

Job Search Guide for the International Student

University of Tennessee Career Services

Introduction

For many international students in the United States, the ultimate goal is to stay in the United States after they graduate and begin a career here. However, international students have very different and unique challenges when it comes to the job search process. International students encounter many practices to which they are not accustomed and obstacles that U.S. citizens do not experience. This guide will provide information and advice to the international student regarding the job search process.

In this Guide:

- **A summary of some cultural differences between a job search in the United States and a job search in their home country**
- **Important United States visa information**
- **A review of job search strategies**
- **Answers to common questions the international student may have**
- **Suggestions for further reading**

Common Cultural Differences in the Job Search

(These differences represent differences between cultures of the United States and foreign culture, not a specific culture.)

– Resume/Application

Abroad: Detailed chronology of experience, not a method of self promotion.

In U.S.: Concise, one page, resume to reflect the individual's accomplishments, credentials, strengths and abilities.

– Punctuality

Abroad: It may be okay to be late.

In U.S.: Be on time. Arrive at least ten minutes early.

– Talking during interview

Abroad: Employer talks more during interview.

In U.S.: Candidate does most of the talking.

– Eye Contact

Abroad: Eye contact may be disrespectful.

In U.S.: Eye contact shows confidence and is necessary.

– “Small Talk”

Abroad: Often very extensive to showcase personality and character.
In U.S.: Brief at beginning of interview, followed by direct, formal interview questions.

– **Self Promotion**

Abroad: Citing accomplishments may be seen as arrogant or individualistic.
In U.S.: Assertive, open discussion of accomplishments is expected and important.

– **Asking questions to the interviewer**

Abroad: May be rude, intrusive, or aggressive.
In U.S.: Expected, shows enthusiasm and interest.

– **Displaying knowledge of the company**

Abroad: May show too much initiative; questioning may show disloyalty.
In U.S.: Demonstrating knowledge of the organization is expected and shows initiative.

– **Personality related discussion**

Abroad: Discussion of hobbies, likes and dislikes may be seen as distractions from work and job performance. Questions about personality (leadership or problem solving style) may be considered irrelevant.
In U.S.: Discussion of personal hobbies and interests are admissible but not crucial. Discussion of leadership and problem solving traits are necessary.

– **Career Awareness**

Abroad: Questions about one's role in the organization may be considered disloyal. Discussion of long-term career goals may be negative.
In U.S.: Questions about role are welcomed. Discussion of long-term plans shows goal-oriented personality.

– **Responsibility in finding employment**

Abroad: Possibility for job search taking place with little or no proactive action on part of individual.
In U.S.: Job search solely individual responsibility. Use whatever means available.

– **Informality in Interviewing**

Abroad: Politeness and formality are necessary. Handshaking and casual speech may not be permissible.
In U.S.: Politeness is necessary, but some joking and informality is acceptable. Firm handshake necessary. Casual, friendly speech is permitted.

– **Follow-up**

Abroad: Questioning one's application status may be rude.
In U.S.: Telephone inquiry on application's status is acceptable. A written thank-you note is highly recommended and often expected.

Visa Information

- **F-1** – The F-1 classification is for those foreign students who have applied for and have obtained a U.S. student visa. This visa is required for any foreign citizen wishing to attend school within the United States. The student must have a valid educational purpose for coming to the United States and must be a full time student. This student visa can be applied for and issued at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the student’s home country. This visa is valid as long as the student is enrolled in school and holds student status.
- **Optional Practical Training (OPT)** – OPT is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. You may use some or all of the available twelve months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete your studies.
- **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** – CPT is an employment option available to F-1 students where the practical training employment is considered to be an integral part of the curriculum or academic program. This employment may be an internship, cooperative education job, practicum, or any other work experience that is either required for a degree or for which academic credit is awarded.
- **H-1B** – H-1B is an immigration classification that is used to hire a foreign national professional. In order to qualify for the H-1B visa status, the student must first have a job offer with an employer and have an employer willing to file an H-1B petition on their behalf. H-1B visa status is reserved for specialty occupations requiring at least a bachelor’s degree. The H-1B visa holder can stay in increments of up to three years, with a total stay limited to six years.

For more in-depth information on visas be sure to visit the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ website (<http://www.uscis.gov>) or the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s website (<http://www.ice.gov>).

For visa and CPT help visit the **International Student Services** office, located at 1620 Melrose Avenue.
Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~globe/students/index.php>
Email: international@utk.edu
Phone: 865-974-3177

Planning the Successful Job Search

Before you begin there are a few important things to keep in mind about job searching:

- Job searching is hard work - be persistent
- Set goals for yourself; setting small milestones will make it easier to motivate yourself
- Job searching takes time - on average three months for college graduates
- It is very competitive
- You do not get matched to an after-graduation job
- Research to find opportunities - few will “come to you”

Know Yourself

Know what you are looking for in a job. Think about and prioritize your personal and career goals. The following are some questions to consider:

- What am I passionate about?
- If I could do anything, what would it be?
- What career fields and positions interest me?
- Geographically, where would I like to be located?
 - When targeting a specific geographic area, research the area’s economy, the lifestyle of the community, climate, cost of living, and job opportunities in your chosen career field. You can find this type of information through the area’s newspapers, the local Chamber of Commerce or community web pages.
- What skills do I enjoy using?
- What are my workplace values?

Career Services has several tools that can help you with the self-assessment step. These tools can help you understand how your personality, interests, values and skills relate to career options. Call us at 865-974-5435 to learn more.

Gather Information

Researching industries and identifying types of jobs that are of interest to you is an important next step in your search. Here are a few ways to learn about different jobs that hire international students.

Job Search Web Sites

The web is a great place to look for the types of jobs that companies offer. Reading a job description is a great way to explore your interest and see how your skills might line up with the job positions.

Check out Hire-A-Vol, UT’s online job database. It is an excellent resource to search for entry-level jobs and internships, but is also helpful for learning about different types of positions.

The Career Resource Center

In the Career Resource Center, you’ll find many books and other job-searching resources that can help with the information gathering step.

Prepare for the Job Search

Resume & Cover Letters

Your resume is your major job search tool and should always be kept up to date. Consider developing one “default” resume that can then be tailored to each job or industry for which you apply. For additional information on high-impact resumes and appropriate formats, please review Career Services’ *Resume Guide* and *Action Verb List*. **Once you have completed your resume consider bringing it in for a critique at Career Services. We have a variety of options including overnight critiques, 15 minute walk-in critiques, or an appointment with a Career Consultant. Any option may be chosen based upon the level of personal service you require.**

Resume Tip:

Consider giving extra context when describing your experiences in your home country. Qualify your experience with facts and comparisons. For example:

- One of the *top five* universities in India.
- A *\$10 million* marketing firm.
- The *second largest* manufacturer in Europe.

Interview Skills

Prepare for interviews before they start. You need to prepare responses to typical questions, including “Tell me about yourself.” Think about how you are going to talk about your skills and experiences to demonstrate your fit for each position.

For practice, schedule a Video Practice Interview with a Career Services staff member to get individual feedback about your interviewing skills. You can also read more about interviewing and see examples of common interview questions in our *How to Ace Your Job Interview* handout and the many interviewing books we have in the Career Resource Center. Don’t forget to attend one of our interviewing workshops!

Job Search

The most commonly used job search method is to find and apply for positions posted online or in printed advertisements. Unfortunately, this is not the most effective method. According to a study quoted in the Harvard Business Review, nearly 80% of the openings available at any one time are never advertised. This hidden job market consists of jobs resulting from recent retirements, firings, company expansions, and anticipated future openings. These positions are usually filled by people using direct contact methods. Most jobs are found through personal contacts or direct contacts with employers. The following are some helpful job search techniques:

Networking

What is “Networking”?

Networking is the process of gathering helpful information from personal contacts and actual professionals in your field of interest. Networking is a fantastic way to research career paths of interest AND later to create job leads. Did you know that research shows networking as the number one way most people actually find a job or internship?

Why is networking important?

When you apply for a job through the newspaper or even a career Services Hire-A-Vol listing, you are one of many candidates—sometimes you are one of several hundred people applying for a position. When you hear about a job opening through a contact, i.e. a member of your network, you can often cite that person in your cover letter, thus helping your application to stand out from the crowd. In some cases, your contact will even make a call on your behalf and encourage a potential employer to give you more substantial consideration...OR they may even be that potential employer! In either of these scenarios, you will be more distinctive than many other candidates because of your network. Without that contact person, you might have not been considered, as your resume would blend in with several hundred others.

In addition, studies show that only 20% of jobs are actually posted—leaving 80% to be discovered or developed. Therefore, hearing about a position through your network may allow you to get a head start because you may be able to get your application in before the job is even posted. In other cases, a person who is part of your network and is impressed with you may be in a position to create a new job within her or his organization and may tailor it to fit not only the organization's needs, but also your strengths.

When should I begin and when does it end?

You can begin networking as you begin exploring career options. You can meet people while doing informational interviews to research a field that has captured your attention. You will definitely want to network once you have decided on a career path and begin looking for jobs or internships. You must maintain your network, even after you have secured a job. You could lose your job or decide to leave at any point, and you will be in a much better position if you have kept in contact with the members of your network than if you need to track down and re-connect with those who helped you in the past. In addition, you should continue to add new contacts to your network throughout your career.

Is networking more relevant in some fields than others?

Networking is important in all career fields and at all professional levels. Some of your networking experiences may differ, depending on the culture of your profession and/or the culture of the organization in which you work.

Getting Started

Decide the purpose of contacting your network. What is to be gained from meeting with these networking contacts?

- Gathering information about jobs and careers of interest to you
- Advice on how to conduct your job search
- Getting leads on potential employment opportunities

Consider and list your existing and potential network

- Family, friends, and neighbors
- Fellow International students
- Friends and co-workers of your parents or other relatives
- Supervisors and acquaintances from past and present jobs and internships
- School faculty and administrators
- People you have met at on-campus information sessions or job fairs

- Members of professional organizations relevant to your field or area of career interest
- Contacts through public service and volunteer work
- Other professionals including doctors, dentists, accountants, lawyers, bankers, and insurance agents
- Alumni, especially recent graduates
- Social Networking sites; i.e. LinkedIn and Facebook. Be aware of appropriate internet behavior and safety!

Your Personal Commercial

You want to be able to quickly and concisely communicate to the networking contact your purpose (which is to set up an informational interview or to develop specific job leads). You will need a brief self-introduction, known as a “*sound bite*” or “*commercial*,” that tells about your background, experience, and what direction you are headed. Think about your education, interests, skills, values, and the types of industries, locations, and jobs that interest you. It is a good idea to write out this introduction and practice it before calling a contact.

How to use a *sound bite*:

- Introduce yourself by name and university, what your major is, and purpose of networking.
- Example: “Hi, I’m Mary Jones and I’m a psychology major at the University of Tennessee. I’m interested in the field of human resources.”

How to use a *commercial*:

- Example: “I became interested in the human resources field last summer when I interned at XYZ Company and got to know the Human Resource Director there. I found her job very interesting. She worked in all aspects of employee relations and hiring. When I returned to school this fall, I decided to add a business class and also joined the Human Resource Management Association. I hope to obtain an internship in human resources next summer.”

On Campus Recruiting

On-Campus Recruiting is our way of bringing employers and students together to fulfill a mutual employment need.

- On-campus interviews allow you to meet face-to-face with visiting employers about specific job opportunities. Employers usually accept resumes and cover letters in advance via Hire-A-Vol.
- Resume referrals are for employers who request resumes from interested students and forward them directly to the hiring manager.
- Information sessions provide students with the opportunity to meet an employer, learn about the organization, and ask questions in a group setting.
- Look at Hire-a-Vol for specific jobs requirements.

Pros:

- Does not require a lot of effort for the job seeker
- Opens up opportunities
- Employers are sending a clear message that there are job openings

Cons:

- Selection of companies that come to campus may not interest you
- Should be used with other job hunting techniques
- Employers who come to campus often pre-select those whom they want to interview
- Some employers may not want to hire international students

Hire-A-Vol

Whether you are looking for a summer job, internship, or full-time permanent position, you need to register and upload a resume into our database using the Hire-A-Vol software program.

- On our home page, click on **Students**, and then on **Student Login**. If it is your first time, click on **Registration Instructions**. This will take you through a few instruction screens to assist you in the process.
- **Important Note:** The program has a **Profile** section you need to complete before uploading your resume to Career Services. Click on **Profile** and complete the sections of information requested (Personal Information, Academic Information, and Privacy). This information is very important for you to complete accurately. It helps to match you with employment opportunities. Once you have completed the **Profile** section, click on the **Documents** heading.
- **Documents** is the section in which you will upload your resume. Follow the instructions on the screen to upload your resume. You may have multiple resumes in the database. You also have the ability to upload cover letters, writing samples, and other items in this **Documents** section.
- Career Services encourages students to have their resume critiqued before uploading it into the database. There are many options available to get your resume critiqued. See the resume section in this handout for more information.
- On-campus Interview opportunities are waiting at your fingertips when you use our internet-based software Hire-A-Vol. This software enables you to complete all parts of interview scheduling on the web.
- **Make sure to select the correct option under “Advanced Search” tab in the “Work Authorization” box.**

For more details on using the Hire-A-Vol software please read the online instructions or meet with a College Consultant at Career Services. There are a variety of ways the software can assist you in your job search. Don't miss out on these opportunities to interview for internships and full time, permanent positions.

Direct Targeting

Direct targeting involves identifying the organization or companies where you would like to work and marketing yourself directly to them, regardless of whether the organization has a current job opening listed.

- Perhaps your experience and energy is exactly what the organization needs. This search tactic is often best coupled with informational interviewing and networking.
- Many organizations' websites have a “careers” section featuring job and internship listings.
- Develop a list of organizations you want to target; you can use employer directories, organizational literature, Chamber of Commerce information, and websites to narrow your choices.
- Identify individuals who have hiring authority. You can send a resume first and follow up with a call.
- If mailing or emailing your resume to a company, always address the letter to a specific person, not a title or “to whom it may concern.” Customize it as much as possible and follow up with a phone call.

- Indicate your desire to meet with them even if they have no positions currently available. This is a good way to learn about possible future possibilities and the company or organization in general, as well as get your name out to them. Do not expect to be interviewed for a job in this case! Once you have had a personal interaction with an employer, they may or may not think of you the next time they have an appropriate opening.

Contacting Employers in Person

Pros:

- Surprisingly effective and active strategy that involves taking control of job search

Cons:

- Takes more energy
- Will probably feel awkward at first
- Rejection can be face to face instead of an email or letter

Sending a Resume & Cover Letter

Pros:

- Impersonal approach
- Less anxiety for job hunter
- Familiar method

Cons:

- Many employers do not look at unannounced resumes and cover letters
- Some employers receive so many they are forced to look at how to exclude candidates

Print and Online Ads

It is true that most jobs do not come from ads. Still, reading them can be helpful in a number of ways.

Pros

- Some people do land jobs this way
- Looking in the want ads or a database like Monster.com is a reminder that many jobs exist in the world
- You can learn about new industries, titles and job duties
- Involves little time and effort
- Somewhat anonymous
- Many jobs to choose from

Cons:

- No guarantee employers will actually look at your resume if you post it
- Your information is public
- Many websites do not update their databases frequently; not unusual for jobs listed to be filled
- Some fields very underrepresented

Employer's Internship or Co-op Program

Interns often receive offers for full time employment before graduation, especially when the experience has been positive and the employer has a current open position.

Career Fairs

Career fairs give you a chance to explore potential organizations and career fields. Employers provide information about job and internship opportunities within their organizations.

- Research employers using the fair information on our website www.career.utk.edu. Review the list of attending companies and their websites. Conducting research before the fair is very important. Be prepared to discuss your relevant skills, interest, background, and career goals at the fair. Think about how to “sell” your qualifications in two to three minutes.
- Bring copies of your resume for employers. Also be prepared to submit a resume online, as some employers only accept resumes in this format.
- First impressions count. Dress in business professional attire. Information about this can be found from Career Services.

Pros:

- Great way to get information about organizations you are interested in
- Chance to introduce yourself and get contact information
- Little investment of time

Cons:

- Infrequent
- Attending employers may not interest you
- Must be prepared to stand out among other job hunters

Faculty Contacts

Some employers go directly to faculty to announce their job and internship opportunities in their academic departments. This is especially common when students with specialized training or knowledge are desired. Faculty can also be a great resource for learning more about organizations related to their field and possible contacts.

Professional Associations

Professional associations often provide job listings for their members, and in many instances non-members may be able to access job vacancies as well. Student memberships are often offered at a discount.

Follow Up

Follow up with employers and contacts.

Persistent job hunters follow up with a visit or a phone call. The personal touch is still the most effective way of marketing oneself.

Send thank you notes to whomever you speak to.

Sending a personal letter of thanks is a forgotten form of job-hunting etiquette. It can reaffirm your interest in the position and highlight your qualifications one last time. It is also a great way to stand out among other job hunters. In fact, some people who conduct interviews and make hiring decisions have used this as a deciding factor on whether to hire a particular candidate.

Evaluate offers as they come.

Remember that when you evaluate job offers, you need to ask yourself if you would truly be happy at this job.

Job Search Ethics

Resumes:

Do not lie. If a potential employer learns you have misrepresented yourself it is perfectly reasonable for them to terminate your candidacy or revoke any job offers made. Don't overstate your GPA or accomplishments. It is likely you will be asked to expand on elements of your resume during your interview, so make sure you can back up everything on your resume.

Applying for a Job:

Only apply for jobs you are truly interested in. Do not accept an interview just to get practice. Chances are good that the employer only has a limited number of interview timeslots. If you accept an interview for a position you have no intentions of accepting, you are taking up another job seeker's possible interview. Electronic job postings have added to this problem. Applying to many jobs just because it is easy can clog a company's candidate search system and result in a significant loss of time.

Initial Interview:

Show up for all interviews you accept. An unused interview time costs someone else a chance at that job. Also, if the interview was on campus, UT's reputation will suffer as a result of no-shows. Cancelling at the last minute is considered the same as not showing up at all. If you need to cancel an interview due to an unexpected illness or emergency contact Career Services or the employer as soon as possible, this is not unethical. However, deciding to cancel an interview because you feel unprepared or a better opportunity came up is considered unethical.

In the interview, everything you say needs to be true. It is likely that anything you state about your past experiences will be followed by more questions. Every answer you give should be straightforward and thoroughly honest.

Follow-Up Interviews:

Once again, if you know you are not intending to accept the position, do not accept a follow up on-site interview. These interviews are usually very costly for employers in terms of staff time and travel costs. Accepting the interview for practice, the trip, or a nice hotel stay is not acceptable and likely costs another candidate the chance to interview for the position. On the other hand, if there is even some possibility that you might want the job, then attend the on-site interview. You can learn a lot from seeing the company or organization in person. If you do accept an on-site interview, be sure to claim fair reimbursement for your expenses. You should only claim reasonable and legitimate expenses.

Accepting or Rejecting a Job Offer:

You should accept a job offer in good faith. This means that when you accept an offer you have full intention to carry it out. Once you have accepted a position, you are expected to contact all other organizations you have applied to and are interviewing with to withdraw your candidacy. You should also withdraw from any future interviews. Whatever your decision, try to contact employers as promptly as possible so they can notify other candidates that the position has been filled or that they are still being considered.



It is unethical to accept a job offer while continuing your search or waiting for a better offer. If you receive a better offer from what is not your first-choice employer, use the offer as an opportunity to contact your first-choice and see if and when they can make an offer.

Reneging on an offer does not just affect you. The employer faces hardships such as being understaffed, losing second-choice candidates to other organizations, and costs involved with conducting another search. The only ethical way of backing out of an accepted position is due to unforeseen events causing a dramatic change in what you know about the company or your personal status. Your Career Consultant can offer information and guidance through this process if needed.

If you decide to reject an offer, you are ethically bound to notify that organization. They need to continue on with their hiring process and notify other candidates. Remember, these decisions do not just affect you.

Common Questions of the International Student

What are some employers that hire international students?

- International Corporations
- Corporations involved in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)
- Employers from the Global MBA/Master's Employment Conference list
- Organizations with international focus:
 - World Trade Organization
 - World Health Organization
 - World Bank
- Try contacting your home country's embassy or consulate to ask which of your home country's firms do business in the United States, and which U.S. firms do business with your home country.

Is it a good idea to list my visa status on my resume?

No, your permanent address and educational and work background will show that you are an international citizen. In addition, you should never lie about your visa status or background.

What are some questions that are illegal for an employer to ask?

Under U.S. law, an employer **may not** ask:

- What is your nationality?
- What is your place of birth?
- Of which country are you a citizen?
- When did you become a citizen?
- What is your visa type?
- What is your native language?
- What language do you most often speak?
- Questions about race or ethnicity
- About age, birth date, or age of your children.
- Questions about marital status, or number of children/dependants.
- Any questions about religion are not allowed.
- About service in foreign military.
- About financial credit or financial status.

An employer **may** ask:

- Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?
- Will you require sponsorship for an employment visa?
- Which language skills do you possess?
- If you have been known by other names, and what those names are.
- About service in United States military.

What should I say when an employer asks about my work authorization?

If you are an F-1 student, explain that you have the legal right to work in the United States for twelve months while remaining under student status (this is the Optional Practical Training). Then tell them that you can renew your authorization to work for a further three to six years with an H-1B work visa. You should avoid the word "sponsor" in this conversation and use the term "petition." You may explain that they do not have to show that there are no U.S. citizens qualified for the job, only that you meet the requirements.

Remember that you probably know more about the Immigration Laws than your potential employer.

When should I disclose that I am an international student?

While this is best answered on a case-by-case basis, usually it is advised to wait until after the first screening measures to the interview. Employers might appreciate it, however, if you discuss the subject before they spend a large amount of effort and time to recruit you. Usually the best time is during the first or second interview and not after the job offer.

What do I wear to an interview?

Business professional attire is most appropriate. Also, see Career Services' *Dress for Success* handout.

For men:

- Dark suit (dark gray or navy is best)
- Dress shirt (long sleeves, button up, collar)
- Tie
- Dark socks
- Polished dark shoes

For women:

- Dark suit (jacket and skirt or dress slacks)
- Dress shirt
- Pantyhose
- Closed-toed shoes

How can I make myself more appealing to employers?

- Use the resources of Career Services; especially resume critique and mock interview practice.
- Become knowledgeable in the immigration process and visa information.
- Research the employers you are interested in.
- Practice English by speaking up in class, talking to faculty, joining clubs and associations, and making more friends who are native English speaking.
- Practice speaking confidently about your skills, interests, and goals.

Suggestions for Further Research

On Campus:

[International Student Services](#)



1620 Melrose Avenue.
Website: <http://web.utk.edu/~globe/students/index.php>
Email: international@utk.edu
Phone: 865-974-3177

The Office of Career Services
100 Dunford Hall
Phone: 865-974-5435
Website: <http://career.utk.edu/>

In the Career Resource Center:

10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College: The Know-How You Need to Succeed
William D. Coplin

A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way to the Hidden Job Market
Katharine Hansen

Careers for Foreign Language Aficionados & Other Multilingual Types, Second Edition
H. Ned Seelye

Careers in Foreign Languages (Professional Career Series)
Blythe Camenson

The Etiquette Edge: The Unspoken Rules for Business Success
Beverly Langford

Start Now Succeed Later: Making College Count for Career Search Success
Patrick S. O'Brien

The Vault College Career Bible
Vault Career Library

Work It! How to Get Ahead, Save Your Ass, and Land a Job in Any Economy
Allison Hemming

On the Internet:

- <http://h1visajobs.com/>
- <http://istudentcity.com/>
- <http://iie.org/>

- <http://www.latpro.com/>
- <http://careerforum.net/>
- <http://www.ihispano.com/>
- <http://www.careers.org/>
- <http://foreignmba.com/>
- <http://crs.wetfeet.com/schools/tennesseedp/Careers-and-Industries.aspx>
- <http://www.acinet.org/>
- <http://online.onetcenter.org/>

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“International Students and the Job Search.” Rice University Career Services Center. Rice University.

“Job Search Workshop International Students.” Career and Employment Services. Kansas State University. Fall 2007

“The Job Search for F-1 and J-1 International Students” University Career Services. University of Houston. October 2005.