INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAREER GUIDE

For international students who seek employment in the United States, the job market can be tough to break into due to work authorization restrictions and the competitive nature of recruitment for employees. However, international students possess excellent skills and abilities that distinguish them from their American counterparts. Some of these desirable characteristics include global and unique perspectives, living and working experience in another country, and bilingual communication skills. This guide is designed to provide you with strategies for decision making and additional resources for making your job search a success.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Are you looking for jobs or internships in the United States? In your home country or another country?
- If applying in the US, how long would you like to work in the United States? Are you familiar with the necessary immigration procedures to work off-campus?
- Is your main goal to gain experience or to establish contacts for future reference?
- Do you hope to gain experience in the United States so that you can contribute to the needs of your home country when you return?

Tips for a Successful Job Search

- Start early! Volunteer or work as an intern during your college years! (see handout “Getting Involved”)
- Research and apply for on-campus job opportunities.
- Have a well-developed resume or resumes that target specific kinds of work/positions
- Write a tailored cover letter that shows how your interests and abilities meet the needs of the organization (a new one for each application)
- Prepare for interviews
- Learn the details of OPT and CPT and how to talk about it confidently with employers, 4pm every Monday in the Red Gym
- Establish a network of professionals in your field including involvement in student organizations and professional associations

Steps for Securing an Internship for Credit

1. Visit International Student Services (ISS) and get Curricular Practical Training (CPT) paperwork and explanation of process. Walk-in advising hours at ISS are 11am - 3pm Mon-Fri; The paperwork is also accessible via the ISS Website: [http://iss.wisc.edu/employment/f1-employment](http://iss.wisc.edu/employment/f1-employment)

2. Find an internship. It’s important to start looking at least a couple months before the next semester because the requirements for CPT application can be detailed and lengthy. Visit L&S Career Services for help, drop-in hours are 1-3 pm Monday- Friday in addition to Tuesdays from 4-5:30 pm. Remember employment must be related to your declared major for CPT to be approved. Please account for 2 weeks processing through ISS.

3. Get a signed offer letter from the employer.

4. Determine what course you will take with your internship. If your major does not have a specific course for internships or if you are not yet eligible to take that course, consider applying for the Inter LS 260 course. Please be aware that some of the application materials need to be signed by your employer. Applications materials can be found on the L&S Career Services Website: [http://careers.ls.wisc.edu/academic-credit-and-more--students.htm](http://careers.ls.wisc.edu/academic-credit-and-more--students.htm).

5. If you are taking Inter LS 260, bring the advisor portion of the CPT papers to the internship coordinator at L&S Career Services to be signed.

6. Take the completed CPT forms and other documents to the ISS office.

7. Send an email to the internship coordinator [lsinternships@saa.ls.wisc.edu](mailto:lsinternships@saa.ls.wisc.edu) when your CPT has been approved.

*Note: Many International students find that a summer internship is beneficial since internships often require more than 10 hours per week and are writing-intensive.*
Employment Options and Restrictions

On-campus Employment
A student in F-1 status may work up to 20 hours per week on-campus while enrolled in a full course of study. "On-campus" jobs include work in the UW student unions, libraries, recreational centers, and in academic and administrative departments. As a full-time student, you do not require permission to engage in part-time work on-campus. You will need to show your employer documents which establish your identification and employment eligibility, as listed on the I-9 form which all new employees must complete. There is no exception to the 20 hour-per-week ceiling, even if the employment is a teaching or project assistantship. On-campus employment may be full time during vacation periods (summer, winter, and spring breaks) for students who have maintained full-time status before the vacation period and intend to register for the following semester.

Off-campus Employment
If you have been in valid F-1 status for two semesters or at least nine months, you may be eligible to work off-campus. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training are the two commonly used options for working off-campus.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
Curricular Practical Training provides the ability to work off-campus provided it is part of your academic program (that is, your work experience is directly linked to your curriculum). To participate in CPT, your academic program must either require a work experience or provide an elective option for you to earn credit for a work experience. CPT may only take place before the completion of your degree and requires authorization from ISS. Please note: if you are authorized for one year or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training, you will not be eligible for Optional Practical Training.

Access the application form here: http://apps.iss.wisc.edu/upload/documents/cpt%20ap.pdf

Optional Practical Training (OPT)
Optional Practical Training provides the ability to work off-campus independent of your curriculum; however, work on OPT must be related to your academic program of study. OPT may take place before or after the completion of your degree. This type of permission requires a recommendation from ISS followed by approval from the US government to participate. The total amount of time that you can work using OPT is 12 months. Recipients of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields can apply to USCIS for a one-time 17-month extension of post-completion OPT (for a total eligibility of up to 29 months). For details, go to: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/practical-training/

OPT Workshop
Students who wish to participate in Optional Practical Training are required to attend a mandatory OPT Workshop. Workshops are held every Monday that the university is open; the workshop begins at 4:00pm and is held in the Media Room, first floor Red Gym. Registration is not required, but you must arrive by 4:00pm to participate.

Social Security Number
Once you have a job offer, you will need to apply for a social security number. The Social Security Administration (SSA) will issue a number for F-1 students who already have a campus job; have been authorized to participate in Curricular Practical Training (CPT); or have been authorized to participate in Optional Practical Training (OPT) and have secured employment. For details, go to: http://iss.wisc.edu/employment/social-security

Resumes
Make sure you have carefully reviewed your resume for each application. A perfect resume covers relevant information that each employer specifically asks for. It is important to tailor your resume to each job you are applying for. Figure out your advantages and create specific strategies for yourself. Address your global experience and bilingual abilities, to help you stand out from other candidates. Remember, you do not have to include any information about your ethnicity, race or nationality in your resume. See resume samples at: http://www.careers.ls.wisc.edu/resume-and-cover-letters--students.htm
Cover Letters

A resume should not be mailed to a prospective employer without an accompanying cover letter, unless the employer is only requesting the resume. In a cover letter, you can talk about what skills and experience you can provide and the connection between your abilities and the employer’s requirements. Similar to the resume, targeting your cover letter is also important. A good cover letter is uniquely composed for one specific employer or position. It is also important to check for typos – most employers will reject resumes and cover letters with spelling and grammar mistakes. We can help you with this!

Preparing for Interviews

Learn as much as possible about the position you are applying for and the background of the employer before you go to an interview. In particular, remember to match your skills and interests with the requirements and preferences of the employer. There can be various ways to phrase a question, but they are often looking for your abilities to match their needs. Work with Career Services to help view questions from a different standpoint so the tough questions will seem a lot easier to answer. Addressing your advantages as an international student would also be a plus. Consider using our office resources, such as mock-interview days to get practice interviewing in the United States. See handout “Guide to Interviewing” and other interviewing resources at: http://www.careers.ls.wisc.edu/interviewing--students.htm

Helpful Resources

Below are some great internet resources. Remember to try some non-internet based approaches as well! Networking (talking to people in your intended field), is crucial to success in the job search. You can also use the internet to help you connect with people! Try the Wisconsin Alumni Association group on LinkedIn.com or the resources at the Wisconsin Alumni Association website to find alumni: http://www.uwalumni.com/careers.

- **International Student Services (ISS):** [http://www.iss.wisc.edu](http://www.iss.wisc.edu), 716 Langdon Street, Tel: 608-262-2044. The ISS office offers a wide variety of services to international students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. ISS staff members provide information and programs to international students about employment and other visa and related immigration issues, as well as connections to the campus and community.

- **UW Student Job Center:** [http://jobcenter.wisc.edu/](http://jobcenter.wisc.edu/), East Campus Mall #9701, Tel: 608-262-5627 This website contains up-to-date job postings from both on and off-campus.

- **American Employers for International Professionals:** [http://www.h1visajobs.com](http://www.h1visajobs.com)

- **International Student:** [http://www.internationalstudent.com/](http://www.internationalstudent.com/)

- **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:** [http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis)

- **Study in the States, Department of Homeland Security:** [http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/](http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/)

- **GoinGlobal:** [http://online.goinglobal.com](http://online.goinglobal.com) This website has great information about employers who hire employees on the H1-B Visa and guides to many countries and major American cities. The link to GoinGlobal is on the BuckyNet homepage, once you sign in to BuckyNet with your username and password. To get your BuckyNet username and password, follow the instructions on our office homepage: [http://careers.ls.wisc.edu/](http://careers.ls.wisc.edu/) This method will allow you access to Goinglobal for one year after you graduate.
Frequently Asked Questions

Can I work more than one campus jobs?
In most cases, yes—as long as you do not work over 20 hours during the school year.

What should I do if my employer asks for my social security number, but I don’t have one?
Inform your employer that you can only apply for a social security number after you have been offered a job. Once you have accepted a job offer, take the employment letter, passport, I-20, I-94, and a verifying letter from ISS to the Social Security Office and apply for a number.

Can I apply for OPT while I am still working towards my degree?
Yes—you may apply for pre-completion OPT, but you will still be limited by the 20 hours per week ceiling when school is in session. However, the time you spent holding pre-completion OPT is counted towards your one year maximum.

How much about my citizenship and immigration status should I tell potential employers?
While it is illegal for employers to ask you your nationality and citizenship before making an employment offer, they will often in the application process ask you whether you currently or will in the future require sponsorship to legally work in the U.S. If you are on an F-1 visa or on OPT, you will need H-1B sponsorship from your employer. Answer those questions honestly and directly. You should not, however, list your visa status on your resume. This handout clearly discusses strategies to discuss your visa and immigration status with potential employers during an interview: http://www.brown.edu/Administration/OISSS/general_info/docs/career_dev_ctr_tips.pdf

What are the employment restrictions I have as a foreign national?
In general, foreign nationals are not eligible to work for the U.S. federal government, and for most local and state government agencies.

How do I as an F-1 student answer when I am asked by an employer about my work authorization?
Start by explaining that you have “the legal right to work in the U.S. for 12 months remaining in Optional Practical Training, which requires absolutely no work on your part.” Then share that “my work authorization can be renewed for another three to six more 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”. (Adapted from School of Management, SUNY-Buffalo: http://mgt.buffalo.edu/files/career/InternationalJobSearchGuide.pdf)

When in the hiring process do I reveal that I’m an international student?
This is a very sensitive question which needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. While some employers adhere to strict policies against hiring foreign nationals, others may prefer to hire U.S. citizens, but can be otherwise convinced. Therefore, it should be your goal to get past the initial screening measures to the interview. It is usually recommended that students wait until the employer asks, but be aware through research if the company has petitioned for visas in the past, especially in the functional area for which you plan to work. However, if you are being asked to travel for an interview, it would be wise to ask at that time: “Is this a position in which the company is willing to petition for an H-1B as I am currently on an F1 visa?” (Adapted from School of Management, SUNY-Buffalo: http://mgt.buffalo.edu/files/career/InternationalJobSearchGuide.pdf)