



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
CAREER GUIDE

International Student Services



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International Student Services

CAREER GUIDE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

This guide is designed to assist international students with the job search process, given the unique challenge presented by your immigration status. This guide is only meant to be a brief overview to get you started on the job search process. In addition, you should also visit the Hubbard Center and/or the International Student Services Office.

TIMELINE AND ACTION PLAN

Self-exploration → Career exploration → Professional Preparation → Application

- 1. First-year:** Explore your different areas of interest to find out about your personality, interests, skills and values, start forming your career and academic decisions, by involving with various extracurricular/co-curricular activities, talking with upperclassmen and professors, and trying your best on academics.
For the summer, look out for volunteer programs, internships, study abroad, summer camps, or anything that may or may not relate to your interest. Even if they are unpaid positions, give them a try! If you do a great job in the position, they/other employers will more likely to offer you new, paid positions. In order to do a *paid* work, you *must* declare your major.
- 2. Sophomore:** Research the internet for work, connect majors to career options and consider graduate school to facilitate career decision-making. You don't need to have a specific answer at this stage, but do narrow down to a few options. Talk to alumni, faculty, and upperclassmen to get advice to plan the next couple of years.
For the summer, it's recommended that you have more specific plans that are relevant to your area of interest. This is also a good time to plan and discuss with family plans to stay or leave the US after graduation.
- 3. Junior:** Learn professional skills such as resume writing, interviewing and networking to be successful in your job/internship search. Shortlist one or two career paths that you want to pursue. Be aware that some tracks require very early preparation. For the summer, it's highly recommended that you have very specific and relevant internships, research projects, or any other plan pertaining to your interest
- 4. Senior:** Put what you've learned into action! The actual jobs and grad school application process begins as early as August, and will continue throughout the Fall semester. Most US companies finish their recruiting season by December - January, although other companies may have different schedules that go into the Spring.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

1. U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services Regulations (USCIS)

Current U.S immigration laws permit international students to be employed in the U.S during and after a course of study. It is crucial that you understand these regulations, eligibilities, timelines, etc. surrounding the visa status you hold and the visa status you are trying to obtain.

- Visa requirement for internship/work off campus: generally, to conduct any sort of internship or work off campus, you must have an internship as part of your curriculum and your immigration documents (I-20) must be updated to show Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT). Have a good understanding of CPT and OPT. If you are not sure what CPT and/or OPT entail, please meet with International student Services staff to develop a better understanding of CPT and/or OPT.
- Non-immigrant Temporary Work Visa: some F-1 and very occasionally 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 status, you must first have a job offer with an employer who is willing to file an H-1B petition on your behalf with USCIS. The number of available slots for new H-1B holders (the “H-1B cap”) is very limited every year. How quickly is this cap met depends on how well the economy is doing. After your petition is filed, it would be then randomly selected for adjudication through a lottery process. It is not guaranteed that you will be granted a H-1B visa status even when you have a job offer.

Visit the International Student Services Office and attend the information sessions held throughout the year for more information on this topic.

2. Communication

Employers are concerned about foreign nationals’ ability to communicate effectively in verbal and written English with their clients and internal personnel. International students can improve their English writing, reading and verbal skills by spending more time with domestic students, participating in customary US activities and traditions, conducting practice interviews, joining student clubs on campus (not just clubs related to student’s ethnicity and background), participating in campus events and going to

networking events. Lastly, international students should get into the habit of getting your correspondence critiqued before sending it out.

3. Cost

Cost to hire international candidates can get up to \$6000 per candidate to petition for an H-1B visa. The company also invests in training the employee and ingraining them in the company culture only to lose them if the employee's petition is not approved. This costs considerably more than \$6000.

\$6000 per candidate is approximately the same amount as most companies' signing bonus and is often budgeted into the Human Resources hiring plan and budget for the year. Smaller companies and non-profits pay much less. Don't give in and offer to pay, it is illegal for candidates to pay government fees.

4. Employment Restrictions

As an international candidate, you cannot work for the U.S. federal government. Most U.S. state and local government agencies or private companies contracted by the government are included in this characterization. But, there are a lot of organizations that have an international focus such as the World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, World Bank and many more. You may also have more success with U.S. companies that have an international presence. Your international experiences, language and cultural experiences make you a very attractive candidate.

5. Hiring Complexities

Many employers are unfamiliar with the process of hiring international students and therefore believe that the hiring of international employees is complicated and complex. International students can help their potential employers by understanding the immigration regulations that apply to them and communicating with their potential employers how the hiring process works for international employees. Please see the first challenge and keep in mind that it is important for you to understand US immigration as it applies to you and your job search.

6. Lack of Commitment to the Job

Employers feel that international students will not commit long term to their company and may leave to return to their home country after a few years. Therefore, the companies are reluctant to invest time and resources into training foreign nationals.

Additionally, some companies also fear that international employees leave after their H-1B is granted to work for another company. These employers, for obvious reasons, develop a negative perception about hiring international students.

International students can show commitment by doing their research on the company and by explaining why they want to work for that company. You should do some research on the city the company is located and show interest in living in the city and being part of the community. You should never give an impression to an employer that you want the job just for the H-1B. You should always work hard on aligning your personal and career goals with the company and the job and not just focus on getting the H-1B visa.

7. American Economic Conditions

The US economy has been recovering but there is still more recovery that needs to happen. Some US employers might be hesitant to hire foreign workers over US citizens in these challenging economic conditions. The way you can overcome this challenge is by being the candidate who is ready to fit in the company and help the company with its needs. Also, have your EAD card ready so you are available to start working right when you get an offer.

8. Location Barrier

DePauw's specific location and class size poses a challenge to your job seeking process, as it generally costs an employer more to visit and recruit at the school. However, this challenge can be overcome if you are proactive in the networking and job seeking process. Successful alumni in the past started reaching out to alumni in bigger cities, where there are more job opportunities, as early as in their second year. They are generally very flexible in terms of geographical location. Besides, be sure to look out for national career fairs and events to attend.

9. Career Fairs

Career fairs can be tough for international students to navigate especially if the employers at the fair are not hiring international students. International students should still explore the fair and talk to the employers. In addition, the students should work with the Hubbard center staff to learn how to network and use informational interviewing skills at career fairs.

COMMON CULTURAL BARRIERS IN THE U.S. JOB SEARCH

International students face a lot of challenges conducting a job search in the U.S. because they are competing in an environment very different from the one in which they were raised. Not only verbal and written skills present challenges when job searching, but business cultures, organizational structures, customs and expectations vary greatly in different countries. This may result in some difficulties international students face while looking for jobs in the U.S. Below you will find a table that details a contrast between the expectations in the U.S. with values in a different country or culture.

	Expectations in the US	Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture
Self-Promotion	<p>Assertiveness, openly discussing accomplishments</p> <p>Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries, thank you notes, etc.)</p>	<p>Unless presented as part of a group activity, citing achieved goals, accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving, and too individualistic</p> <p>Asking employers directly about the status of the application may be viewed as rude.</p>
Directness in Communication	<p>Open and direct responses to questions</p> <p>Eye contact with the interviewer, relaxed posture</p> <p>Discussion of salary and benefits only when initiated by the interviewer or at time of the job offer</p> <p>Candidates ask questions at the end of the job interview</p>	<p>Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g., employer/interviewer) is considered disrespectful</p> <p>Appearance of criticism must be avoided to save face</p> <p>Asking open-ended questions about the job may be seen as rude and inappropriately direct</p>

<p>Career Self-Awareness</p>	<p>Demonstration of knowledge of self, career goals and how they relate to the job</p> <p>Discussion of long-range career plans</p> <p>Ability to be self-directed in one's career development</p>	<p>Questions about the role in the company indicates potential disloyalty</p> <p>Jobs are assigned by the government or family or determined by the school or test score</p> <p>Individuals must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available without regard to their own career goal</p>
<p>Informality in the Interview Process</p>	<p>Friendly interview environment that encourages openness, some joking and exchange of information</p>	<p>Sitting with a person of higher status requires deference. The job applicant is supposed to be very polite and not ask questions. Handshaking, touching, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate</p>
<p>Punctuality</p>	<p>Arrive 5 to 10 minutes before the scheduled appointment</p>	<p>Personal relationships are more important time. Anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours lateness from agreed meeting time may not be inappropriate</p>
<p>Effective Letters of Application and Resumes</p>	<p>Error-free, generally one page, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experience, skills, accomplishments and academic credentials</p> <p>Personalize to reflect each individual's strengths and capabilities</p>	<p>Resumes are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion</p> <p>Often contain personal information about family, marital status, a photo, parent's occupation.</p>

<p>Individual Equality</p>	<p>Race, sex and age are legally not supposed to affect the interview process</p> <p>Politeness and respect are shown to all employees a candidate meets, whether a receptionist, secretary or CEO</p>	<p>Males and older persons may expect to assume dominance in interactions with females and younger people</p> <p>Level of organizational hierarchy may determine the amount of respect an individual is given</p> <p>Attitudes on gender, race and other individual traits and how they impact hiring decisions vary from culture to culture</p>
<p>Self-Disclosure</p>	<p>Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses</p> <p>Answers to questions related to personality (leadership style, skills, problem-solving abilities)</p>	<p>Personal questions about likes, dislikes etc. may be considered as invasion of privacy and discussed only with close friends and family members</p>
<p>Knowledge of Organization Prior to the Interview</p>	<p>Obtain as much information as possible about the company before the interview. Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application or cover letter and during the interview</p>	<p>Research about the organization may indicate excessive and undesirable initiative or independence</p>

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

The above factors are not indigenous to one particular society but represent a cross-section of countries and continents.

ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES/QUESTIONS

What Employers can and cannot ask prior to a job offer:

	An employer can ask:	An employer cannot ask:
National Origin	<p>What languages can you speak, read, or write? (if foreign language ability is relevant to the job)</p>	<p>What is your nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, or place of birth? (or those of your parents or spouse)</p> <p>What is your native language or the language you most often speak?</p> <p>How did you acquire your foreign language ability?</p>
Citizenship	<p>Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?</p> <p>Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa status?</p>	<p>Of which country are you a citizen?</p> <p>Are you a naturalized or native-born citizen?</p> <p>Can you produce your naturalization papers?</p> <p>When did you acquire your citizenship?</p> <p>What is your visa type?</p> <p>Whether your parents or spouse are naturalized or native-born U.S. citizens, or the date when your parents or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship</p>
Name	<p>Whether you have used another name</p> <p>Any additional information regarding an assumed</p>	<p>Your maiden name (this helps the employer know if you are married)</p>

	name, changed name, or nickname necessary to enable a check on your work and educational record	
Age	Are you 18 years or older? If not, what is your age?	(before hiring): -age* -birth date (determines age)
Color and Race	Nothing	Race or Color Questions regarding the color of your skin, eyes, or hair
Sex, marital status	Name and address of parent or guardian, if you are a minor Names of relatives already employed by the employer	Questions that would indicate your sex Questions that would indicate your marital status Number and /or ages of children or dependents Questions regarding pregnancy, childbearing, or birth control Name or address of relatives, spouse, or children, if you are not a minor
Religion	Nothing	Questions related to your religion or faith
Physical Description and Abilities	Height and weight, but only commensurate with specific job requirements	A photograph, either required or optional, at any time before any offer is made

Disability	Whether you can perform the essential functions of the job, either with or without accommodation	If you have a disability, if you have been treated for any specific diseases, whether you have, or ever had a drug or alcohol problem
Arrest Record	If you have been convicted of a crime	Whether you have ever been arrested
Membership in Organizations	Membership in organization(s) that you may consider relevant to your ability to perform your job	List all organization(s), societies, and club(s) to which you belong (determines religious groups, or political beliefs, or national origins.
Military Service	Questions regarding relevant skills acquired during military service	Questions regarding service in foreign military to determine national origin
Miscellaneous	Questions regarding long term plans Describe yourself Elevator Speech Sharing strengths and weaknesses	Questions about financial credit, union membership, financial status, naturalization papers, type of visa you have, citizenship status of your parents or spouse

*Unless the position requires serving alcohol, then they may ask if you are 21

Adapted from the Job Search Guide for International Students in the University at Buffalo's School of Management.

HOW TO HANDLE INAPPROPRIATE/ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

There might be some instances where you are asked inappropriate/illegal questions. It is important to know when you are being asked these questions. The table above will help you determine when inappropriate/illegal questions are being asked. Here are some ways you can handle these questions:

- Deflect the question. Simply state why you are a good candidate for the job and a good fit for the company/organization.
- You can give an honest, assertive, but not contentious reply. For example, if the interviewer asks you if your spouse would mind if you travelled for work. You can just say that you and your spouse are supportive of each other's career ambitions, or you can say that "if you are asking me if I have the flexibility to travel as the job requires, yes, I can do that."
- Consider carefully whether or not you want to work for such an organization. The interview is usually a preview of what a company will be like.

OTHER INTERVIEW/JOB SEARCH RELATED QUESTIONS

1. How do I answer questions about my work authorization?

Start by explaining that you have “the legal right to work in the US for twelve months under Optional Practical Training (OPT)” which doesn’t require any work on the employer’s end. Also, share with the employer that under OPT it gives them a chance to see how well you do your work and if you are a good fit for the company. After a year under OPT, if they are not satisfied they don’t have to pursue you for further employment. There are few employees an employer would have this kind of flexibility with.

After sharing information about OPT, you can share that “my work authorization can be renewed for another three to six years with an H-1B work visa.” Avoid saying the word “sponsor” when talking about the H-1B application process, instead use the phrase “petition”. Some students also qualify for STEM OPT extension which like OPT is authorized for international students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to extend their OPT by another 17 months.

2. When in the job search process do I share that I am an international student?

Your goal should be to get past the initial screening measures to get an interview. There are some employers who adhere to strict policies against hiring foreign nationals; other companies may prefer hiring only US citizens. This is why you should share you are an international only when you land an interview with the company/organization as sharing it before could screen your file/application and remove you from the process. You may also choose to not share till the employer asks or you are receiving a job offer.

3. If a company says they don’t hire international students, should I even apply?

There is always a first time and now could be that time. You can be the first international employee the company hires. It is your responsibility to educate them about the process of hiring international students and the benefits of hiring a diverse workforce. Be mindful that they still may not hire you and this can become frustrating, stay patient and keep trying. All it takes is one good job offer not one hundred. However, it is recommended that you first target organizations with a history of hiring employees with a work visa. Network, network, network! Start early in your college career. Be sure that you do

not mislead the employer about your status as an international student. If some companies feel misled they might eliminate you from the candidate pool or terminate your employment.

4. What can I do to make myself a more attractive candidate?

- Work with Hubbard center on interviewing skills, resume and cover letter review, networking, and other things.
- Become thoroughly familiar with the immigration regulations and benefits of your visa status. ISS staff can help you with this.
- Research the employers and positions you are interested in and be prepared to ask meaningful questions in interviews.
- Participate in mock interviews. The Hubbard Center can help you with mock interviews.
- Improve your English skills by speaking up in class, presenting in front of peers, and expanding your friendships to native English speaking friends
- Become confident in your English speaking skills
- Network, network, network: get to know people of influence in the companies/professional area you would like to work
- Join student organizations and clubs outside of your interests and hobbies
- Join professional organizations related to your field of studies
- Connect with international alumni. You are not limited to the US as you pursue opportunities after DePauw.

