

Job Search Information for International Students

If you are an international student studying in the U.S., you are generally allowed to work in the U.S. within the terms and conditions of your visa. Finding employment can sometimes be challenging since the employment practices followed in the U.S. may be different from those followed in other countries, and some employers choose not to hire international students. However, many international students do secure employment and prospects continue to improve. According to the annual Job Outlook Survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the percentage of U.S. employers indicating plans to hire international students has increased from 23.4% in 2018 to 28.3% in 2019.

This information was developed by Engineering Career Services for international students interested in co-ops, internships and full-time employment in the U.S. This information is a supplement to the Student Guide to Employment, which can be found at <http://www.engineering.iastate.edu/ecs/students/the-employment-process/>

Rules and Regulations

VISA Regulations

It is very important that you understand and adhere to the terms of your visa. The ISU International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) is your best resource for information and you must have their approval before starting employment in the U.S. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforces federal laws governing border control, customs, trade and immigration and is also a good source of information. Since information about working in the U.S. (including CPT, OPT and the H1-B visa) is clearly explained on the websites of these organizations, it will not be repeated here. Individuals with a record of extraordinary ability, may want to evaluate employment-based immigration with an EB-1 or EB-2 visa. See the Resources section of this document for website links.

Minimum and Preferred Qualifications

‘Required Qualifications’ (Sometimes called ‘Minimum Qualifications’) on a job posting are the minimum amounts of education or experience and the minimum level of knowledge, skills, abilities, licensures, certifications and other job-related requirements that must be met for a candidate to be considered for a position. If you don’t meet the minimum qualifications, don’t bother applying for the position. If an employer were to hire you instead of someone who applied and met the minimum qualifications, they would risk a lawsuit. ‘Preferred Qualifications’ are qualifications that the employer will take into consideration when evaluating applicants, but not having them won’t automatically disqualify you from consideration. You should apply to positions even when you don’t meet the preferred qualifications.

Pay Requirements

In addition to many other aspects of employment, the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act requires employers to pay individuals at least minimum wage for the services they perform. In other words, you cannot volunteer to do work for a company simply to gain experience. Additionally, engineering internships in the “for-profit” private sector will most often be viewed as employment, and therefore, must be paid.

U.S. Employment Practices

Resume and Curriculum Vitae

In the U.S. a concise resume is used to apply for employment unless the position is with a research or educational institution where they may ask for a curriculum vita instead. A resume highlights your skills and knowledge as it summarizes your education, employment, other skill-building activities and accomplishments. Personal information such as age, marital status, race, religion, visa status or a photo should never be included. [See the educational materials on our website for more information on resume development.](#)

A curriculum vita (CV or Vita) is a detailed listing of your educational achievements, publications, presentations, professional activities and honors. The curriculum vita is longer than the resume; it is generally two pages or more. They are most often necessary only if you are seeking a teaching, research, clinical or scientific position.

Do not include information about your work authorization status on the resume or CV. Be open and honest about your work authorization status but it is better to include this information in your elevator speech or cover letter after you have gotten the employer interested in your qualifications.

Employment Search

In some cultures, family connections are essential for securing employment. At some universities, placement offices assign individuals to employers following graduation. At ISU, the career services offices work to make job seekers aware of employment opportunities and to facilitate connections between students/alumni and employers. It is left up to the individual to use websites such as CyHire and take advantage of career fairs and other networking opportunities to connect with employers.

Self-Promotion during the Search for Employment

During the employment search process, individuals are expected to talk about their skills and accomplishments. Some students find this difficult because humility is highly valued in their culture. U.S. employers are strongly result orientated, so it is important to get comfortable talking about accomplishments that demonstrate the successful application of skills. It is often helpful to start by sharing credit for an accomplishment with others but then you must focus on

your individual contributions to the effort. For example, you might say, “I was part of a very successful team effort. I contributed by...”

Employer Policy on Hiring International Students

Some employers are happy to consider employing all well-qualified individuals while others have policies of hiring only individuals who are authorized to work in the U.S. on a permanent basis. When an employer doesn't want to consider employing international students, it is usually for one of the following reasons:

- They have never hired an international student and think that the process will be costly and time consuming.
- They are looking for a long-term employee and don't want to risk hiring an employee that may not be selected to receive an H1-B visa.
- They are a popular company and their applicant pools contain many well-qualified individuals who are authorized to work in the U.S. on a permanent basis.
- They are using their internship program to evaluate individuals for full-time positions, and don't want to risk selecting an intern who they won't be able to hire full-time.

The information in the next section may help you overcome some of these obstacles.

Best Practices for Securing Employment in the U.S.

Use CyHire to Identify Employers Willing to Consider International Students for Employment

CyHire can be used to locate employment opportunities, apply for positions, schedule on-campus interviews, learn about career-related events, and more. In CyHire, you can narrow your search for jobs by companies who are willing to hire international students:

Under the *Jobs* tab, click on *See All Jobs* (under the Search button):

- Click on *More Filters*
- Select your major by clicking *Majors/Concentrations*
- Choose the appropriate *Position Type*. *Experiential Education* is intern or co-op work experience.
- Under *Work Authorization* choose: 'Temporarily authorized by student visa to work without sponsorship' and/or 'Requires immediate visa sponsorship to work in the U.S.')
- Click *Apply*
- Tip: After searching, click the *Create Job Alert* button. You can then choose to have the system run this search a regular basis and email you the results. Simply select how often you would like to run the search by clicking on *Job Alerts* (under the Search button).

Focus on Employment Opportunities where you are Likely to be the Most Qualified Person in the Applicant Pool

Employers with strong name recognition generally attract many well-qualified applicants for positions. In these situations, employers will usually choose to interview U.S. citizens and permanent residents since they are more likely to become long-term employees. The exception being multinational companies or exporters that have an interest in special language skills or cultural knowledge. International students generally have more success when they apply for positions with smaller companies that attract less attention from job seekers. If the company happens to be in a rural area, the applicant pool is often even smaller. For internships, target employers that are more interested in using the skills and energy that interns contribute towards getting projects done than employers that use their internship programs to recruit for full-time positions. The Work Authorization selected by an employer in CyHire is a good indication, but sometimes the only way to know the primary purpose of an employer's internship program is to talk with the employer. Be prepared to advocate for your employment (see next section).

Advocate for Your Employment

Since some employers may not understand employment law associated with student visas, it is important that you are able to explain these terms and advocate for your employment. Do not begin a conversation or letter with a discussion about you being an international student. This discussion should come when the employer brings it up or you are offered a position. Your first goal is to convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the position. When the subject is raised, a few of the points you may want to mention to employers include:

- Students who maintain F-1 or J-1 visa status can be employed as interns in a position related to their major. Engineering students on F-1 visas are eligible for up to 12 months of Curricular Practical Training before completing their degree, and an additional 36 months of Optional Practical Training following graduation if employed with a company that is a member of "E-Verify" (12 months otherwise). Students with a J-1 visa are usually eligible to work up to 18 months following graduation.
- All that is needed from the employer is a written offer of employment. The student and the ISU ISSO handles all of the paperwork.
- Generally, F-1 and J-1 students are exempt from Social Security and Medicare contributions, which saves an organization money.

If any circumstance in your life is likely to lead to a change in your immigration status, such as marriage to a U.S. citizen, you will want to mention this to potential employers.

You may be able to persuade an employer to consider you for employment by assuring them that:

- You are authorized to work for them for a significant period of time without the need for them to do anything except provide a written offer of employment.
- You have skills that will allow you to do the work better than your peers.

- Communication will not be an issue and your additional language skill could be useful to the employer.
- You will be able to assimilate into the U.S. business culture and can cite examples of team integration.
- It will be an enjoyable and interesting cultural experience for all involved.

Market Yourself Effectively

Attend Engineering Career Services career development presentations and follow the advice offered by ECS in the Ten Step Guide to Employment. After you have prepared a resume or CV based on U.S. standards, have its effectiveness evaluated by Engineering Career Services. Be sure to highlight skills that your target employers are seeking and those that set you apart from other students/alumni with your major.

Network and Develop Professional Relationships

Networking is the most effective technique for securing employment. Developing relationships takes time, so start attending career fairs, information sessions and other networking events early in your college career. When you establish a positive professional relationship with a recruiter, they will be more willing to recommend you for employment. If you hit it off with a hiring manager, they might decide to add you to their team.

Resources

- Engineering Career Services at ISU – <http://www.engineering.iastate.edu/ecs>
- CyHire - <https://shibboleth-iastate-csm.symplicity.com/sso/>
- International Student Services Office - <https://www.isso.iastate.edu/>
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement information on Employment - <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/employment>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provides information on regulations related to international students and working in the U.S. - <https://www.uscis.gov/>
- Employment-Based (EB) Visas - <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/permanent-workers/employment-based-immigration-first-preference-eb-1>
- International Student - http://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life/working-in-the-usa/