

# International Students and the Job Search



As an international student seeking postgraduation employment in the United States, you will have to deal with a few special issues. This brochure is intended to provide information about visa requirements, the job search, and interviewing. It should be used for informational purposes only; it is NOT a substitute for professional legal advice.

It's important that you understand that employers have a legal obligation to hire only authorized persons. Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, it is unlawful for anyone to hire, recruit, or refer for a fee a noncitizen who is not authorized under the immigration laws to take that job. This duty is enforced through I-9 verification requirements.

Authorized aliens are defined as

- those who, by virtue of status, may be employed generally (e.g., permanent residents, conditional permanent residents, refugees, asylees).
- those who, by virtue of status, may work for a specific employer (e.g., H-1Bs, F-1s under limited circumstances like on-campus and curricular practical training).
- those with employment authorization documents (EADs).

The Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) is a great place to obtain additional information.

## LEGAL ISSUES

### Visa issues

For more information on the various kinds of visas, the criteria for eligibility, and the application process, you can go to [www.foreignborn.com](http://www.foreignborn.com) or the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) website [www.ins.usdoj.gov](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov) (which contains electronic versions of many of the forms you might need), call the national INS toll-free information service at 1-800-375-5283, or consult an immigration attorney.

### Practical training

After graduation, your student visa ("F" visa) gives you

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the option of taking a practical training extension, which will allow you to remain in the United States for up to one year. To qualify for this extension, you must take a job that is related to your field of study.

There are two primary types of practical training: curricular and optional.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a type of employment for an F-1 student that is a required part of the student's curriculum or program. This employment may be an internship, cooperative education job, a practicum, or any other work experience provided it is either for credit or required for your degree. If the time you spend on CPT is less than 12 months, it will not be deducted from your 12 months of Optional Practical Training after graduation.

To be eligible for CPT, you must

- have been in legal status in 9 consecutive months,
- have a job offer related to your major or field of study, and
- your employment must be an integral part of your degree program or requirement for a course.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. OPT is authorized by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. This authorization can take up to 90 days to obtain. The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status is 12 months. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full 12 months to use after you graduate. You may apply 120 days before the employment start date or you must

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2nd Floor Student Center

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Houston, TX 77005

Phone: 713-348-4055

Fax: 713-348-5270

<http://riceinfo.rice.edu/projects/careers>

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apply within 60 days after graduation or the last time registered.

Eligibility prerequisites for OPT are as follows:

- You must have been in valid F-1 status at least 9 consecutive months.
- The employment must be directly related to your major area of study and must be equivalent with your educational level.
- The maximum amount of time granted to work in F-1 practical training status will be 12 months.
- You may change jobs during the 12 months.

Again, the OISS can assist you with this process. You will need to complete INS form I-538 for CPT and forms I-538 and I-765 for OPT.

### **Temporary worker visas**

A temporary worker visa is a nonimmigrant visa for a person who wishes to work temporarily in the United States. There are several categories of temporary worker visas, but the most frequently used one is the H-1B visa. This visa applies to persons in a specialty occupation that requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge requiring completion of a specific course of higher education. It requires a labor attestation

issued by the secretary of labor.

### **TN visas**

The TN visa is a nonimmigrant visa for professionals who are eligible under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). You are eligible for this visa if you are a citizen of Mexico or Canada who works in a professional occupation and you meet the following criteria:

- your profession is on the NAFTA list,
- you possess the specific criteria for that profession,
- the prospective position requires someone in that professional capacity, and
- you are going to work for a U.S. employer.

Be aware that the application requirements for Canadians and Mexicans are not the same.

### **Permanent residence**

It is possible to become a permanent resident based on the fact that you have a permanent employment opportunity in the United States. To be eligible, you must fall into one of several categories:

#### **EB-1: Priority workers (first preference)**

- extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics
- outstanding professors and researchers

### **NAFTA Professional Job Series List for the TN Visa**

Accountant	Technical publications writer	Biochemist
Architect	Urban planner	Chemist
Computer systems analyst	Vocational counselor	Dairy scientist
Disaster relief insurance claims adjuster	<i>Medical professions</i>	Entomologist
Economist	Dentist	Epidemiologist
Engineer	Dietitian	Geneticist
Forester	Medical laboratory technologist	Geochemist
Graphic designer	Nutritionist	Geophysicist
Hotel manager	Occupational therapist	Horticulturist
Industrial designer	Pharmacist	Meteorologist
Interior designer	Physician (teaching or research only)	Pharmacologist
Land surveyor	Physiotherapist/physical therapist	Physicist
Landscape architect	Psychologist	Plant breeder
Lawyer	Recreational therapist	Poultry scientist
Librarian	Registered nurse	Soil scientist
Management consultant	Veterinarian	Zoologist
Mathematician	<i>Scientist</i>	<i>Teacher</i>
Range manager/range conservationist	Agricultural (agronomist)	College
Research assistant	Animal breeder	Seminary
Scientific technician/technologist	Animal scientist	University
Social worker	Apiculturist	
Silviculturist	Astronomer	

(from [www.foreignborn.com/visas\\_imm/other\\_visas/8tn\\_visas\\_nafta.htm](http://www.foreignborn.com/visas_imm/other_visas/8tn_visas_nafta.htm))

- certain multinational executives and managers
- **EB-2: Professionals with advanced degrees or persons with exceptional ability (second preference)**
- members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent
- exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business
- **EB-3: Skilled or professional workers (third preference)**
- professionals with a baccalaureate degree (not qualifying for a higher preference category)
- skilled workers (minimum of two years training and experience)
- other workers (requiring less than two years training or experience)
- **EB-4: Special immigrants (fourth preference)**
- religious workers working with a religious organization in the U.S.
- employees and former employees of the U.S. government abroad
- retired employees of international organizations
- **EB-5: Immigrant investors, entrepreneurs (fifth preference)**
- employment creation, capital investment, commercial enterprise

Applicants for adjustment to permanent residence status are eligible to apply for a work permit while their cases are pending. You do not need to apply for a work permit once you adjust to permanent resident status.

### **Illegal employment practices**

The governmental regulations that forbid discrimination on the basis of national origin and citizenship are somewhat more complicated than the regulations concerning such characteristics as race, sex, and age. Before you go into an interview, and even before you apply for a job, you should know what kinds of information you cannot be required to provide.

#### ***National origin***

A company is required by law to hire only “authorized aliens,” or those foreign citizens eligible to work legally in the U.S. According to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, “authorized aliens” include:

1. those who, by virtue of status, may be employed generally (e.g., permanent residents, conditional permanent residents, refugees, asylees).
2. those who, by virtue of status, may work for a specific employer (e.g., H-1Bs, F-1s under limited circumstances like on-campus and curricular practical training).
3. those with employment authorization documents (EADs).  
As an international student, you almost certainly qualify

as “authorized,” which means that you are protected from discrimination on the basis of national origin. National origin encompasses your place of origin, your ancestors’ place of origin, and the physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics of a particular nationality. An employer who treats a job applicant differently than other applicants or employees violates IRCA.

#### ***Citizenship***

IRCA also prohibits discriminating against a U.S. citizen or intending citizen because of citizenship status. Intending citizens include lawful permanent residents, temporary residents under the legalization provision for pre-1982 entrants, special agricultural workers, refugees, or those granted asylum.

#### ***An unsolved dilemma***

There is no government-endorsed way for employers to distinguish applicants who are authorized for a limited time or a specific employer. Some employers may approach this question in the following way, which is probably legal even though it has not been officially endorsed. The employer may ask, “Are you a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, temporary resident, asylee, or refugee?” If the answer is yes, the employer should not inquire further. If no, the employer may ask if the applicant has a legal right to work in the U.S. If the answer is yes, the employer may ask the applicant to explain and can then inquire into the duration and basis of their authorization. However, an employer who uses this approach runs the risk of inquiring about citizenship or national origin.

#### ***What an employer can and cannot ask***

##### ***National origin***

*An employer can ask:*

- What languages can you read, speak, or write? (if foreign language ability is relevant to the job)

*An employer CANNOT ask:*

- What is your nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, or place of birth? (or those of your parents or spouse)
- What is your native language or the language that you speak most often?
- How did you acquire your foreign language ability?

##### ***Citizenship***

*An employer can ask:*

- Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?
- Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa status (e.g., H-1B visa status)?

*An employer CANNOT ask:*

- Of which country are you a citizen?
- Are you a naturalized or native-born citizen?
- When did you acquire citizenship?

## What employers can and cannot ask

### **Name**

*May ask:*

- whether you ever used another name
- any additional information regarding an assumed name, changed name, or nickname necessary to enable a check on your work and educational record

*May NOT ask:*

- your maiden name

### **Age**

*May ask:*

- Are you 18 years or older? If not, what is your age?

*May NOT ask (before hiring):*

- age
- birthdate
- ages of your children

### **National origin**

*May ask:*

- which languages you read, speak, or write, provided foreign language ability is job-related

*May NOT ask:*

- your nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, or place of birth
- the nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, or place of birth of your parents or spouse
- What is your native language? or, What language do you most often speak?
- How did you acquire your foreign language ability?

### **Color and race**

*May ask:*

- NOTHING

*May NOT ask:*

- race or color
- questions regarding the color of your skin, eyes, or hair

### **Citizenship**

*May ask:*

- Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?
- Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa status (e.g., H-1B visa status)?

*May NOT ask:*

- Of which country are you a citizen?
- Are you a naturalized or native-born citizen?
- Can you produce your naturalization papers?
- date when you acquired citizenship
- visa type
- whether your parents or spouse are naturalized or native-born U.S. citizens, or the date when your parents or spouse acquired citizenship

### **Sex, marital status**

*May ask:*

- name and address of parent or guardian, if you are a minor
- names of relatives already employed by the employer

May state the employer's policy regarding work assignments of employees who are related

*May NOT ask:*

- 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**

*May ask:*

- NOTHING

May state the employer's regular days, hours, and shifts

### **Physical Description and Abilities**

*May ask:*

- height and weight, but only commensurate with the specific job requirements

*May NOT request:*

- a photograph, either required or optional, at any time before an offer is made

### **Disability**

*May ask:*

- whether you can perform the essential functions of the job, either with or without accommodation

*May NOT ask:*

- if you have a disability
- if you have ever been treated for any specific diseases
- whether you have, or ever had, a drug or alcohol problem

### **Arrest Record**

*May ask:*

- if you have ever been convicted of a crime (if yes, may ask for details, but there must be a direct relationship between the job and the offense in order to use conviction as a basis for denial)

*May NOT ask:*

- whether you have ever been arrested

### **Membership in Organizations**

*May ask:*

- membership in organizations that you consider relevant to your ability to perform the job

*May NOT ask:*

- all organizations, clubs, societies, and lodges to which you belong

### **Military Service**

*May ask:*

- questions regarding relevant skills acquired during U.S. military service

- whether you received a dishonorable discharge

*May NOT ask:*

- questions regarding service in a foreign military

### **Education**

*May ask:*

- your academic, vocational, or professional education
- which schools you attended

*May NOT ask (before hiring):*

- dates of attendance or dates of degrees obtained

### **Miscellaneous:**

*Should not ask:*

- questions about financial credit
- questions about union membership
- questions about financial status

- Can you produce your naturalization papers?
- What type of visa do you have?
- What is the citizenship status of your parents or spouse?

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**THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S JOB SEARCH: SOME ISSUES**

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**Finding opportunities and applying for jobs**

As an international student, you should start your job

search early. Because of the legal issues that may be involved with hiring international students, you should expect that your job search will take as much as a year. You may find that it takes longer to find companies that are interested in hiring international students.

The best way to find companies that are willing to hire international students is to talk to other international students and alumni, since companies that have hired international students in the past are likely to continue to do so.

**Some common selection standards**

***Analytical Ability***

*Ability to:*

- define parameters of task and desired objectives
- gather relevant data from appropriate sources
- identify all relevant factors or restrictions
- apply logical reasoning to determine relationships of variables
- develop result-oriented conclusions
- test assumptions, observe results, and incorporate revisions or corrections

***Assertiveness and Enthusiasm***

*Ability to:*

- pursue goals with commitment and pride in past accomplishments
- take initiative eagerly, persist at tasks, and maintain a high energy level
- demonstrate self-confidence and a positive attitude toward self and others
- enjoy reasonable risk-taking and competition
- express personal and organizational needs in a positive manner

***Technical Knowledge***

*Ability to:*

- demonstrate understanding of terminology, principles, and theory
- read manuals, blueprints, or journals as required
- follow required technical, industrial, and regulatory guidelines
- demonstrate knowledge of issues, problems, and/or innovations specific to industry
- diagnose, maintain, and troubleshoot equipment or systems

***Responsibility and Maturity***

*Ability to:*

- do a thorough job on each task and complete assignments on time

- implement or work within organizational policies and guidelines, relating own efforts to organized goals
- maintain composure, effectiveness, and flexibility under pressure
- recognize problems and enlist outside assistance when necessary
- encourage flow of information about decisions, problems, and successes

***Intellectual Ability***

*Ability to:*

- analyze problems with an open mind
- process information from a variety of sources
- develop new ideas, products, and solutions
- quickly grasp new concepts, approaches, or systems
- organize or reorganize information in unique ways
- apply creative thinking and imagination

***Interpersonal Skills***

*Ability to:*

- work cooperatively with a variety of individuals
- interface effectively with customers, the public, and coworkers
- recognize strengths and limitations of self and others
- exhibit appropriate sensitivity to others
- focus on task or performance rather than on personality when supervising or relating with others

***Mathematical Ability***

*Ability to:*

- work comfortably with figures
- develop or apply pricing or financial plans
- perform calculations accurately
- formulate measurement systems
- forecast budget and/or report quantitative data
- identify and correct mathematical errors

Also, if a company is participating in the Campus Recruiting Program at the Career Services Center, you can search the online database to see if they indicate that they will hire students for practical training.

It is possible that a company that has hired international students in the past will no longer be willing to do so, as hiring policies often change. However, it's a good idea to find out the specifics of the situation if you still want to apply for a job at the company in question. Alumni currently working for the organization are a good source of information. You may find that the company no longer actively recruits international students but is still willing to hire international students in some instances. A recruiter may not give out this information freely, but others within the organization may be more willing to help you.

If a company indicates in their material for the Campus Recruiting Program that they are not accepting applications from international students, you should not apply through the Career Services Center. However, if they have a history of hiring international students, you can send a cover letter and resume directly to the contact listed with the Career Services Center. The letter should detail your qualifications and reasons for your interest in the company. You can bring the letter to the Career Services Center for a critique.

Sometimes, a company will simply indicate that they only hire U.S. citizens. You shouldn't take this personally—the company may be obligated to do so because of contracts with the government. There are plenty of organizations that are perfectly willing to hire international students, and with a little work, you can find them.

When you apply for a job, you should not list your visa status on your resume or CV, although it is appropriate to mention your status in your cover letter. If you have any doubt about whether your employer understands your visa status, make sure you reiterate the terms of your eligibility before you accept a job. Hiring organizations will ask the appropriate questions as the process continues. You should never lie about your visa status or try to conceal it, but you don't have to draw attention to it if you don't think that this would be to your advantage.

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**PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**  
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Some international students are initially uncomfortable with American-style job interviews. Cultural differences can lead to difficulties if you go into an interview without a good idea of what to expect and what will be expected of you.

For example, American job interviews require you to sell yourself by discussing your career goals, qualifications, achievements, and expectations. Members of some cultures may find it difficult to talk about themselves in such detail when addressing a potential employer. The best way to prepare for a job interview is to get a lot of practice. Contact the Career Services Center to set up a practice interview with one of our counselors. This interview can be videotaped, allowing you to see for yourself how you look and act in an interview and how you could improve your interviewing technique.

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**INTERVIEWING**  
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For a more complete look at the interviewing process, check out the Career Services brochure on interviewing. This section will deal exclusively with a few issues that are of particular importance to international students.

**Conventions of the American job search**

Here is a short list of some of the conventions that you will be expected to adhere to in your job search. Some international students have to make an effort to adjust to these standards, since many of these expectations conflict with the values of other cultures.

***Self-promotion***

The interviewer will expect you to be assertive and to display confidence in openly discussing your goals and accomplishments. It is also normal to follow up on your interview with thank-you notes and telephone inquiries about the status of your application.

***Directness in communication***

You will be expected to give open and direct responses to the interviewer's questions. Eye contact with the interviewer and a relaxed posture are appropriate.

***Self-disclosure***

The interviewer will probably ask for personal descriptions of your experiences, hobbies, strengths, and weaknesses. You may also have to answer questions about your personality—for example, your leadership style.

***Career self-awareness***

You should be prepared to demonstrate a clear knowledge of your long-range career goals and how they relate to the job at hand.

***Individual responsibilities in finding employment***

You should use a wide variety of resources in finding and pursuing jobs. Your friends, family, and contacts, as well as professional associations, academic mentors, and the

## **“When in the hiring process do I reveal that I’m an international student?”**

*From a presentation by  
Adrienne Nussbaum,  
Assistant Dean for International Student Services,  
Boston College, 1999*

One of the most frequent and difficult questions that I am asked in my position as assistant dean for international student services at Boston College is “When and how should I tell a prospective employer that I am an international student?” There is certainly no easy or correct answer to this question. For example, I recently heard a representative from the human resources department of a multinational company state that she actually likes to see this information listed on the person’s resume so that she knows right from the start. I have to admit that I found this response quite surprising as it is not what I usually recommend to students! However, it just demonstrates that there are many approaches to how to handle this situation.

I’d like to take a few moments to share some of the advice that I tell my students on this subject. Let’s start with the “when.” I personally feel that it is not necessary to list your nationality on your resume. An astute employer may in fact deduce that you are a foreign national based on where you received your education or the location of past work experiences, but you do not necessarily want to draw attention to this fact at this early stage of the process. Your goal, of course, is to get past the initial screening and be invited for an interview. Some employers have a policy of not hiring foreign nationals and strictly adhere to it, but many start with that attitude and may be convinced otherwise when given the chance. You need to give them that chance.

On the other hand, you also do not want to wait until your third or fourth interview to bring it up. I personally know of a student who lost a job offer because he waited too long. American employers value honesty and directness, and if they feel you have been hiding something from them, they won’t trust you. They also might then come to think that your immigration status is a bigger “problem” than it actually is and therefore not want to bother. I usually recommend that students address the issue in either their first or second interview, once they have had the opportunity to “sell themselves” and feel that the employer is potentially interested in hiring them.

As for the “how” to bring it up, this is absolutely critical to your success in securing a position. As I mentioned earlier, there are employers who absolutely won’t hire foreign nationals, there are employers who do it routinely, but the majority falls somewhere in the middle. They simply do not know what is involved in the process and it is your responsibility to “educate” them. It is therefore crucial that you have complete and accurate knowledge of your options and can communicate them to an employer in a clear and confident manner. If you simply say, “I don’t really know what has to be done,” most employers are not going to take the time to find out.

Most international students on F-1 student visas are eligible for 12 months of “practical training” upon completion of their studies without any job offer or letter from an employer. Therefore, you can start by explaining to your potential employer that you have a one-year employment authorization that requires absolutely no work on their part.

As for discussing the H-1, I do not want to turn this into an immigration lecture, but what I can tell you is that there are many myths and misunderstandings out there on the part of employers about the H-1 visa. They often confuse it with the process of applying for permanent residency and getting a “green card.” Once again, it is your responsibility to dispel those myths. I tell students to avoid using the word “sponsor” when talking about an H-1 because this term is often associated with green cards. Instead, use the phrase, “petition for an H-1.” You should also explain that employers are NOT required to show that there are no U.S. citizens available who can do the job, but simply that you meet their minimum qualifications. This small fact will often open the door to further discussion.

If the employer does not have someone on staff who is familiar with the H-1 process, it is generally advisable to hire an immigration attorney, not because it is required but because he or she processes these applications routinely and knows exactly what the immigration service is looking for. A minor mistake can cause delays of weeks or even months in the process during which you will be losing salary. The legal fee associated with applying for an H-1 visa usually runs (in the Boston area) from \$1,800 to \$2,000. You can often negotiate with your employer who will pay the fee; if necessary, offer to pay it yourself. It is an investment in your future, and you will make up the money in no time. The process usually takes about six to eight weeks, so be sure to leave plenty of time on your practical training so you do not fall “out of status” or have a gap in your employment eligibility.

Lastly, don’t forget that you should not try to hide the fact that you are an international student, but rather you should be proud of it. It is an asset, not a burden! International students bring with them many skills and experiences that set them apart from American students. They often know more than one language, have been exposed to other cultures and systems, are mature, flexible, adaptable, and deal well with change and ambiguity, just by virtue of having come to the U.S. to study. These are all qualities that are sought after by employers. Highlight your special and unique background! It will make you stand out from the crowd.

Please remember that all of this is simply one person’s advice from having worked with international students for the past 16 years. Ask another adviser and you will probably get other opinions! If you haven’t already, I strongly recommend that you visit your own international student office and learn as much as you can about practical training and H-1s. Good luck!

Career Services Center, are all useful resources in your job search. Networking is an important part of the job search process.

### ***Informality in the interview process***

The interview environment is often quite congenial. Some joking and a free exchange of information are acceptable.

### ***Punctuality***

You should arrive 5 to 15 minutes before your appointment.

### ***Effective letters of application and resumes***

Your resume should be one page long and error-free. It should be a concise and attractive outline of your relevant job experience, skills, accomplishments, and academic credentials. It will be personalized to reflect your qualifications and professional interests.

### ***Preparation about the organization***

You should obtain as much information as possible about the job and organization before the interview and demonstrate an awareness of the organization's specific needs and expectations in your letter of application and during your interview.

## **Types of interviews**

Several kinds of interviews are commonly used by American employers. You should be familiar with these types:

### ***“Tell me about yourself” interview:***

In this type of interview, the first question from the interviewer is “Tell me about yourself,” and the follow-up questions are all derived from your answer to this first question. This is a highly unstructured interview.

**How to prepare:** Think about what three or four things you would want the interviewer to know if this were the only question in the interview. Be prepared to summarize your work history, career goals, and other relevant information.

### ***Highly structured interview:***

Sometimes the recruiter has a fixed list of questions that are asked of all the interviewees. You can tell when you are in a highly structured interview because the recruiter may frequently refer to his or her question sheet to decide what to ask next. Also, the interviewer is unlikely to probe your answers or ask related questions.

**How to prepare:** Know before you go into the interview what you want the interviewer to know about you and plan to emphasize those points during the interview. Once in the interview, listen to each question carefully to under-

stand what explicit and implicit question is being asked. You can often gauge the kind of candidate the company is looking for from the questions asked. If at the end of the interview there are some important things that the interviewer has not asked about, say, “I’d like to point out a couple of other important items in my background that we have not yet had an opportunity to discuss.”

### ***Stress interview:***

In this type of interview, the interviewer deliberately introduces some stress to see how you respond. For example, the interviewer may ask your opinion about a controversial subject and then disagree with you.

**How to prepare:** Your best preparation is to anticipate when an interviewer will use a stress interview. If the job for which you are interviewing is “stressful” or demands that you regularly think on your feet, the interviewer may use this interview to test you. Stay calm, don’t take it personally, and remember that *how* you answer is more important than *what* you answer.

### ***Group interview:***

Many companies are now using group or panel interviews as part of their process. It is more efficient to have several people interview you at one time rather than individually.

**How to prepare:** Ask ahead of time who will be conducting the interview. Remember during the interview to speak to all the people on the interview panel and not just the person who asked you the question.

### ***Telephone interview:***

Some organizations resort to telephone interviews for screening purposes, either to reduce a too-large pool of highly qualified candidates or when geographic distance precludes an in-person interview until the final stages.

**How to prepare:** Schedule your interview for a time when you will be fresh and undistracted. Try to imagine a person on the other end of the phone to make the conversation feel more personal so that you can convey warmth and congeniality in your voice.

### ***Inexperienced interview:***

If the interviewer has not had much experience interviewing, you may notice that the pace of the interview is uneven. The inexperienced interviewer may not know how to take the lead in the interview and may let you control the content. This interviewer might also ask illegal questions simply because he or she is unfamiliar with employment law.

**How to prepare:** Use the situation to your advantage! The interview is likely to be more informal, which will give

you more opportunity to talk about your selling points. Also, since these interviewers are likely to be very familiar with the job (after all, they are inexperienced because they are not professional interviewers!), ask them technical questions about the position.

### **Stages of the interview**

#### ***Icebreaker:***

A good interviewer will begin with a few minutes of small talk to help you relax and to get a sense of your personality. Even though this may be a conversation about things completely unrelated to the job, this is still an important part of the interview. The interviewer is getting his or her first impression of you, and this is a chance for you to develop rapport with the interviewer. Remember, the interview begins the moment you introduce yourself and shake hands.

#### ***Personal qualifications and interest in the position:***

The adept interviewer will move subtly from a casual exchange to a more specific level of questions. Now he or she will begin to probe your background with “when, where,

and why” questions. Although the interviewer is asking the questions at this point, you can usually control the course of the interview with your answers. Make sure you get across what you want to, including character traits they can’t ask you about directly (e.g., integrity, dependability). You want to be conversational but concise.

#### ***Organization and position:***

Once the interviewer has a good sense of your skills and interests, he or she will begin to talk with you about the company and the specific position for which you are interviewing.

#### ***Candidate questions:***

The interviewer should leave a few minutes at the end of the interview to answer your questions about the company and position.

#### ***Close and follow-up:***

At the end of the interview, ask the interviewer, “Do you need any additional information?” Make sure you are clear about the next step in the interview process and when you can expect to hear from the organization. Ask the recruiter for his or her business card. Send a typed thank-you

### **Frequent interviewee questions**

(Only ask a question if the answer will influence your decision on whether to take a job.)

- How much travel is normally expected?
- Do employees normally work many hours of overtime?
- Can I progress at my own pace or is it structured?
- How frequently do you relocate professional employees?
- What is the average age of your first-level supervisor?
- Is the sales growth in the new product line sustainable?
- How much contact and exposure to management is there?
- At what level is an employee placed in the “exempt” status?
- Is it possible to move through the training program faster?
- When does the training program begin? Only in June?
- About how many individuals go through your program each year?
- What is the housing market for young married couples in (location) like?
- How much freedom is given and how much discipline is required of the new people?
- Would I have to cut my hair and/or trim my mustache?
- Do you recommend any night courses the first year?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- Is it possible to transfer from one division to another?
- How much decision-making authority is given after one year?
- Have any new product lines been announced recently?
- How soon after graduation would I be expected to report to work?
- How much input does the new person have on geographical location?
- In your firm, is this position more analytical or more people-oriented?
- In promotions, are employees ever transferred between functional fields?
- Does the firm provide employee discounts?
- Are cars provided to traveling personnel?
- Is the city difficult to adjust to compared to this campus community?
- What is the average age of top management?
- What is the normal routine of a (position) like?
- Is public transportation adequate?
- What is the average time it takes to get to \_\_\_ level in the career path?

(from *Career Planning Today*, 1981.)

letter to the interviewer within 24 hours of the interview.

### **How to approach the questions**

Think from the interviewer's perspective! When preparing to answer a question, ask yourself why the interviewer chose that question so that you can provide an answer that he or she is really interested in. In general, when you're asked about your personal or professional qualifications, don't answer with dry lists of your talents and skills. Instead, try to answer with "success stories" or anecdotes that illustrate those talents and skills.

### ***Behavioral interviewing and the STAR technique***

Many companies are now using an interview technique called *behavioral interviewing*. It is an approach that assumes that your past performance predicts your future work performance. You can usually tell a company is using a behavioral interviewing approach when you are asked questions about how you handled previous situations.

The biggest mistake most people make is not providing the interviewer enough detail or examples. The best way to answer behavioral interview questions and to provide enough detail is to use the STAR technique. STAR stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

Using the STAR technique, your responses might look something like this:

- Situation: While I was a member of the graduate student council, a controversial issue arose that divided the faculty and the grad students.
- Task: I had to get feedback from all the grad students in my department in order to gauge the range of opinions on the issue.
- Action: I organized a department-wide meeting of grad students and faculty to discuss the issue and any other serious issues that might come up.
- Result: Several students expressed their appreciation for having a formal forum to discuss the issue, and now the department hosts a similar meeting every semester. Because people felt like they could discuss their opinions, the issue caused a lot less rancor in our department than in most other departments.

The STAR technique, essential for behavioral interviews and useful in all interviews, will improve your overall per-

formance in several ways. It is a good format for talking about what you have actually done in the past rather than simply relying on your resume to convey the necessary information. It ensures that you will emphasize the results of your action, and most importantly, it forces you to be very thorough when presenting your experiences.

### ***Talking about your status as an international student***

It's difficult to know when to reveal to a potential employer your status as an international student. It's not necessary to list your nationality on your resume. It is unlikely that giving this information to an employer immediately will help your chances, and there is a possibility that it will make the employer less likely to consider you. On the other hand, you don't want to wait too long before telling the employer about your status, because the employer might think that you have something to hide or that your status is a bigger problem than it really is. There's no universal agreement about when you should discuss this issue with an employer, but a good rule of thumb is to address it in either your first or your second interview. At this stage of the job search, you have attracted the employer's attention and your position is more secure than it is at the very beginning of the search.

An equally important issue is what to say about your status. Most employers are not averse to hiring foreign nationals, but they don't have a good idea of what is involved in the process. It is your responsibility to have complete and accurate knowledge of your options so that you can communicate them to the employer in a clear and confident manner. If your employer doesn't know what a practical training extension is or the difference between an H-1 visa and a green card, you must be able to explain these issues. This will benefit both you and the employer.

Whatever you do, don't try to hide your status from a potential employer. Your background is not a liability; it's an asset! Most international students bring with them skills and experiences that set them apart from American students. They often know more than one language, have been exposed to other cultures and systems, are mature, flexible, and adaptable, and deal well with change and ambiguity, just by virtue of having come to the U.S. to study. All of these qualities are sought after by employers. Your unique background sets you apart from the crowd; use it to your advantage!

## Common cultural barriers to the job search

### *U.S. Employer Expectations*

### *Conflicting Values of Another Culture*

#### Self Promotion:

Assertiveness, openly discussing accomplishments.  
Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries about application, thank-you notes, etc.).

Unless presented as part of a group activity, citing achieved goals, accomplishments, and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving, and too individualistic.

Asking employers directly about status of application is rude.

#### Directness in Communication:

Open and direct responses to questions.  
Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture, and other appropriate nonverbal behavior.

Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g., employer, interviewer), is disrespectful.

Appearance of criticism must be avoided to save face.

#### Self Disclosure:

Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths, weaknesses.  
Answers to questions related to personality (e.g., leadership style, problem-solving abilities).

Personal questions about likes, dislikes, etc. are considered an invasion of privacy and are discussed only with close friends and family.

#### Career Self-Awareness:

Demonstrating knowledge of self, career goals, and how they relate to the job.  
Discussion of long-range career goals, company assigns work responsibilities.  
Individual must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available.

Questions about role in a company indicate potential disloyalty.

Jobs are assigned by government or family.

#### Individual Responsibilities in Finding Employment:

Use of wide variety of resources in identifying jobs (friends, family, contacts, associations, career services, academic mentors, etc.).  
Networking

Jobs are found through government or family.

Dependency relationships in job search are fostered. One resource (e.g. academic advisor, employment agent) will find work for job seeker.

#### Informality in the Interview Process:

Congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking, exchange of information.

Sitting with a person of higher status requires deference. The job applicant is very polite and does not ask any questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer's position. Handshaking, touching, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate.

#### Punctuality:

Arrive 5–15 minutes before appointment.

Personal relationships are more important than time. Anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours lateness from agreed meeting time is not insulting.

#### Effective Letters of Application and Resumes:

One page, error-free, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experience, skills, accomplishments, and academic credentials. Personalized to reflect each individual's strengths and capabilities.

Resumes are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion qualifications and professional interests.

#### Individual Equality:

Race, sex, age should not affect interview relationship.

Males are expected to assume dominance in interactions with females. Younger persons defer to older persons.

#### Preparation about Organization:

Obtain as much information as possible about the company prior to the interview. Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application and during interview.

Research about the job and organization before the interview may indicate excessive and undesirable initiative or independence.

*Note:* These factors are not indigenous to one particular society, but represent a cross-section of countries and continents.

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

## Frequently asked questions

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) by international students was compiled by the Career Services Center staff. We hope that you find the answers helpful. If you are interested in participating in the campus recruiting process described below, you must register on OwlTRAK, the online tool used by career services. For additional information on how to register, contact Career Services at 713-348-4055 or go to our website at <http://www.rice.edu/projects/careers> and click on the MonsterTRAK.com icon.

*How do I find companies that are willing to hire international students?*

The best way is by talking to other international students and Rice alumni who were international students. Those organizations that have hired international students for summer or full-time positions in the past are very likely to continue to hire them. If a company is participating in the Campus Recruiting Program at the Career Services Center, you may search the online database to see if they indicate that they will hire individuals with practical training.

*What do I do when I know a company has hired international students in the past, but now indicates they no longer do so?*

Companies often change their hiring practices. However, it is always good to find out the real story. Alumni currently working for the organization are a good start. You may find that while the company no longer actively recruits international students, they will still hire international students in certain instances. A recruiter may not give out this information freely, but others within the organization may be more willing to share.

*If a company says they won't hire international students, should I still apply?*

If a company indicates in their material for the Campus Recruiting Program that they are not accepting applications from international students, you should not apply through the Career Services Center. However, if you are interested in that organization, find out if they have previously hired international students (see the first two questions above). If they have a history of hiring them, send a cover letter and resume directly to the contact listed with the Career Services Center. This letter should detail your qualifications and reasons for your interest in that company. Bring the letter by the Career Services Center for a critique. If a company indicates that they only hire U.S. citizens, they may be legally obligated to do so because of contracts with the government. Don't take it personally. There are many organizations that do hire international students, and with a little research, you can find them.

*Should I list my visa status on my resume or vita?*

Your visa status should not be included on your resume or vita. It is appropriate to mention your status in your cover letter. This, however, is not necessary. Your educational experience and work history will clearly display that you are an international student. Hiring organizations will ask the appropriate questions as the process continues. You should never lie about or try to hide your visa status, but there is no reason to make a big deal out of it either.

*Can the Career Services Center help me if I want to work in my home country?*

Career Services can definitely help you find work in your home country. Many companies that do not hire international students for work in the United States have operations elsewhere and are always looking to fill positions at those locations. The Career Library has directories and information that will help you find organizations with operations in your home country. The Career Services Center also receives notices for positions all over the world. Make an appointment to see a staff member and we can help you strategize and locate these opportunities.

*I've never had a job interview. What do I do?*

The best advice is to research and practice. The Career Services Center offers interviewing workshops, informational handouts, and many books on the subject. Included in the books and handouts are sample questions. Write out your possible answers and practice them in front of a mirror. We also offer mock interviews to practice your skills in an actual interview situation. You may schedule a mock interview with a staff member by calling the Career Services Center. You can request that this interview be videotaped. This will help you see your problem areas so you can work on them. Please let us know when you schedule the appointment if you wish it to be taped.

*How do I get involved with the Campus Recruiting Program?*

You must register with the Career Services Center to be involved with the Campus Recruiting Program. Simply visit the Career Services Center homepage at <http://www.rice.edu/projects/careers> for more information. After you register, you will get weekly announcements on recruiting events and changes.

*How do I find out what companies are coming to campus to interview, when I can turn in my resume, and when the companies are doing company presentations?*

All information concerning the Campus Recruiting Program and related events is listed on the Career Services Center homepage (see above). You can search by company, posting date, qualifications, and/or visa requirements. The best way to learn the system is to spend some time playing with it.