

Career Guide for International Students

As an international student, you offer many skills by virtue of your country of birth and experience in another culture. Perhaps you speak more than one language. Maybe you have lived in multiple countries. Because you have been exposed to and lived in other cultures, international students like you often demonstrate maturity, flexibility and adaptability. Many international students are eager to experience the world of work in the United States both during and after college. Whether you are interested in working on-campus or off-campus, obtaining and internship, or working after graduation, work regulations are central to the life of any international student. Not being a U.S. Citizen or permanent resident does add a layer of difficulty to your job search, but it is important to remember that there are companies and industries interested in hiring foreign nationals. It is important for you to be familiar with Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) regulations.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)*

CPT provides F-1 status international students an opportunity to gain work experience while they are students. At Hamline, students complete CPT through the internship program. Students must be enrolled full-time for one academic year at Hamline before becoming eligible to participate in an internship. Students may engage in internships only for the employer, location, and period approved on the LEAP Learning Agreement Form (LLA) recorded by the Career Development Center, Global Engagement Center, and the Registrar. The duration of the internship depends on the specific period of time granted by Global Engagement Center. There is no cumulative CPT maximum. However, CPT must be completed BEFORE graduation. Internships can be approved for up to 40 hours per week, but students must also maintain a full course of study in F-1 status during the internship. Internships must be integral to your course of study and be related to your major field(s) of study. The internship employer must qualify as a Hamline approved internship site.

Use of full-time CPT (more than 20 hours a week) for one year or more eliminates eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Use of part-time CPT (20 hours or less) does not affect eligibility for OPT. After the LEAP Learning Agreement Form (LLA) has been signed by the CDC, it must be submitted to Global Engagement Center in order for them to process and approve the CPT authorization. You must receive CPT authorization from the Global Engagement Center on a new I-20 before you can begin work.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) provides F-1 status students with an opportunity for hands-on work experience complementary to their academic field of study. You must have been enrolled in a full course of study for one academic year to apply. You are eligible for a maximum of 12 months of full-time OPT per academic level. For example, you may apply for OPT after completing a bachelor's degree and then again after completing a master's degree. An extension may be possible depending on your field of study. While on practical training, you are still considered to be an F-1 status student and you must report any changes in contact information as well as employer information. You may apply and file with USCIS for OPT up to 90 days before your program end date and up to

60 days after your program end date. Your program end date is indicated on your Form I-20. Allow three months minimum for processing by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Service Center. You cannot begin employment until USCIS approves the OPT application and you have your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

Unfortunately, as a foreign national you cannot work for the U.S. federal government, most state and local government agencies, or for private employers who receive government contracts. Try to avoid companies dependent on contracts for the U.S. Department of Defense. For the first year that you work in the U.S. you are able to work under “Practical Training”. In order to work in the U.S. beyond the OPT authorization period, an employer will have to sponsor you for an H-1B Visa, or another employment based visa.

It is important to think about your skills and what you have to offer to a company. U.S. companies want to hire foreign nationals for their education, background, and skill sets. The best thing to do is target companies where your skill sets will be in demand and you will be a strong candidate. International students looking for employment after graduation may consider the following options:

- work with an American based organization
- work with a multinational corporation
- work in the public or private sector in your home country
- work in the public or private sector of another country
- deciding not to work right away but to continue in school for another degree

Immigration Status and the Job Search

Many students are nervous and unsure when to bring up their immigration status when conducting their job search. You do not want to put your immigration status on your resume! On an employer’s formal application, it is important to be honest and truthful. There might be a section where it asks for your immigration/visa status. You never want to lie, but make the most positive, truthful statement, such as: “Immigration status allows 12 months U.S. work permission,” or “Permanent Residency to be awarded in next four months” depending upon your situation. You always want to say the truth and be able to have documentation available to support your immigration status. The best time to bring up your immigration status is just before a company offers you a job; never on the first round of interviews. However, if the company asks you directly what your work authorization is, you should always tell them the truth.

Cultural Differences in the Job Search

There may be a number of differences between the American job search and the one in your home country. Most of your job search will involve you directly applying to companies, and not using a third party intermediary. When conducting a job search you will need a resume and a unique cover letter for every job you apply to. A U.S. resume will include more emphasis on your skills and experience. The interview is the most drastic difference in the job search here in the U.S. American employers expect you speak confidently about your skills and experiences and want to hear about your achievements. You want to make eye contact with everyone, even the most senior level professionals; this is seen as a sign of confidence rather than disrespect.

*CPT information is different for graduate level students. Ex: HSB students must enroll in a 1 credit internship course that allows for CPT. Currently, HSE graduate students have no opportunity for CPT.

Potential Cultural Barriers to the Job Search

U.S Employer Expectations	Conflicting Values with Other Cultures
Self Promotion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Assertive · Able to openly discuss goals and accomplishments with confidence · Follow-up with employers · Appropriate professional dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Unless in a group activity, mentioning specific skills and accomplishments is seen as boastful · Following up with employers about application status is seen as rude
Directness in Communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Openly responds to questions in a direct manner · Maintains eye contact with interviewer and displays appropriate nonverbal feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Maintaining eye contact with someone of higher power is seen as disrespectful
Self-Disclosure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Openly discusses experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses · Answers personality questions regarding leadership and problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Personal questions are considered an invasion of privacy and are only discussed with close friends and family
Career Self-Awareness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Openly demonstrates knowledge of personal self in relation to short-term and long-term career goals · Discusses career concentration and expresses interest in doing specific job tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Jobs are often assigned by government or family · Questioning someone about career role is seen as disloyal · Companies assign work responsibilities · Individuals must be flexible and willing to accept available job
Individual Responsibility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Uses multiple resources to identify job opportunities · Actively seeks career information independently · Networking with friends, family and professionals is crucial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Jobs opportunities are found through family and/or the government · Depends on specific person/people to coordinate job search (e.g. advisor or employer agent)
Informality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Interviewer and interviewee may engage in friendly, open conversation that may incorporate some joking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Job applicant is very polite to interviewer and is very careful about saving face and not coming off impolite · Handshaking, touching, using first names, crossing legs, etc. may be seen as inappropriate
Punctuality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Arrive approximately 5-15 minutes early for interview/appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Time is not of high value, and 15 minutes – 2 hours of lateness is not seen as insulting
Effective Resumes and Cover Letters	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Résumés need to be 1-page, error-free and concise · Strong focus on accomplishments and skills that relate specifically to the job · Personalized according to the job and employer · Does not contain a picture or personal information such as age, sex, religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Résumés are detailed chronology of academic and work experience and not a tool of self-promotion · May contain personal information and a picture
Individual Equality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Race, sex, and age should not affect the outcome of a hiring decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Males are expected to assume dominance in interactions with females
Preparation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Obtain as much information as possible about the job and the employer and demonstrate this in the cover letter and during the interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Researching the organization may indicate excessive initiative or independence

US Employer Expectations and Perceptions

Characteristic	Employer Expectations	Employer Perceptions
Personal Responsibility and Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All candidates are to take responsibility for their own job search and personally market their skills and abilities to employers Candidates are expected to research employers, find job openings, reach out to employers and follow-up with employers in a timely manner Candidates should talk about marketable skills and accomplishments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates who speak modestly about personal achievements may seem uncomfortable working independently and unable to achieve personal goals Candidates who fail to take responsibility for their job search show employers that they lack accountability Candidates who focus too much on technical skills risk demonstrating “in the box” thinking
Interpersonal Interaction and Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All candidates are expected to demonstrate abilities beyond technical skills, therefore joining organizations and making friends from other cultures is important While networking, start with informal conversation; focus the conversation around the other person and their needs and interests Always greet professionals with a firm handshake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only interacting with people from your home country may inform employers that you are not comfortable with American culture or language Handshakes that are too limp demonstrate a lack of confidence
Written Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poorly written documents are typically not given consideration; employers expect all candidates to have proficient written business level English Résumés and cover letters are to be free of errors and awkward language Résumés and cover letters are to be primarily focused on accomplishments and abilities that directly relate to the job description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates who use translators to type correspondence to employers may use words incorrectly and come off sounding awkward Poor grammar and spelling gives off the impression that a candidate has trouble with the English language and may have a hard time communicating with colleagues and customers
Verbal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All candidates are expected to have proficient verbal business level English Employers expect candidates to be prepared and demonstrate assertiveness, confident answers in a clear, projecting voice with natural enthusiasm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spending too much time searching for the right word to say may lead to employers questioning your ability to communicate effectively
Eye Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates are to make direct eye contact when corresponding with people of all authority levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates who demonstrate averted eye contact appear to lack confidence
Professional Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates are to dress professionally and demonstrate exceptional personal hygiene out of respect to the employer Gentlemen are expected to wear a shirt and tie under a business suit with polished dress shoes Ladies are expected to wear a professional dress or pants suit with hosiery and polished closed toe shoes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wearing unprofessional clothing gives off the impression that the candidate lacks attention to detail. Candidates who wear ill-fitting clothing that is wrinkled come off looking unprofessional Candidates who do not demonstrate personal hygiene risk coming off disrespectful
Professional Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender, race, class, age and marital status are never to be an issue in a business or interviewing relationship Religious beliefs are considered personal, therefore not to be discussed to employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates who speak specifically about race, class, gender, etc. are considered disrespectful Résumés that include pictures, personal or religious information are seen as inappropriate

Resources

www.hamline.edu/students/international - Global Engagement Center at Hamline University

www.myvisajobs.com - Database of employers willing to hire students who are authorized to work in the U.S for a short period of time

www.ihipo.com - Job and Internship search site focused on international positions (U.S. included)

www.uscis.gov - United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

www.istudentcity.com/career/career_tips_basic.asp - Online chats with other international students (note: the “career placement” side of this site is a fee-for-service recruiting agency)

www.4icj.com - 4 International Careers and Jobs; World-wide directory of job sites and career resources. Covers 190 countries and including more than 1000 job sites

www.careerjet.com -Search for job listings by country and city worldwide

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-help-hub/student-records/fm-student-employment> - Study in the States Department of Homeland Security website on F and M Student Employment