

I don't have U.S. citizenship or permanent residency. Will this matter to a prospective employer?

In general, not being a U.S. citizen or permanent resident adds a level of difficulty to a job search, but there are employers who are not only willing to hire foreign nationals, but are also specifically looking for these individuals. Naturally, it will depend on the industry as well as the employer. Practical Training offers students who have studied in the U.S. on an F-1 visa the opportunity to work for up to twelve months in a field related to their studies. In general as a foreign national you cannot work for the U.S. federal government, for most other U.S. state and local government entities, or for private employers who receive government contracts.

If you hope to remain in the U.S. for longer than the period of your Practical Training, it is important to look into acquiring an extended visa such as the H-1B visa. An employer must sponsor you for an H-1B visa, and thus you will impose more papers and cost on an employer than will a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

Since internships usually count as Optional Practical Training (OPT) time, make sure the internship you're looking at is what you want to put your valuable time into. OPT is a period during which undergraduate and graduate students with F-1 status who have completed their studies are permitted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to work for twelve months per educational level (an extension of seventeen months is available for graduates for a government-designated STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics]) on a student visa without needing to acquire a work H-1B visa towards getting a practical training to complement their field of studies. That being said, it isn't uncommon for international students to receive job offers from the sponsoring American company after completing an internship with them, so this may be a great opportunity to seek employment.

Cultural differences in the job search & interviewing process:

Almost all U.S. job searches require you to write resumes and cover letters. You may want to look through our guides on Resume and Cover Letter writing or speak with someone at the Becker Career Center to help you develop documents to better fit the U.S. style. Many international students may find interview to be the most culturally different aspect of the job search. Making eye contact with even the most senior person will be seen as a sign of confidence, not of disrespect. Some of these differences may challenge you, but console yourself that many Americans do not find the job search easy either. The Becker Career Center offers workshops on the job search and interviewing. Take advantage of these workshops!

International Interview

- 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 stats 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.

U.S. Interview

- Be punctual. Arrive five to fifteen minutes proper to appointment.
- Eye contact is expected and shows confidence.
- Interviewer styles vary, and some 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, sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin and marital status are illegal.

When should I tell an employer about my visa stats?

It's hard to give an exact moment to alert an employer, but it should be before an employer offers you a job. Some employers aren't necessarily aware of work permission issues, and if someone offers you a job and only then learns that they'll have to apply for an H-1B visa in order to keep you, the employer may be put off by the fact that you didn't provide this information up-front. You may want to raise the issue sometime near the end of a positive first interview, so the employer feels that you are being open about your work situation. However, if you know that you will be receiving permanent residency status in the near future, share that information as early as possible. That way you will assure your employer that he or she will not need to worry about work permission.

English

The more a position requires extensive contact with others, the more important it is that your English is clear. If it is not, some last minute tutoring may be helpful. Employers may use your written English to assess your spoken English, so edit and reedit your cover letters to make sure you are as clear as possible. Unless you're fluent in English, it's a good idea to have a native speaker review your work.

What can I do to maximize my chances?

Don't procrastinate or expect to do it all in a day. Learn everything you can about the process through which an employer can obtain an H-1 visa for you. They may be unaware of the steps in which case you will need to clearly explain the process. Don't downplay its importance, either. In the long run it's better to discuss the process and seriously assess the situation before you and your potential employer have gone too far, only to find that you are ineligible. There may be some advantages to involving a lawyer familiar with the process to help with the paperwork. If you're willing to pay any associated fees, let the employer know that.