

# International Student FAQs

## Seeking Internships & Jobs in the U.S.

*Prepared by The Center for Careers & Internships (CCI) for a Middlebury College presentation  
given by Ursula Olender—November 2016*

The job search for international students requires careful planning and forethought. You have more factors to consider than your peers who are U.S. citizens or U.S. lawful permanent residents. If you want to work in the U.S. after you graduate, you should start exploring your options early.

### How do I know if an employer hires international applicants?

- **Read the job description very carefully.** In MOJO, most postings indicate whether or not an employer will sponsor a visa. If the posting doesn't say anything about work authorization, see the options below, each with advantages and disadvantages.
- **Call the employer** (typically the Human Resources Department) and find out. Advantage: You learn about any relevant policies and will not waste time applying if they tell you they don't hire international students. Disadvantage: If they tell you that they don't hire international students, you remove yourself from the pool before they ever have a chance to see your application materials or meet you. Occasionally employers make exceptions for outstanding international candidates.
- **Connect with alumni who work at the organization** to find out. Advantage: It's possible that they have an "inside scoop" on the hiring policies or can direct you to the best person for your questions. If they already know you well, they may choose to advocate for you as an applicant, despite the restrictions of your work authorization. Disadvantage: The alumna/us may not be familiar with the hiring policies and may misinform you.
- **Use the MiddNet and LinkedIn** to see if any alumni who were international students work or have worked for the employer.
- **Apply and find out during the hiring process.** Advantage: Your application will be evaluated on your merits alone, and the employer will have a chance to meet and get to know you. You will have an opportunity to make an impression before you tell them about your international visa status and work authorization specifications. Disadvantage: You might waste your time and the employer's time by applying if they have a firm policy not to hire international students. *See the question below* "When should I tell my potential employer about my work authorization status?"

### If a job posting says the employer does not sponsor visas, what are my options?

- **Do not apply.** Advantage: You do not waste time on an application that will most likely be discarded. Disadvantage: You remove yourself from the applicant pool before they ever have a chance to see your application materials or meet you.
- **Contact the employer** to see if the posting is accurate and ask if there are any exceptions. Advantage: If there are any errors or they make exceptions, you will learn more about it. During your conversation, you may be able to make a good impression

and educate them more about hiring international students if they are not already familiar. Disadvantage: If you learn that they are firm about their work authorization requirements, you will be removed from the pool of applicants before they ever have a chance to see your application materials or meet you.

- **Apply anyway.** Employers who state that they do not hire international students may have a variety of reasons why this is the case, and your response will vary depending on the reason. *See the question below “What are the reasons an employer may not want to hire an international student?”* Advantage: Your application will be evaluated on your merits alone, and the employer will have a chance to meet and get to know you. If they think you are a great candidate despite your work authorization, they *may* be willing to make an exception. Or if their reasons for not hiring international applicants are due to a lack for knowledge about what is required, you have the chance to educate them on what they would need to do to hire you. Disadvantage: The employer may be upset that you wasted their time if they have a firm policy not to hire an international applicant. You also may have prevented another applicant from moving forward in the hiring process.

## **What are the reasons an employer may NOT want to hire an international student?**

- **Financial and legal obligations.** Perhaps the most common reason employers do not want to hire international students is a fear of doing something illegal or a concern for a large financial commitment. Employers may not understand what is required to hire an international student and might assume that it will require a lot of extra paperwork, fees, and additional legal obligations.
- **Concerns over language ability.** Until they meet you, employers may be concerned that your language abilities are not strong enough to communicate effectively with clients, co-workers, and supervisors.
- **Concerns over cultural awareness.** The dynamics of the workplace in the U.S. might be different than your home country, and employers may worry about your ability to adjust to your surroundings.
- **Return on investment.** Ideally your employer will invest a substantial amount of energy in your training, and so they may prefer to hire someone who can contribute to the organization or company over the long run. If they are not able or willing to petition on your behalf for an H-1B visa, your commitment to them is limited to the length of your OPT or OPT STEM extension.
- **Commitment to American workers.** Given that many Americans struggle to find work, some employers may feel that they should provide opportunities to applicants from the U.S. first and foremost.

## **When/how should I tell my prospective employer about my work authorization as an international student?**

If the employer has not asked about your work authorization status, you will have to decide when to discuss it with them. There are many approaches to informing an employer. You can mention it in your cover letter or discuss it with a recruiter or the hiring manager, but most advisors recommend waiting until the end of the first, and possibly the second, interview. This gives you a chance to “sell yourself” and your strengths and abilities and gives the employer a chance to get to know you and (hopefully) get excited about what you might offer to the team. The longer they have to start visualizing you in the role, the less likely they will want to give you up, despite your work authorization status. However, if you wait until the second interview, there is a risk that employers who do not hire international students may get upset and feel that you have wasted their time.

Here are some helpful “dos and don’ts” to keep in mind when explaining your international visa status and work authorization options:

- **DO:**
  - Prepare! Get familiar with your status and work authorization options currently and long-term. Be ready to explain the options to the employer in case they are not aware. Focus on what the employer would need or NOT need to do in order to make each option happen.
  - Avoid using the word “sponsor” when talking about H-1B visas as it is often associated with “green cards”/lawful permanent residence, a much more complicated, expensive process. Use the word “petition” instead.
  - Emphasize the strengths that you offer as an international student.
- **DON’T:**
  - Expect the employer to know everything about visa status and work authorization.
  - Hide the truth or be dishonest about your status.
  - Refer to your status as a “problem” or “issue”. Frame the work authorization options as “opportunities” or another way to make it seem more positive.
  - Hide the fact that you’re an international student! Be proud of who you are and all that you have to offer.

## **What questions can the employer ask about my work eligibility in the U.S.?**

Some employers may ask you about your work authorization before you have a chance to tell them about it. By law, they must frame their questions in a way that does not discriminate against you based on your nationality or citizenship status.

- **Illegal questions:**
  - What country are you from? Are you from \_\_\_\_\_(country)?
  - Are you a U.S. citizen? (unless the position is only open to U.S. citizens as a government, government-contracted, or otherwise lawfully restricted position).

- **Appropriate questions:**
  - Are you legally eligible to work in the U.S.?
  - Will you now or in the future require visa sponsorship for employment at this company?
  - What is the basis of your current work authorization? When does this authorization expire?

If the employer asks you an illegal question, it does not necessarily mean that they are discriminating against you – employers may not be well-informed about these laws. However, if you believe that the employer is using discriminatory hiring policies, contact the Center for Careers and Internships and we try to help you figure out your next steps which many include referring you to other resources.

### **Are there certain employers or industries that hire international students more frequently?**

Certain employers have a history of hiring international applicants more frequently. Generally speaking, *though not always*, they tend to be either large companies/organizations with ample financial and human resources or industries that have a hard time finding the talent they need among domestic applicants. If the industry or employer that you are most interested in does not typically hire international students, it's important to start networking with people in the company or industry early on in your time at Middlebury.

### **How can I highlight the positive aspects of my “internationalism”?**

It is your responsibility to highlight what you have to offer to the employer that is unique from domestic applicants. Here are some general ideas, but you may have more specific characteristics you want to highlight based on your own unique personality, skills, and experiences.

- **A global perspective on the work they do.** You may offer an entirely different viewpoint on an issue than a domestic employee based on your own unique background and experiences. Perhaps you can help the employer zoom out to see the bigger picture of global markets and trends or zoom in on the specific practices of a particular country or region.
- **Motivation, maturity, and adaptability.** In order to study and live in the U.S., most likely you have worked hard, taken risks, and left behind the comforts of home. This persistence combined with the adaptability and maturity required to survive and thrive in a new and foreign environment speaks volumes about the probability you will do well in a work setting.
- **Diversity and cross-cultural fluency.** Knowledge of multiple languages and cultures can add a depth and awareness to the employer's team. You can also help bridge cultural gaps after studying in the U.S. and living for many years in your home country(ies).