S. on a: F1 or F2 student visa, J1 or J2 exchange visitor visa, G series visa (pertaining to international organizations. (eoc.gov/laws/practices/inquiries_citizenship.cfm))

Q. Can I be hired to do volunteer work?

A. Normally, if the volunteer service doesn’t involve any form of compensation, you may participate without having to complete any additional paperwork.

Q. Can I ask about salary or benefits?

A. Do not bring up company benefits or make salary negotiations until an offer has been extended to you.

Sources:

Arizona State University Engineering (Engineering.asu.edu)

Bucknell University

DiversityInc

InternationalStudent.com/JobSearch/

Rice University

University of California - Berkeley

University of Illinois

University of Virginia

6. RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The following are resources available to assist international students in their careers or career readiness.

Resources

- American Chamber of Commerce Abroad
- www.Uschamber.com/international-affairs-division
- Careeronestop Business Center - www.Careeronestop.org/BusinessCenter
- EVerify
- www.E-verify.gov/about-e-verify/e-verify-data/how-to-find-participating-employers
- Foreign MBA - www.Foreignmba.com
- H1 Base Learning Center - www.H1base.com/content/visas
- H1-B willful violator list - www.Dol.gov/whd/immigration/H1BWillfulViolator.htm
- H1-B debarred/disqualified list - www.Dol.gov/whd/immigration/H1BDebarment.htm
- International Student Careers - www.InternationalStudentCareers.com/h1b-jobs-list/
- Live & Work in America - www.Visacoach.org/
- OPT nation - www.Optnation.com/
- Transparent career - www.Transparentcareer.com/
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services - www.Uscis.gov
- U.S. Department of Labor - www.Foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/h-1b.cfm

Internship and Job Search Websites

- DiversityInc - www.Diversityinc.com
- Diversity Employers - www.Diversityemployers.com
- Global Jobs - www.Globaljobs.org
- My Visa Jobs - www.MyVisaJobs.com
- Personnel agencies – Randstad
- University of Illinois Career Center - www.Intlconnect.illinois.edu/companies
- Uniworld Online - www.Uniworldonline.com

Illinois State University Resources

- Career Services - www.CareerServices.IllinoisState.edu
- Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning
- www.CommunityEngagement.IllinoisState.edu
- Dean of Students Office - Involvement and Leadership
- www.DeanofStudents.IllinoisState.edu
- GoinGlobal - www.IllinoisState.edu/HireARedbird
- International Student Career Series
- www.CareerService.IllinoisState.edu/InternationalStudentSeries
- INTO - www.Into.IllinoisState.edu
- RedbirdLife, database of Registered Student Organizations
- www.RedbirdLife.IllinoisState.edu
- University College: Writing Center, Success Coaching, Julia N. Visor Academic Center
- www.UniversityCollege.IllinoisState.edu



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