

# CAREER STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS & ALUMNI

## 1. **Be Informed** - Learn what impact your visa status will have on your job search

As an international student, you may hold an F-1 visa, which limits you to a specific period of paid work experience called Optional Practical Training (OPT). If an employer offers to sponsor you during your OPT, you can apply for an H-1b (Temporary Worker) visa. Laws governing visa status and practical training are enforced by the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services and are subject to change. Before beginning a job search, we recommend that you do the following:

- Visit International Student Services (ISSS, UC 5<sup>th</sup> Floor) for further info on the details of visa employment in the U.S.
  - meet with the International Student Advisor to obtain current information about procedures you must follow, such as obtaining a work authorization permit, in order to be employable.
  - become familiar with ISSS' website resources: <http://www.usfca.edu/iss/>
  - attend Practical Training Workshops (see website above for dates)
- For general questions about employment visas, see the following website: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/index.html>

## 2. **Be Focused**

In today's competitive job market, successful candidates must be able to clearly state what types of work they are qualified for and how their skills, abilities and accomplishments will be of value to potential employers. The first step in any career strategy is to assess your skills, interests, values, and personality preferences. This information will help you identify and explore viable career options. The CSC and USF's Gleeson Library have a variety of resources available to help you research career options and clarify your focus.

- Attend Drop-ins at the Career Services Center on the UC 5<sup>th</sup> Floor. Meet with a career counselor to clarify your goals, learn job search strategies, and develop an action plan for your individual interests. Call 415-422-6216 for appointments and this semester's drop-in hours.
  - Define your skills, interests, values, and personality preferences
  - Identify which jobs you are qualified for

## 3. **Be Prepared**

Presenting yourself as informed, organized, and able to discuss your past academic, work, and/or volunteer experience will create a positive impression with employers. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Conduct research on your field of interest at [www.usfca.edu/career](http://www.usfca.edu/career), in the CSC Resource Library, and at Gleeson Library. Today's employers expect you to know more than "the basics" about their company.
- Attend as many Career Services Center workshops as possible on Resume and Cover Letter Writing, Interviewing Skills, and Job Search Strategies. Meet with a career counselor to obtain feedback on resumes and cover letters; develop a job search strategy.
- Be able to explain to employers the details of your visa status and how it affects them if they hire you. Consider speaking directly with an immigration lawyer to gain a greater understanding of the legalities and regulations of working under your particular visa status.

#### 4. Be Realistic and Flexible

International students can find a U.S. job search to be a highly challenging experience. In addition to the legal limitations on their eligibility to work in the U.S., they must adjust to cultural and language differences, as well as being removed from their natural network of family, friends, previous employers and co-workers. International students/alumni who have successfully secured work experience in the U.S. have used a variety of the following strategies to obtain their goal:

Gain valuable experience prior to graduation by participating in:

- **Internships:** Internships are on-the-job learning experiences in work settings, which are directly related to your personal interests, career goals and major field of study. An internship is typically a structured, and supervised field-based experience where you learn about the demands and needs of a particular profession and/or industry. Internships are often paid and can be taken for university credit with the approval of the academic department. Since internships provide on-the-job-training, employers do not expect applicants to have much, if any, related work experience. Students apply for internships as they would for a job, competing with other students in the selection process. The CSC maintains listings of current internships in a wide range of industries in its resource library.
- **Volunteer Work:** Since all volunteer work is unpaid, international students can perform volunteer work without depleting their practical training time allocation. Most employers are enthusiastic about students who are motivated to volunteer time to learn. Unlike paid employment, it may not be necessary to look for a position opening. It is possible that an employer will accept your direct request to volunteer.
- **Networking:** In the U.S., 80% or more of all jobs are never advertised. How do you tap into this hidden job market? One way is to tell everyone you know that you are looking for a job. Even the most unlikely person may be able to help you with a lead or referral to someone else. It is important to be specific about the type of job you are seeking, and the kinds of organizations you will consider. You can begin your networking with USF professors, classmates, alumni and members of professional associations related to your field of interest. Visit the CSC for a list of USF alumni who are willing to be career resource contacts.
  - Attend related events: International Alumni Panel (Fall semester; see CSC calendar online)
  - Visit CSC to ask about potential job-related contacts
- **Informational Interviewing:** Informational interviewing is a way to meet with professionals in order to obtain more information about your field of interest. This is not a job interview; it is an opportunity to learn first-hand about the pros and cons of a particular field or employer, and to gather information, advice and referrals to other professionals. See the CSC handout on Informational Interviewing for strategies and tips.
- **Career Fair:** The Career Services Center sponsors an annual Career & Internship Fair in the Spring semester. The event usually attracts over 90 Bay Area employers who are interested in meeting USF students and providing information about opportunities at their companies.

#### 5. Be persistent and creative; consider unusual job search techniques!

- Tips from a 2001 undergraduate International Business alumna who recently obtained H-1b visa sponsorship:

*"I made a network; I went to networking events; I went to chambers of commerce for different regions/countries; I spent 12-14 hours per day marketing myself. I tailored my resume for each position I applied to--usually spending 2-3 hours each time I made changes. Go everywhere, put yourself out there. You must believe in yourself, be truthful, have integrity, know your own weaknesses and strengths and be willing to explain them, go into interviews with confidence, be clear about what you want."*

With perseverance and hard work in job hunting, this alum was offered a position with an international printing broker who agreed to sponsor him--less than two weeks before his F-1 Optional Practical Training visa ran out!