January 2014

Dear International Student:

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation. Career Services is here to assist you as you prepare to enter the world of work or enter graduate or professional school. The purpose of this handbook is to assist international students in gaining necessary job-seeking skills to secure positions in business and industry in the United States.

As you may realize, the job market and economy are very tight right now and finding employment in the United States is very challenging, particularly for international students. Fewer employers are willing to hire international students for post practical training because they are unable to sponsor them beyond that time. A lot of money goes into training new employees and with a tight job market, employers are choosing their employees with that in mind. Even though it may be difficult for an international student to find employment in the United States at this time, it is not totally impossible. However, it is crucial for international students to begin the job search process much earlier and possibly seek internships and part-time employment in their majors to help make themselves more attractive to employers.

We hope you find this handbook useful. We wish you the best of luck with your upcoming graduation and years ahead. If you have any further questions, stop by and see us at 102 Sanford Hall. You can also give us a call at 755-2038 or e-mail us at career@bemidjistate.edu.

Sincerely,

Margie Thomas Giauque  Nancy Haugen
Director         Associate Director

Upon request this document can be made available in alternate formats. Please contact Career Services at (218) 755-2038 for assistance. For TTY communication, contact the Minnesota Relay Service at (612) 297-5353 or 1-800-627-3529 and ask them to contact us at Career Services at (218) 755-2038.
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Campus Contacts

Cherish Hagen-Swanson, Director of International Program Center
Deputy 103 755-4096

Mary Carlson, Administrative Assistant, International Program Center
Deputy 103 755-3877

Jill Stackhouse, International Student Organization Advisor
Tamarak Hall 755-3350

Records and Registration
Deputy 101 755-2020

Career Services
Sanford 102 755-2038

Advising Success Center
Sanford 101 755-4226

Student Center for Health and Counseling
Cedar Hall 755-2053

Residential Life
Walnut Hall 755-3750

Writing Resource Center
Hagg Sauer 110 755-3919
How Can We Help?

Welcome to Bemidji State University’s Career Services! As an international student, you face different obstacles and often have different concerns than native students. This may be particularly true if you are trying to secure employment in the United States. We’re here to help. In this booklet you will find information on American social customs, immigration, work permits, resumes, cover letters, interviewing and more to aid you in seeking employment. Below is a brief explanation of the services offered in Career Services. As always, we invite you to contact Career Services to make an appointment with a member of our professional staff to discuss career concerns, resumes, job search, etc.

Career Services Advice

1. **Start early** realize that the process to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) takes 90-100 days.
2. **Networking**—includes former students from your home country, professors, alumni, fellow students and their families, employers at job fairs and others who you are in contact with. Ask people “Who do you know who would know anything about….”
3. **English language skills matter**. Improve your English speaking skills by interacting with native English speaking students, joining clubs and organizations, volunteering to do presentations whenever possible, speak English with your classmates from your home country, etc.
4. Tap into the **Hidden Job Market** by networking with companies before they post openings. Researching and contacting companies that operate in your home language region can be done through the consulate, by connecting with local Chambers of Commerce and by looking at directories of companies that export to your country.

Career Services Offers:

- **Career Services Website**: We maintain an informative website that includes information on virtually all Career Services related activities and events. It also includes employment information including: BSUCareers, on-campus interviews, Job Fair information, internship information, international job search links, and more.
- **BSUCareers—Resume Referral System**. Students can upload their resume, search for internships and full time employment and sign up for on-campus interviews through this system. Your resume must be pre-approved by Career Services staff prior to uploading. Call 755-2038 for an appointment or check our calendar for our Resumes on the Run times.
- **Individual Counseling**: Meet individually with a counselor in areas of choosing a major, career exploration, resume/cover letter critique and job search. Please call to set up an appointment for individual counseling.
- **Assessment Tools**: Focus2 is a comprehensive online program specifically designed to assist individuals with career-related self-assessment, gathering information on corresponding career areas and graduate or professional school options. You can access the Focus2 program by logging in to MyBSU and the link will be on the left hand side.
StrengthsQuest is another inventory utilized in the career decision making process. You were given access to this assessment during your FYE class. Please contact Career Services to make an appointment with a professional staff member to discuss the results of either of these assessments.

- **Career Resource Library:** Specific to International students in our library is the *Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries*. Computer terminals are available for career related projects and for Internet access. The Career Resource Library is open Monday through Friday 8:00 to 4:30.

- **On-campus Interviewing:** Students may meet with a variety of recruiters in settings ranging from individual and mock interviews to information meetings to display tables. Employers begin coming to campus early in the fall semester to recruit for full-time and internship positions. You must have your resume critiqued and uploaded in BSUCareers in order to participate in interviews. Also, *Interview Stream*, practice interview system is available to use with your own webcam (or in Career Services if you don’t have a webcam.)

- **Assistance with creating a “self-managed credential file”:** A credential file consists of a resume, letters of recommendation and a transcript and is used by juniors seeking internships and seniors seeking full time employment.

- **Job and Career Fairs:** Career Services is involved with Tri-College Career Fair held in the fall in Fargo, ND, MN Government and Non-Profit Career Fair held in the fall in Minneapolis, MN, Job and Internship Fair held in February in Minneapolis, MN and Minnesota Education Job Fair, held in April in Minneapolis, MN.

- **Career Events:** Major and Career Expo, Grad Prep for Seniors (GPS)

- **Workshops:** Workshops are scheduled for resume and cover letter preparation, interviewing, finding internships, job seeking skills, etc.
American Social Customs

The United States of America has a population of about 295 million people and an area of just over 3 and a half million square miles (approximately 9,000,000 square kilometers). It is the fourth most populous country in the world. Our citizens come from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. That’s why the U.S.A. has often been called “the great melting pot.”

You may have noticed that Americans have many social customs. Below is a brief explanation of just a few that are commonly recognized - you may already have noticed these or you may notice other customs.

Greetings: “Hello” and “How are you?” are typical American greetings. It is common for Americans to say these things even to strangers. Usually the American who greets you in this way does not expect much of a response, but not to answer would be considered rude. Americans will often shake hands with strangers or with friends they have not seen for a while.

Informality: Americans tend to be informal and rarely use terms of respect, such as sir. In more formal settings, such as business meetings, Americans may seem more reserved and will sometimes prefer titles and last names.

Time and Appointments: Americans place a high value on time and try to use it efficiently. Since time is so valuable, Americans are normally very punctual for appointments. Americans demonstrate respect for other people by calling to inform them if they will be late or must cancel an appointment.

Conversations: For most Americans, silence is uncomfortable and so “small talk,” or superficial conversation is usually preferred to quiet. Some common topics of American small talk include television programs, movies, sports, politics, and the weather (especially in Minnesota). Americans generally avoid talking about how much money they earn, how much they weigh, how old they are, or details of their personal lives.

Nonverbal Communication: Eye contact while talking is important to most Americans. Hand gestures such as waving, pointing, or motioning someone toward you are common. Making the letter “O” with the thumb and index finger while extending the fingers almost straight means “OK.” Holding the hand up and extending only the middle finger is a vulgar gesture of contempt for someone. Americans typically keep at least 1 1/4 to 2 feet (0.5-0.7 meters) of distance between themselves and others while talking. Close friends may hug or embrace. Women may sometimes greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, but men do not.

Sitting: At informal gatherings, Americans often do not care how they sit. This is usually not meant as a sign of disrespect, but rather as a way to communicate that the person is approachable. In more formal settings, such as during an interview or while in class, slouching or sitting with your feet propped up would be a sign of disrespect.

Eating: American meal times are often different than your normal meal times. Breakfast can be anytime from the time you awaken until approximately 10:00 am. The noon meal, sometimes called lunch can be eaten any time between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm. Dinner, or supper, is usually served between 5:00 and 7:00 pm. Meals are often served informally by passing around dishes of food. Some Americans say grace, or pray. Most meals are served with three utensils: a fork, a knife and a spoon.

Hygiene: Americans are very concerned about body odor. Both men and women will use all sorts of hygienic products so that they will not offend others with their natural smell. A similar attitude prevails about breath odor, which Americans mask with mouth washes after brushing their teeth, or using mint-flavored chewing gums or candies. Most Americans will bathe or shower at least daily.

Adapted from International Student Guidebook 1999-2000, University of Indianapolis.
CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE JOB SEARCH

U.S. EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

- assertiveness
- confidence in openly discussing goals, personal qualities and accomplishments
- follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries regarding application status, thank-you notes)
- appropriate dress/grooming/hygiene
- open and direct responses to questions
- eye contact with interviewer and relaxed posture
- appropriate space and other non-verbal behaviors

- personal descriptions of experience, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses
- answers to questions related to personality (e.g. leadership style, problem-solving abilities)

- demonstrating knowledge of self, career goals and how they relate to the job
- responsible for own career development
- discussion of long-range plans

- use of wide variety of resources for identifying jobs, friends, family contacts, professional journals and associations, career services, faculty
- networking

- concerned with image and professional style
- congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking, exchange of information

- arrive 5-10 minutes before interview appointment

- egalitarian attitude regarding wealth, social status
- gender does not affect interview relationship
- age is not a factor

CONFLICTING VALUES OF ANOTHER CULTURE

SELF-PROMOTION

- aggressiveness
- unless presented as part of group activity, citing accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving and too individualistic
- asking employer directly about status of application is rude
- appearance is not as important as technical expertise

COMMUNICATION

- directness is disrespectful
- eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g. employer, interviewer) is disrespectful
- body language of respect

SELF-DISCLOSURE

- personal questions about likes/dislikes, etc. are considered an invasion of privacy and are discussed only with close friends and family
- items unrelated to work are unimportant

CAREER SELF-AWARENESS

- jobs are sometimes available through government or family
- questions about role in a company indicates potential disloyalty
- company assigns work responsibilities; individual must be flexible to accept whatever is available

FINDING EMPLOYMENT

- many jobs are found through government or family
- dependency relationships in job search are fostered; one resource (e.g. academic advisor, employment agent) will find appropriate job

INTERVIEW PROCESS

- personal hygiene has an effect on professional and social relationships
- sitting with person of higher status requires deference; job applicant is polite and does not ask questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer

TIME ORIENTATION

- personal relationships are more important than time; anywhere from 15 min – 2 hr. late from agreed meeting time is not insulting

INDIVIDUAL EQUALITY

- show deference to people of greater wealth, older, higher social status
- males are expected to assume dominance in interactions with females
- younger persons defer to older ones
U.S. Employment: Challenges for International Students

By Caprice Lantz, Career Counselor at the University of Baltimore
(excerpts from articles posted on JobWeb.com-Career development and job search help for college graduates)

Many international students want to work in the United States after they graduate. According to U.S. immigration law, international students with F-1 visas are eligible to work full-time for one year after they graduate as part of their "practical training."

After their practical training, international students must be sponsored by an employer in order to continue working in the United States. International students have difficulty securing postgraduate employment. Reasons include:

Hiring Complexities
After international students complete practical training, employers must sponsor them to obtain an H1-B visa, which allows them to work in the U.S. for one to six additional years.

Hiring an international student is not as common, is more complicated, and less familiar than hiring an American. The process involves:

- petitioning the government for an H1-B,
- obtaining approval from the Labor Department,
- hiring a lawyer, and
- absorbing some fees.

For these reasons, some employers will not even interview, let alone hire, international graduates.

Perceived Lack of Commitment to the Job
Some employers are reluctant to hire international students because they fear international students will eventually want to return to their home countries. Employers do not want to invest time and money in training international students only to have them leave in a year's time.

Communication
Strong communication skills are critical for prospective employees. Employers are often concerned with international students' ability to communicate effectively with their clients and/or internal personnel.

Antimosity
Some Americans, and probably some employers, feel that by living and working in the U.S., international students are taking jobs away from Americans.

How to Find Job Openings

In some countries, people find jobs primarily through the government or family members. In the United States, self-reliance is more the rule, and it is important for everyone, including international students, to use a wide variety of resources to identify jobs.

About 20 percent of the jobs that exist in the United States are advertised in newspapers, trade magazines, or on the internet. The other 80 percent of job openings are in the "hidden" job market and are never advertised. These positions are filled by word of mouth. For this reason, it is important to contact as many people as possible to find out about job openings. This technique is called networking. Contacts include friends, classmates, neighbors, family members, professors, alumni, and community members.

Working for International Companies

The best employment prospects for international students may be with international companies. International students are great assets to global organizations desiring language skills, respect for diversity, and/or
knowledge of overseas economies. Your career center will have publications related to international employment available.

Internships

Students who lack experience in their career fields should complete one or more internships while working towards their degrees. Your career center assists students in locating internships at local companies in order to gain experience and build their resumes.

According to one recent report, more than 53 percent of international survey respondents received a job offer from the sponsoring American company after they completed an internship. Obtaining an internship is important not only in terms of resume building, but in terms of its potential to translate into a full-time job after graduation.

Approaching the Topic of H1-B Visas with Employers

Many employers are intimidated by the U.S. immigration process and are reluctant to sponsor H1-B visas, or simply have a policy against it.

Do not begin an employment interview or letter with an inquiry regarding H1-B sponsorship. Discussions about H1-B sponsorship should come later, either when the employer brings it up or when the applicant is offered a position.

The applicant's first task in an interview is to convince the employer of his/her suitability for the job. Only later, when an employer is close to making, or has made an offer, should the applicant raise the H1-B sponsorship issue.

Learn about the sponsorship process including hiring and paying for a lawyer. By explaining the simplicity of the sponsorship process, the applicant will increase the likelihood of getting hired.
Additional Advice for International Students

- **Market Yourself Positively**
  It is very important for international students to turn employers' objections into positives.

  By virtue of living and studying abroad, international students demonstrate tenacity and resourcefulness. It is important for them to tell employers about the challenges they faced in studying overseas and how they overcame them.

  International students should be prepared to tell employers how hiring them offers more advantages than disadvantages.

- **Choose a Major/Specialization In Demand**
  The demand for employees in technical fields, such as information technology and accounting, far outweighs the supply, therefore, international students who study these subjects may have more opportunities than those select majors in low-demand areas.

- **Be Flexible**
  International students may need to expand their job search by considering jobs outside their desired career.

  For example, an Information Technology major who would like to do web development may want to search for jobs in web development and other areas of information technology.

- **Patience and Persistence**
  Although finding employment as an international student can be challenging, it is not impossible. Each year the U.S. grants almost 200,000 H1-B visas.

Generally speaking, there are major differences between resumes for employers in the United States and resume formats for employers in other countries. These differences do not apply to all countries and do not attempt to account for individual differences or for changes over time.

**U.S. Resumes**

- Concise, attractive marketing tool—summarizes jobs, skills, accomplishments, and academic background relevant to employment objective.
- One to two pages maximum.
- Does not include age, marital status, race, or religion.
- May or may not include completion of military service depending upon whether it is relevant or makes the person a stronger candidate.

**International Resume**

- Chronologically details academic and formal work experience
- Sometimes two or more pages
- Sometimes includes age, marital status, race, and/or religion
- Sometimes includes completion of military service.
Resume Tips for International Students

- Introduce employers to foreign companies and schools by providing a frame of reference. For example:
  A $10 million marketing firm.
  One of the top five universities in China.
  Second largest technology manufacturer in Europe.
  MIT of Turkey.
  Nigerian version of McDonalds.
- Emphasize strong English skills on the resume. For example: "Translated written and spoken English on a daily basis for two years."
- Ensure that writing skills are up to American standards by taking courses that include writing.
- Make sure the resume is free from grammatical and spelling errors as well as awkward use of language.
- Have resume reviewed by a career counselor. Ask for explanations about necessary changes in order to ensure that the same mistakes will not happen again.
- Maintain up-to-date copies of the resume in the format and language of native countries to serve as back-up for employment in home countries or to pass on to contacts.
- Create a resume by following The Quick Resume Checklist.
- Meet with a counselor for a resume critique in order to achieve the best possible display of skills and background.

There are several major differences found between job interviews in the United States and job interviews in foreign countries.

Interview With a U.S. Company

- Be punctual. Arrive five to 15 minutes prior to appointment.
- Eye contact is expected and shows confidence.
- Interviewer styles vary. May begin with direct questions or minimal small talk.
- Interviewer may do most of the talking or may expect the candidate to do most of the talking.
- Questions regarding age, race, sex, and marital status are illegal.
- Expect direct questions regarding competency, experience.
- An open discussion of accomplishments and skills shows confidence.
- Show clear self-knowledge, career goals, and long-term plans. NOTE: An international student may find it important to be flexible, however, to initially obtain employment.
- Interviewer may expect immediate competency and look at each new employee for a two- to five-year commitment.
- Self-disclosure of strengths, weaknesses, personality, leadership style, problem-solving abilities, etc. may be appropriate.
- Researching the organization and demonstrating that knowledge during the Interview is expected. Shows initiative and interest.
- It is acceptable to ask an employer at the close of the interview where they are in the interview process and when the candidate can expect to hear back from them.
- Inquiring about the status of an application after the interview is acceptable and demonstrates interest in the position.
Interview With an International Company

- Personal relationships may be more important than time. Being late may not be a problem.
- Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status, may be disrespectful.
- Interviewers commonly start with small talk and look for information regarding character or personality.
- Interviewer may talk for the majority of the interview.
- Age, race, sex, or marital status may be issues in the interview. Males may be expected to dominate interactions with females. Younger people may be expected to show deference to older people.
- Expect indirect questions regarding competency, experience.
- Citing accomplishments and skills might be considered boastful, self-serving, or too individualistic.
- Jobs may be assigned by government or family. Questioning one's role in a company may be seen as disloyal. Companies sometimes assign work and expect individuals to accept what is available.
- Interviewer may not expect immediate competence and instead be looking for a long-term employee.
- Researching an organization in advance may show too much initiative and independence.
- Asking an employer during an interview where they are in the interview process and when you can expect to hear back from them may be seen as too forward.
- Inquiring about the status of an application after the interview may be seen as rude.

Interviewing Tips for International Students

- Enhance communication skills by:
  talking and speaking up in class,
  making presentations,
  making friends and talking with Americans,
  taking communication courses for credit,
  attending workshops at the career center,
  joining and participating in multinational clubs,
  watching television, and
  reading newspapers and academic publications.
- Study commonly asked interview questions; write answers to those questions; and practice your responses in front of a mirror as well as with friends.
- Schedule a mock interview with a career center counselor to receive feedback on interview skills for traditional and telephone style interviews.
Hiring Foreign Students and Foreign Graduates of U.S. Universities

F-1 Students – Foreign students are permitted to attend U.S. colleges or universities as long as they show (1) they have the resources to support themselves and cover all tuition and expenses; and (2) they have an intent to return to their home country. Foreign students will need a completed Form I-20 (issued by a university) to obtain valid F-1 status. F-1 students may be eligible for several different types of employment opportunities and very specific rules apply to each.

On-Campus Employment: If the F-1 student is maintaining a valid F-1 status, the student may work on campus no more than 20 hours per week while school is in session, but may be full time when school is not in session.

Off-Campus Employment: An F-1 student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student’s control.

Curricular Practical Training: Another work option for hiring F-1 students is Curricular Practical Training. CPT is work authorized by the foreign student advisors if the employment is shown to be an integral part of an established curriculum. A student is not eligible for CPT unless the student is legally enrolled on a full-time basis for at least nine months, although this can be waived in certain instances for graduate students. If a student accumulates more than twelve months of CPT, the student is ineligible for Optional Practical Training.

Optional Practical Training: The most common method of employment authorization for F-1 students is Optional Practical Training (OPT). Most students are eligible for 12 months of OPT employment authorization upon graduation, to work in jobs related to their degree programs. Students in so-called “STEM” degree programs (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) are eligible for an additional 17 months of OPT, for a total of 29 months. All that is required for OPT is approval from the university’s Foreign Student Advisor, and receipt of a work authorization card from CIS. This process of obtaining the card can be started 90 days prior to graduation or up to 60 days after graduation. The student cannot commence work until the EAD is received. Receipt notice is not sufficient to initiate employment. If a card is not issued with 90 days, the student should consult an immigration attorney or foreign student advisor for assistance.

STRATEGY TIP: F-1 Optional Practical Training is an excellent way to recruit top foreign graduates of U.S. colleges and universities with a minimum of delays and paperwork.

Family: The F-2 spouse of an F-1 cannot work under any circumstance.

J Visas

The visa is based on cultural exchanges between the United States and a foreign country and is a comprehensive visa covering several different categories: (1) students; (2) trainees; (3) teachers; (4) professors; (5) international visitors; (6) alien physicians; (7) government visitors; (8) researchers; (9) short term scholars; (10) specialist; (11) camp counselors; and (12) au pairs. Most of these categories permit full-time work authorization for varying time units. Selected categories are discussed below:
**Students**: Like F-1 students, J-1 students are permitted to work on campus or off campus if there is an urgent, unforeseen need. The employment is limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session or full time when school is not in session. For **Academic Training**, J-1s are eligible for up to 18 months of academic training (36 months if post-doctoral research). Unlike F-1s, they do not require an employment authorization document to engage in U.S. employment. Rather, they only need a letter of authorization from the Foreign Student Advisor that the employment is related to the degree.

**Professors and Research Scholars**: These positions cannot be tenure-track and the J-1 visa holder cannot have been in the U.S. on a J visa for all or part of 12 months immediately preceding date of program commencement, with a few minor exceptions. The time limit is five years for a J-1 stay in this category.

**Short-Term Scholars**: Coming to the U.S. for a period of six months to lecture, observe, consult and participate in seminars, workshops, conferences, study tours, professional meetings or other educational activities.

**Family**: J-2 family members of J-1s may obtain work authorization if they can show that income is not needed to support J-1 alien.

**STRATEGY TIP**: Some J-1 visa holders may be required to return to their country of last residence for two years after expiration of their J-1 visa. You should consult your university, foreign student office or immigration law advisor to see if you are subject to this important restriction or if there are other visa options available to avoid the restriction.

**H-1B Visas**

Using an H-1B visa, U.S. employers are permitted to hire foreign professional employees (for example, professors, researchers or technical personnel) who have **at least a four (4) year college degree**, if they will work in a position requiring a college degree.

H-1B visas are available to persons with (1) a 4 year Baccalaureate Degree *or the foreign equivalent*; or (2) persons who can show by expert affidavits **that their combination of education and qualifying experience** is the equivalent of at least a U.S. four year B.A. or B.S. degree in the field.

**Duration**: An H-1B visa is valid initially for up to three (3) years and can be extended for an additional three (3) years for a total of six years, regardless of the number of employers during that time. Extensions beyond six years are available in limited circumstances.

**Limitations**: There are many technical requirements, including **payment of a prevailing wage** and the **filing of a Labor Condition Application**, for successful processing of an H-1B. Failure to comply with all of the H-1B regulations can result in the employer being disqualified for one year.

**10. Trainee Visa Options For Up To 24 Months**

U.S. and foreign companies often wish to provide training on new or existing technologies to foreign workers. Several visas exist which allow for **the training of foreign employees who do not have college degrees or specialized knowledge** or cannot otherwise enter under H-1B, L-1B or E visas:

A J-1 trainee visa can be obtained through an international exchange program authorized by the Department of State. This category allows the trainee to work for a U.S. firm and engage in productive employment as part of her training for up to 18 months. Unlike many of the other visa options, the **spouse of the J-1 trainee can be granted work authorization**.

An **H-3 training visa** requires a detailed training curriculum set up by the employer and the training cannot be available in the applicant’s home country. This visa allows the trainee to engage in productive employment only if it is incidental to the training. **The H-3 is valid with extensions for up to two years**. Specialized immigration law advice is usually needed to establish and obtain approval for an H-3 training program. Spouse and children (under 21) can enter with an H-4 but cannot work.
A B-1 visa can be used for short term training of less than one year. The trainee must be an employee of a foreign company. The employee must be compensated (except for expenses) by the foreign firm. Spouses and children of B-1 trainees can accompany the trainee but cannot work in the United States.

F-1 student visa allows for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) if the training is part of the student’s degree program. Optional Practical Training (OPT) is available for up to 12 months during an academic program or post-graduation. Use of CPT for 12 months or more will void eligibility for OPT.

**Common H1-B Questions**

Q: H1-B Visas: What are they and why do you need them?
A: The H1-B visa is a non-immigrant visa to employ temporary foreign workers in the United States in specialty occupations. The United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) define a “specialty occupation” as an occupation that requires both a theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge and a bachelor’s degree or higher in the area of specialization. Engineers, scientists, teachers, accountants and marketing analyst are examples of occupations under the H1-B Visa.

Q: Why are they such a hot topic right now?
A: H1-B visas have always been in high demand by U.S. employers to bring skilled workers into their businesses. Per fiscal year, the visa quotas or “caps” are set to a maximum of 65,000 for foreign workers with a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree not earned in the U.S. and 20,000 for foreign workers with a master’s degree or higher earned in the U.S.

Q: What can you do right now if you need or want one?
A: You know what an H1-B Visa is, why they are in such demand and why it’s the perfect time to get one. It’s kind of like social media right now. You are at the ‘sign me up now’ process.
Do not let fear of the simple visa process prevent you from hiring the best and brightest graduates available. U.S. law provides several ways for employers to hire foreign college graduates. For example, CIS (formerly INS) issues tens of thousands of H-1B work visas each year. In addition, graduates of U.S. institutions on F-1 visa are eligible for one year of "practical training" and are hired regularly by U.S. employers.

The two most common mechanisms for hiring foreign graduates are:

I. PRACTICAL TRAINING: This allows up to twelve months of employment after graduation for students in F-1 student visa status. Students in so-called "STEM" degree programs (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) are eligible for an additional 17 months of OPT, for a total of 29 months. The student need only obtain permission from the university foreign student advisor, and a work authorization card from the CIS (formerly INS). Some students (on J visas) may even be eligible for up to 18 months of training without even getting a work authorization card from CIS. The university can provide additional information.

**Timing:** Graduate can begin working immediately upon receipt of the work authorization card.

**Cost:** No cost to employer. Student pays $380 filing fee to CIS to get card.

**Employer Obligations:** Treat employees on practical training just like other U.S. employees in terms of pay, discipline, termination, etc.

II. H-1B VISAS: This is an extremely popular work visa. Available to foreign nationals who (a) have at least a U.S. Bachelor’s Degree or foreign equivalent and (b) will be working in a job that requires at least a Bachelor’s Degree. The employer must submit a visa petition to the CIS. Approvals can take as little as two weeks.

**Employer Obligations:** The employer must:

- Post a notice for ten days at the worksite stating that you are hiring an H-1B worker, providing information about the job. Maintain public access file.
- Pay the same wage and benefits provided to U.S. workers in similar jobs. Pay return transportation in some circumstances.
- There is no need to advertise the position, and no need to determine if U.S. workers are available to fill the position.

**Timing:** Normal processing times can vary depending on the work location. However, CIS has special "premium processing" which guarantees processing in 15 days. Premium Processing requires an extra $1,000 filing fee.

**Cost:** CIS’ normal filing fee for private employers is $ 320, plus a $1,500 “training fee”, plus a “fraud prevention” fee of $ 500. (NOTE: University employers and primary/secondary schools pay only the $ 500 fraud prevention fee). Premium processing (15 day processing) has an additional $1,000 filing fee to CIS.

**H-B Cap:** CIS issues 65,000 new H-1B approvals each year (CIS year – October 1 through September 30). Exceptions to the cap: university jobs; graduates with U.S. advanced degrees; H-1B extension with same employer; H-1B transfer to new employer.
Highlighting Your Skills

What skills should you be highlighting when job seeking?

General Skills: Professional, Adaptable, Engaging

- **Professional** At its base, being professional is about being appropriate for a work environment and acting in a way that will put you in a good light (being agreeable, getting your work done, etc). As you gain experience, you'll see professional norms and etiquette more specific to an individual industry.

- **Adaptable** Studying abroad is one great way to show that you are adaptable because you adapt to a different culture, usually for an extended period of time. A diverse set of professional work experiences is also important in displaying your track record of performing in a variety of work situations.

- **Engaging** Communication in a foreign culture is simply harder than in one’s native culture, so it is that much more important than usual that you can display that you understand what they mean and can effectively make yourself understood.

Specific Skills: Technical, Relevant Experience, Language Skills

- **Technical Skills** These are the broader abilities that one can learn in school (Accounting, Engineering, Financial Modeling) or technology-related knowledge related to your studies such as software or programming which can help you add value right away

- **Relevant Experience** This relates to technical skill, but is a little broader. If you've interned or worked full time in an industry or in certain functions, you have a track record that makes you much more appealing.

- **Language Skills** – With few exceptions, you cannot be serious about a global career without knowing one or two other languages. If you only speak English, you can often “get along” but you won’t stand out and your language (in)abilities will be a liability.

Finally, write down what your strengths are as they relate to these six Skills and think of a few stories relating to each that you could share to demonstrate each skill. In summary, build the general skills that are transferable and make you a more appealing employee in a range of environments. Be strategic and focused in choosing the specific skills and experiences as they relate to specific jobs or regions where you want to work. Developing and identifying your skill set prepares you for your next step: researching potential employers abroad.

Who do you know? If you have lots of local contacts and people vouching for you somewhere, that makes a huge difference in getting your foot in the door. If you have not already created an account with LinkedIn start now! Connect with your friends, people you've worked with at internships, professors and Career Services people who you know, and so on. LinkedIn is designed to help you see through the people you know to their contacts so that you can make a more personal connection.

1) **Who do you contact?** Start with the person who would become your boss. If you are looking to work for the Head of Design or the Director of Operations, start there. That individual will be the main beneficiary of your work, so they are most likely to see the merit of bringing you on board.

2) **What do you say?** The message for each organization must specifically explain why you are a good fit. You have hopefully researched what the target company does, thought about what they might need, and can express how you fit into the equation. Write a concise e-mail. If you can point to your resume online (LinkedIn profile, or even a link to a document) you can avoid spam filters that will keep your message from going into the junk file.
3) **How do you contact them?** First, send an e-mail briefly highlighting your fit with the company, your contact info/resume link, and promising to call them on a certain day and time (3 days out). Then call them as promised. Practice the “elevator pitch” of your unique value (in the target language) and have your e-mail with your fit with the company handy so you can refresh their memory about what makes you compelling.

4) **How many people do I contact?** For a larger company, you can try a couple people at the same time, for smaller ones make sure one potential boss has definitely decided not to call back before you try the next one.

5) **The Pep talk…**
   Be systematic and professional in your outreach. Be the upbeat, confident version of yourself without going overboard on either trait.