

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT GUIDE

WORK AUTHORIZATION OPTIONS IN THE U.S.

JOB SEARCHING BASICS IN THE U.S.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AT MSU

TRANSITIONING TO THE U.S. WORKPLACE

EMPLOYERS GUIDE TO HIRING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

ADVISOR GUIDE TO HELPING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

# INTRODUCTION



## Why do we design this guide?

In today's increasingly global economy, international students educated in the U.S. should be considered as a valuable part of the talent pool that universities provide to employers. International students bring unique benefits to the employers: diversity, adaptability, global perspectives and connections, to name just a few.

However, it can be difficult for international students to navigate the U.S. job searching process. Both international students and U.S employers can be unfamiliar with the working visa options.

This guides aims to help international students, U.S employers, and university advisors by providing the basic information and strategies to navigate the process.

## Who designed this guide?

This guide is designed by the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS) and the Career Services Network at Michigan State University.

Should you have any question or edits to suggest, please contact OISS by emailing [oiss@msu.edu](mailto:oiss@msu.edu) or call via **517-353-1720**.

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# WORK AUTHORIZATION OPTIONS IN THE U.S.

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# WORK IN THE U.S. BEFORE GRADUATION

## On Campus Limitation

Students in F-1 and J-1 status are required to be full-time students and may work on-campus up to 20 hours or in the “practical training” options below.

## Practical Training Options

International students are eligible for temporary work authorization that permits them to engage in part- or full- time employment in their field of study.

### 1. Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is temporary employment authorization directly related to a F-1 student’s academic program and granted by the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS).

CPT is typically authorized on a part-time (up to 20 hours a week) basis during the school year and can be authorized on a full-time (over 20 hours a week) or part-time basis during vacation periods. CPT gives students the possibility to work off-campus or to work for more than 20 hours a week on campus if certain qualifications are met.

Some types of CPT are as follows:

**Required for the degree program:** In order for training to be considered “required”, all students in the degree program must be required to complete an internship or practicum in order to receive their degree. A few programs at MSU have such requirements.

**Integral part of an established curriculum:** If the internship/work experience is not required, then it must be taken for academic credit. Students will work with their academic advisor to fill out the “CPT Authorization Form” issued by OISS.

The student must receive a job offer before securing the employment authorization, and thus will be unable to provide documentation at the interview stage. OISS needs a signed, written offer of employment on the company’s letterhead as part of the CPT application requirements.

**Proof of Work Authorization:** The employer and dates for which the student is authorized to work will appear on the student’s Form I-20 (certificate of eligibility). Students cannot begin work before the start date on the Form I-20, or continue working after the end date. CPT authorization may be renewable if the student continues to be eligible.

**To apply for CPT:** <https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/files/7515/2571/3183/cpt.pdf>

### 2. J-1 Academic Training

J-1 students may apply for temporary work authorization called “Academic Training” (AT) either prior to or after completion of studies to accept positions within their field of study.

Students seeking or completing bachelor’s or master’s degrees are eligible for 18 months of AT. Students seeking or completing doctoral degrees are eligible for 36 months of AT.

Non-degree (exchange) students are eligible for AT authorizations matching the length of time they have spent studying in the U.S. Example: A one-semester (4-month) exchange student is eligible for up to 4 months of AT.

# WORK IN THE U.S. AFTER GRADUATION

The U.S. government allows students to apply for authorization to gain practical work experience to supplement their academic programs. Many employers find this to be a useful opportunity to hire a student with valuable international perspectives.

## 1. F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is defined as “temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study”. F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of employment authorization under this category. For students whose majors are given the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) designation, employment may be extended for an additional 24 months, if the F-1 visa holder is employed by an E-Verify employer. More information about STEM:

<https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/immigration1/visa-immigration/workintheus/>

OPT is recommended by OISS at MSU and granted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The application process can take several months.

**Proof of Work Authorization:** Students on OPT will receive an employment authorization document or EAD card. USCIS issues the EAD and it specifies the dates of authorized employment.

### To apply for OPT:

Complete the required and tuition-free OISS - Optional Practical Training Course available in D2L during your final semester.

Steps for registering for the OISS - Optional Practical Training Course:

- Log into D2L
- Click on “Select Self Registration”
- Click on the course named “OISS - Optional Practical Training (OPT)”
- Register for the course

## 2. After you finish the OISS - Optional Practical Training Course:

Print the OPT Certificate of Completion. The certificate must be dated during your final semester. Complete the application and gather required documents as directed in the course.

**2. J-1 Academic Training:** see the “before graduation” section.

# EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS FOR NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS

Beyond CPT, OPT, or AT, there are options for employing internationals.

## Temporary Worker (H-1) Visa

The H-1B visa allows foreign nationals to work in the United States in specialty occupations. The H-1B visa category has the following key requirements:

Applicant must have theoretical and practical application of a highly specialized body of knowledge and must have a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree or its equivalent in a specialized field. The company is the petitioner

of the H-1B and the international is the beneficiary. The company should consult their HR and legal counsel when completing these petitions.

The employer makes an H-1B visa petition to the Department of Labor and USCIS. An employer may petition for H-1B status for a maximum of 3 years at a time. An individual can hold H-1B status for up to a maximum of six years. It is advised to plan petition applications early as timing of filing is critical due to H-1B visa limits.

# WORK IN THE U.S. AFTER GRADUATION

## **O-1 Visa: Individuals with Extraordinary Ability to Achievement**

The O-1 nonimmigrant visa is for the individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics, among other fields, and are recognized nationally or internationally for those achievements. An O-1 petition has an initial period of stay of up to 3 years. Subsequent extensions may last for no more than one year at a time. There is no limit to the number of extensions.

## **Nonimmigrant NAFTA Professional (TN) Visa**

The TN visa allows citizens of Canada and Mexico, as NAFTA professionals, to work in the U.S. in a prearranged business activity for a U.S. or foreign employer. Permanent residents, including Canadian permanent residents, are not able to apply to work as a NAFTA professional. Both Canadian and Mexican citizens can be admitted to the United States in TN status in increments of up to three years. There is no cumulative time limit on TN status. Status is renewable indefinitely, provided the stay remains temporary in nature.

## **E-3 Certain Specialty Occupation**

**Professionals from Australia** The E-3 classification applies only to nationals of Australia. The specialty occupation requires theoretical and practical application of a body of knowledge in professional fields and at least the attainment of a bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, as a minimum, for entry into the occupation in the U. S. There is no cumulative time limit on E-3. It is renewable every two years indefinitely, provided the stay remains temporary in nature.

## **Intra-Company Transfer (L) Visa**

Intra-company Transferees who, within the three preceding years, have been employed abroad continuously for one year, and who will be employed by a branch, parent, affiliate, or subsidiary of that same employer in the U.S. in a managerial, executive, or specialized knowledge capacity may be eligible for an L Visa.

USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-us>

## PERMANENT RESIDENCY

Lawful permanent residency (PR) is a status granted by the U.S. government to citizens of other countries. One option to obtain PR is through an “employer-based petition”. For example, the employer may document the need for a person’s occupational skills, or the individual must prove international recognition in his or her field. While an employer may sponsor an individual, USCIS makes the final decision and makes no promise or guarantee to the employee.

**USCIS website:** <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/permanent-workers>

## LEGAL SUPPORT

### **Find an immigration attorney**

OISS can only provide general information on visa categories beyond F and J. International students and U.S employers need to talk to an immigration attorney regarding specific cases.

American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) offers a “find a lawyer” option. <http://www.aila.org/>

# COMMON US WORK AUTHORIZATION OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS

## CPT

### Curricular Practical Training

**Definition:** Temporary employment authorization directly related to student's academic program

**Authorized By:** Designated School Official (DSO) at OISS

**Duration:** Employment dependent but is granted on a semester basis

**Who is eligible?** F-1 visa students who have completed at least one academic year full-time

**When to Apply** When applicable but after first year of full-time status

**Start Date** Employment dependent but must have offer first before applying

**Permitted Work Hours** Part-time CPT: no more than 20 hours a week during fall and spring semester

## OPT

### Optional Practical Training

**Definition:** Temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study

**Authorized By:** United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

**Duration:** 12 Months

**Who is eligible?** Full-time F-1 visa students who will be completing degree requirements this semester

**When to Apply** 90 days prior to program end date and up to 60 days after

**Start Date** Decided by student, last date to start is 60 days after degree completion

**Permitted Work Hours** Minimum of 20 hours a week



## AT

### Academic Training

**Definition:** Training for students in their field of study as a form of experiential learning

**Authorized By:** International Student Advisor and/or Program Sponsor

**Duration:** 18 months for Bachelors/Masters Graduates. 36 months for Doctoral Graduates. Non-degree AT: length based on duration of study (1-2 semesters)

**Who is eligible?** J-1 Students

**When to Apply** Pre or Post-Graduation

**Start Date** Employment dependent but must have offer first before applying. Last date to start is 30 days after degree completion

**Permitted Work Hours** Maximum of 20 hours a week (part-time) or a minimum of 20 hours a week (post-completion of program)



# HOW TO ANSWER “ARE YOU AUTHORIZED TO WORK IN THE U.S.?”

## Discussing Your Immigration Status

Although it is illegal for a potential employer to ask you your race, nationality, or immigration status, they can however, ask you if you are authorized to work in the U.S. You are not required to offer the information if not asked about your employment eligibility, but it is very important that you are able to explain it if necessary.

Not all employers are familiar with the work authorization associated with various immigration categories, so the more knowledgeable you are about the employment options available to you, the more confident you will feel about the discussion.

The Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS) can help you to understand your work authorization options.

**If a company says they don't hire international students, it may still be okay to apply.** While some employers cannot hire international students for certain reasons -- U.S. governmental contracts, for example, when employers say they don't hire international students it may simply mean they haven't hired any yet. In order to convince prospective employers, it is your responsibility to educate them about the process of hiring an international student. Keep in mind that they still may not hire you. It is recommended that you first target organizations with a history of sponsoring individuals for H-1B (temporary worker) visas.<sup>1</sup>

**Be knowledgeable about your work authorization options:** You need to know the benefits and restrictions of your particular immigration status and be able to discuss comfortably (depending on your visa

type) Academic, Curricular, and Optional Practical Training (AT, CPT, OPT) and H1-B visas, among other possible visa types. The more knowledgeable you are about your employment options, the more confident you will feel and appear during the discussion with your prospective employer. You should also practice responses to potential questions such as “Are you authorized to work in the US?”

**Know the appropriate time to reveal that you are an international student:** If your interviewer asks about your visa and work eligibility, answer directly and honestly. If your interview is coming to a close and the visa issue has not been mentioned yet, it is a good idea for you to bring it up casually. You can say: ***“I would like to mention that I am on a student visa and will need to briefly discuss my legal employment options with you if I'm hired. My international student advisor has explained the procedures that exist for my lawful employment.”*** By bringing up the topic yourself, you are showing the employer that you are motivated to get the job and that you are ready to assist them with the procedure.<sup>2</sup>

**When interviewing you should emphasize the positive:** It is an advantage for employers to have a diverse group of employees. Especially as more companies are going global, it is a benefit to many employers to have a bilingual employee and/or an employee familiar with work abroad. The fact that you have lived and studied abroad shows your confidence and resourcefulness. Convey to the interviewer challenges you have faced and overcome in this process. Be prepared to explain to your potential employer how hiring you offers more advantages than challenges.

# HOW TO ANSWER “ARE YOU AUTHORIZED TO WORK IN THE U.S.?”

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I answer when I am asked by an employer if I can legally work in the U.S.?

#### **(F-1 Student)**

Start by explaining that you are legally able to apply for your own work authorization through your university while you are on an F-1 visa at *no cost to them* (using either Curricular or Optional Practical Training). Utilizing this practical training may allow you to work anywhere from 12 to 29 months (or more if you combine CPT and OPT together), depending on your major.

#### **(J-1 Student/Scholar)**

Same as the F-1 student though the time you have available may differ and, in certain cases, you must get permission from your sponsor to work. If you are unsure, please check with the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS).

Please refer to the OISS website (<https://oiss.isp.msu.edu>) for more information under “Employment”. You can also share with the employer - “my work authorization can be renewed for another three to six years with an H-1B temporary worker visa.”

Avoid saying the word “sponsor” when talking about the H-1B application process, instead use “petition”.

Explain to the employer that they “petition” for the visa and you are the beneficiary.

**Note:** An H-1B petition *does not* require an employer to test the labor market, meaning they do not have to prove there are no qualified U.S. citizens or Permanent Residents available for the position. It may also be useful to explain that you do not need a “Green Card” in order to work in the U.S. and that an H-1B visa is different from this.

### Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for employment (e.g., H-1B visa)?

Yes! Many employers will ask this because they need to know whether a petition for H-1B is needed. Following the question above, explain that you will require an H-1B petition to work for up to six years after you have exhausted your F or J visa options. The legal fee for applying usually runs from \$1800 to \$3,500 with additional filing fees paid to the U.S. government.

You can also share with the employers the **“Employers Guide to Hiring International Students”** section of this document.

# CHALLENGES INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MAY ENCOUNTER

**No job search goes exactly as you plan. Successful searches require preparation for the cultural expectations of U.S. employers as well as addressing potential concerns.**

**Language:** Finding the right words to express yourself professionally in a language that is not your first can be difficult. Take advantage of all your campus resources (Career Services Network, English Language Center, OISS programs) to practice your English and the vocabulary you need to make a positive impression on an employer in the U.S.

**Hiring Complexities:** When your student work eligibility expires, in order to continue working in the U.S., your employer will be required to sponsor you for a 'change of status' to a work visa. The transition to another visa status requires careful planning well in advance of the expiration of your current immigration status. Not all employers have their own immigration department, therefore it is important that you are aware of the time it will take to change your status and be proactive in making sure your employer is aware. Because of this, as well as the costs involved in changing an employee's immigration status, some employers hesitate to hire international students. This is why you must be prepared to demonstrate what you can bring to the organization, as well as the benefits of hiring a non-U.S. citizen.

**Commitment:** Some employers fear international employees will return to their home country soon after the employer has invested time, money, training resources, and possibly sponsoring him/her for a work visa. It is important to show the employer your loyalty to the company and how you are an asset to the company's overseas operations.

**Animosity:** Some Americans feel that by hiring an international student employers are taking jobs away from U.S. citizens. Due to the current economy, this sentiment may be more pronounced right now. You should be able to demonstrate how your skills and knowledge will be an asset to the company. Also, research diversity and its benefits in the workplace. If you are pursuing a degree in any of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, you may also want to arm yourself with statistics that show international students are the majority of graduates in many of these fields.

**Location:** International students often limit their job search to the east or west coasts (California, Seattle, Boston, New York, Washington D.C., etc.). The competition for these jobs thus becomes very intense. Be open to all locations, especially Southeast Michigan. Michigan is the first state to create a program specifically to recruit international students to live and work in the Detroit area. **The Global Talent Retention Initiative (GTRI)** is being developed as a resource to connect employers in the Detroit area with international students seeking internships and full time employment, particularly in the STEM fields, during their practical training period.



## Global Talent Retention Initiative

To get the latest information on SE Michigan Employment opportunities for international students, "LIKE" us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/MiGTRI](http://www.facebook.com/MiGTRI)

*Prepared by the GTRI, adapted for Michigan State University by the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS)*

# WORKING VISA REALITIES IN THE U.S

## Limited visa options and industries

H-1B temporary working visa is the most commonly used visa for U.S employers to hire international employees. However, the application is extremely competitive, has many limitations, and is largely based on luck.

### Who is eligible?

There are three types of individuals who may have petitions filed on their behalf under the H-1B category.

#### 1. Specialty Occupations

Typically, companies file for individuals to come to the United States to perform services in specialty occupations. These positions normally require bachelor's degrees (or higher) in a specialty field.

#### 2. Department of Defense Cooperative Research and Development Projects.

Individuals who will be engaged in cooperative research and development projects administered by the U.S. Department of Defense are eligible.

#### 3. Fashion Models

Individuals who are fashion models of distinguished merit and ability are eligible.

### Below are some key requirements that you must meet to be classified as an H-1B Temporary Worker:

- **You must have an employer-employee relationship with the petitioning U.S. employer.**
- **Your job must qualify as a specialty occupation by meeting one of the following criteria:**
  - A bachelor's or higher degree, or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for the particular position;
  - The degree requirement is common for the position in the industry, or the job is so complex or unique that it can only be performed by someone with at least a bachelor's degree in a field related to the position;
  - The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position;
  - The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree.
- **Your job must be in a specialty occupation related to your field of study.**
- **The petitioning employer must submit evidence that a labor condition application (LCA) has been certified by the U.S. Department of Labor.**
- **You must be paid at least the actual or prevailing wage for your occupation, whichever is higher.**
- **An H-1B visa number must be available at the time of filing the petition, unless the petition is exempt from numerical limits.**

Source: [https://my.uscis.gov/exploremyoptions/h1\\_visas\\_for\\_temporary\\_workers](https://my.uscis.gov/exploremyoptions/h1_visas_for_temporary_workers)

# JOB SEARCHING STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**Due to all the language, cultural and immigration challenges you may encounter while looking for a job in the U.S, the strategies below are highly recommended by your fellow peer international students and alumni to help you get prepared!**

- **Resources**

MSU's Career Services Network (<https://careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/student-resources/resources-for-international-students.html>) has a webpage with dozens of tips and resources just for international students - it's a great place to start.

- **Start early**

Your career development begins the moment you join MSU. MSU Career Services is here to help you explore how your interests, values, skills and personality fit together to give shape to your future. If you already know what you want to do, we can you prepare for your career path and search for great internships! Begin by creating your Handshake account, and connecting with a career advisor with expertise in your area of interest.

- **Use Handshake**

Handshake (<https://careernetwork.msu.edu/services-locations/handshake/handshake-student-info.html>) is MSU's system for career advising, career events, and thousands of internships and jobs, just for Spartan students.

- **Work on campus first**

You'll quickly discover that MSU has a very large campus. Working in the dining hall near your room or in an office on campus will help you manage your time and travel around campus. This early work experience is important in helping you to obtain an internship in your desired career field. MSU hires 17,000+ students to work on campus each year, so opportunities are plentiful.

- **Use work authorization options from your student visa**

Take advantage of CPT and OPT, and make sure that you understand your work authorization options. See Section 1 of this guide to start!

- **Volunteer, study away and study abroad to gain experience**

MSU's Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement offers opportunities for students to get involved in service activities on campus and in the local community - a great way to develop your resume. Study away opportunities are class or internships held in another part of the U.S., usually for credit - the College of Social Science, James Madison College, the College of Arts and Letters, and the College of Natural Science all offer these programs. You do not need to be a student in those colleges to participate in their study away programs. Last, study abroad through MSU! MSU's Office of Education Abroad offers 275+ education abroad opportunities around the world.

- **Internships are the key to a full-time job**

Internships are challenging work opportunities related to your major and intended career that force you to reflect on and integrate your college learning in the professional world. International students use their Curricular Practical Training (CPT) work authorization option in these roles. These experiences are important in helping you be a strong candidate for jobs after graduation. Internships on MSU's campus may be more attainable for international students, or a good option during a students' earlier years.

# JOB SEARCHING STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CONTINUED

- **Understand the immigration policies and be able to explain to potential employers**

Being familiar and up-to-date on U.S. visa regulations is important. Whether you are considering employment during your time as a student at MSU or afterward, it is important to partner with both the Office for International Students and Scholars and the Career Services Network. OISS can explain your work authorization options and assist you with the proper documentation in many instances as the CSN offers programs and resources to help you build your resume writing and job interviewing skills.

Make sure you understand the differences between various employment authorizations, and the paperwork or processing required for each. Refer to the table on page 8 of this guide for more specific information.

- **Have a back-up plan - dual country job searching**

Whether you wish to work in the U.S. after graduation, work in another country, or return home, it's important for international students to spend time exploring work options in your home country. Connect with MSU alumni (<https://alumni.msu.edu>) in your home country, and join student groups (<https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/get-involved/student-leadership/international-student-organizations/>) to meet people from your home country or that share your interests.

## SECTION 2

# JOB SEARCHING BASICS IN THE U.S.

Whether you have been in the U.S. for one year or for many years, life as a student is different from that of a full-time employee (often referred to as “the real world” by Americans). One of the most important skills to use in your first few months at work is observation. The workplace has its own culture, which can vary from company to company even in the same field.

**Resume and Interview Tips**  
**Elevator Speech**  
**Networking Tips**  
**Informational Interview**  
**Managing your Online Identity**  
**Presentation Tips**

# RESUME AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Just as there are cultural differences in education systems and social life, there are cultural differences in what an employer expects during the interview process. This guide is designed to help international students in the U.S. understand what these cultural differences may be, help them create a U.S. appropriate resume, and prepare for a successful interview process.

## Resume

A resume for a U.S. employer (often called a “CV” in other countries), is a concise, attractive marketing tool that summarizes job skills, experiences, and academic background relevant to your employment goals. It is NOT a detailed chronological list of academic and formal work experience.

### You SHOULD Include

- Full Name (*given name, family name*)
  - Contact Information in the U.S. (email, phone #)
  - Education (*highest degree first*)
  - Relevant Experience (*most recent first*)
  - Leadership Experience (*optional*)
  - Honors & Awards (*optional*)
  - Languages (*other than English*)
- \*Find resume guides and samples: at [careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/resources](https://careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/resources).*

### You SHOULD NOT Include

- TOEFL Score
- Photograph
- Immigration Status
- Age
- Hometown/Home Country
- Marital Status
- Race/Ethnicity
- Religion
- Personal Interests or Hobbies

## Interviewing

The most difficult thing for many international students during the interview process is “selling themselves.” The U.S. is a highly individualistic, direct culture where employers expect you to show confidence in yourself and enthusiasm for the job. To do this, you must openly discuss your goals and accomplishments in order to convince them you are the best candidate for the job. Some international students feel boastful and disrespectful when trying to discuss their qualifications in such an individualistic manner, but this is a situation where it is important that you practice expressing yourself confidently without sounding arrogant. Learning to find the appropriate language is often difficult, so it is very important that you take advantage of practice or “mock” interviews with Career Services.

### You SHOULD

- Be on time
- Maintain eye contact
- Anticipate questions regarding ability and experience
- Openly discuss your accomplishments
- Be direct and give specific examples that demonstrate your experience
- Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses
- Research the organization
- Follow-up your interview with a thank you note
- Interview guide and sample questions: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/jobs-internships/interviewing/interview-questions.html>

### You SHOULD NOT

- Be late
- Disclose age, race, marital status (*it is illegal for them to ask you such personal questions*)
- Answer questions indirectly
- Avoid responding to questions that require to you talk about your accomplishments and personal career goals
- Treat anyone you meet differently based on education, job title, sex, age, etc. (*politeness and respect are shown to all employees a candidate meets, whether a receptionist or CEO*)



# THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

An elevator speech is a 30 to 60-second introduction that is a concise, well-practiced marketing message about your professional self. Think of it as a personal commercial! Whether you're on the phone, in person at a networking event, or informally chatting with a friend or relative, you will have a "ready-made" answer to these kinds of questions:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are you hoping to do when you graduate?

## Clarify Your Job Target

Know what type of experience or position you are looking for and tailor your pitch to be relevant to your goal.

## Put it on Paper

Write down one or two highlights you'd like a potential employer to know about your skills, accomplishments, and experiences.

## Format it, Practice it!

While there are a few skills and experiences to highlight in your pitch, practice ways to customize it for particular situations. Be sure to rehearse and get feedback from others.

## Say it With Confidence

Remember to maintain eye contact and be calm. Avoid sounding overly rehearsed.

## Incorporate Follow-Up Questions to Continue the Conversation

Your elevator pitch is often the start of a conversation. Consider how you might end your statement with a question about the company, opportunity or the person with whom you are speaking.

Who are you?

What do you do?

What are you looking for?

## Common Mistakes

**Lack of confidence in what you have to offer.**

*"I don't have a lot of experience yet."*

**Lack of focus or goals.**

*"I have a lot of interests and don't want to limit myself."*

# NETWORKING TIPS

## Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

Challenge yourself to attend networking and social events to talk with people. If English is not your first language make the effort to interact with English speakers and use your 'Elevator Speech'! Attend OISS Coffee Hour (<https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/about/feature/weekly-coffee-hour/>), which is held each Friday from 4-6pm in the International Center.

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## Understand Cultural Differences

Take the time to understand and address different business cultures and how to network. When networking at events and social gatherings, be aware of language cues and general etiquette. For example, in U.S business culture, it is appropriate to speak about yourself and your qualifications.

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## Be Proactive Online

When searching for opportunities, use credible resources for employment information, industry trends, and business culture in the country you are seeking employment. Connect with industry professionals using social media: Use Twitter and LinkedIn to also participate in news articles and posts written. Don't forget to be cautious of language choice when posting or writing to professionals.

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## Be an Active Listener

It's important to be an active listener when networking. When seeking information about a certain job, career, or industry, it is important to show sincerity and interest. Take brief notes on the key points. Remember to ask for business cards or contact information and be sure to follow-up afterwards a thank you email, or connection on social media. *Tip: Write what you talked about and when/where you met on the back of their business card.*

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## Don't be Discouraged

Building your network takes a lot of time and energy. Not everyone you reach out to will necessarily respond to you. Don't take it personally, and don't give up! Move on to the next person. More often than not, people are more than willing to speak to students.

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# INFORMATIVE INTERVIEW

## What is Informal Interviewing?

Informational interviewing entails finding individuals in your field of interest, and asking them questions regarding their work that will eventually help you in determining whether or not that a particular field of work is a good “fit” for you. At the same time, you begin a new relationship with someone who can begin to mentor and advise you along your chosen path.



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## Objectives of Informational Interviews

### To Learn More

If you hope to find what a specific career path has to offer, what the positives and negatives are within an organization’s culture, or which academic major will prepare you best for a selected career path -- why not ask the people who already working within that field?

### To Build Relationships

USA Today posted the question, “How did you find your present position (jobs)?” Almost 70% of those surveyed claimed that they were able to obtain their position because of someone they knew. In other words, most of us attribute our career success to personal relationships. The earlier you start building relationships with people in your field of interest, the stronger they will be. This can significantly improve your professional network you’ll use when you actually begin your job hunt.



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## Where Do I Start?

Informational Interviewing is a networking process. On the following page is a guide for making contacts and gathering information from them. As you go through the process, focus on obtaining information relevant to your career objectives while building lasting relationships. The sooner you begin, the more prepared you will be to make career decisions pertaining to internships and full time positions.



# INFORMATION INTERVIEW PROCESS

## 1 Network Through Friends and Family

You will be amazed at how many contacts you may be able to make through existing relationships. Ask, “Who do you know that...” and be sure to obtain contact information. Let your friends and family members know that your intent is to contact this person to learn more about their career field. MSU Alumni, your professors and advisors, and LinkedIn are also useful in helping you identify people you may wish to meet.

## 2 Schedule Meeting

Call or e-mail the new contact and let them know that:

- **You are an MSU student studying (your academic field)**
- **Your friend/advisor/etc. suggested that you contact them for career advice**
- **Ask if they have 30 minutes available to talk about their background and experience** you have about the field in which they work (face-to-face appointments are best, but a phone conversation is fine)
- **You can even invite them to coffee!**

## 3 Write out Your Schedule

Remember, you are the interviewer so be prepared. Make a list of questions that you have. Be sure to show a substantial interest in the career field and the organization. For example, you may want to ask:

- **What has been your career path?**
- **Can you describe a typical work day?**
- **What do you like best/least about your job/company?**
- **Sample questions can be found on the Career Services Network**

## Final Three Questions

4 Once you are ready to end the discussion (keep an eye on the clock, you only asked for 15-30 minutes!), ask three final questions:

- **Would you be open to reviewing my resume?**
- **Who else do you know that might give me further insight into this field, and can I contact them?**
- **Would you mind if I kept in touch with you?**

## 5 Follow-Up

Make sure to show your appreciation for their time. Send a thank you note or email and let them know what you learned. As you continue to study the field, approach your new contact with questions that come up, and as you strengthen the relationship ask if they know of any opportunities to gain experience.

Thank you note and email source: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/thank-you-letters/index.html>

# MANAGING YOUR DIGITAL IDENTITY

Your online identity or “brand “ is any online information that exists about you, whether you created it or not. Social networking sites, including Facebook, are part of your public image. The material you post and the things you write will influence an employer’s or graduate schools’ impression of you, for better or for worse. Employers, graduate schools, and other programs use social media sites in their recruitment and selection processes. Know what is out there with your name on it. If you can search for it, so can someone else.

## Check Your Current Online Identity

**Review your public email address(es):** Is each address professional?

**Google yourself:** Are you comfortable with an employer or graduate school seeing what you found?

**For each social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, etc):** Would you be comfortable if someone else were to see your profile, photos, groups and comments? Are you tagged in any photos online?

**If you’ve posted your resume online:** Are you comfortable with the privacy policy where your resume is posted? You may want to omit your street address and phone number for safety and privacy.

**If you have your own website:** Are you comfortable with an employer or graduate school seeing what you’ve written, posted and/or compiled?

## Clean Up Your Online Identity

The next step is to target potential problems you’ve identified and clean them up.

Identify the easier areas to address first, like your own social media profiles or website, then tackle the tougher ones like contacting friends regarding the embarrassing photos in which you are tagged.

There are some pieces that are a part of the public record and can’t be removed, like police logs and newspaper articles.

## Build Your Online Identity or Brand

Now that you know what’s out there, and have worked to clean up your image, you are ready to begin proactively building your brand with intentionality.

The simplest step you can take to guarantee that the first Google link with your name on it is professional is to create a LinkedIn profile.

LinkedIn is a great way to professionally display your skills, accomplishments and your goals while building meaningful relationships.

**Creating a professional online presence can help you find a job!**

SOURCE: <https://www.pomona.edu/administration/career-development/how-to/networking/managing-your-online-identity>

# PRESENTATION TIPS

## Before the Presentation

### Understand the content.

- Know your audience and create your presentation accordingly
- Know the key points you want your audience to take away

### Design your slides well.

- Have a simple background with less detailed text and more bullet points in each slide

### Use visual aides.

- Visuals aides help your audience understand better
- Use high resolution images to avoid blurry pictures during the slide show
- When using graphs, tables and charts, the simpler the better, don't forget to label them

### Choose the right fonts.

- Large and Simple fonts are easier to read
- Use Serif Fonts (e.g. Times New Roman) for printouts and Sans Fonts (e.g. Arial) for projector/computer screens

### Spellcheck and proofread

- Typos make the presentation look bad, make sure you check the presentation and any handouts you may have.

### Ensure that your formatting is consistent

- Check headings, subheads, alignment, placements, and fonts on each slide
- Don't use more than 2 fonts

### Practice, Practice, Practice!

- Present to yourself or with someone
- Arrive early to run a check on the video or audio in your presentation location

## During the Presentation

### Be prepared.

- Have water available for yourself
- Make sure the room is well-lit
- Have a backup plan for delivering the presentation if all of your audiovisual materials become unavailable. Do not rely on technology!

### Have a strong introduction.

- Smile and introduce yourself
- Make a concise explanation of the purpose of the presentation

### Present confidently.

- Focus on delivering your message, not on how you feel
- Talk to your audience, not at them
- Never read your presentation slides word for word.
- Occasionally move from one spot to another, stop, and then continue to speak. Don't pace!

### Let the audience ask questions.

- If you are unsure of how to answer, do not create a false answer! Offer to look into it further and follow-up with them, or direct it to the rest of the audience (do any of you have experience with this? How would you answer this?)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### Networking Tips

<http://nyuwassermanblog.career.admin.nyu.edu/2013/10/networking-tips-from-international-nyu-alumni/>

#### Informational Interviewing

[www.careernetwork.msu.edu](http://www.careernetwork.msu.edu)

## SECTION 3

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AT MSU

Job searching in the U.S as international students can be overwhelming. But you are not alone. We have Career Advisors, Immigration Advisors and all the resources available right here on campus to help you. Find out where to find support and who can help you along the way.

**How to prepare for a Career Advising appointment**  
**MSU Career Services Network**  
**Office for International Students and Scholars**  
**Resources and materials**

# PREPARE FOR A CAREER ADVISING APPOINTMENT

**Learn about the MSU Career Services Network** with support all across campus, and find the career advisor that is right for you and your interests. Career Services has advisors in every college on campus. Visit: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/services-locations/where-we-are.html>

## What do Career Advisors do?

Career advisors are specialists that help you explore your interests and the resources on campus, prepare for internships, interviews, and the job search process. They help with resume and cover letter creation, practice interviews, and search strategies. They can also connect you with organizations and opportunities to get ready for life after MSU. Typical career advising topics include:

- Major & Career Exploration (<http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/info.html>)
- Getting Involved in Campus Activities
- Resume & Cover Letter Writing
- Job and Internship Search Strategies
- Interview Preparation and Practice Interviews
- Graduate School Options and Application Preparation
- Professional Portfolio Development
- Job Offer Evaluation & Decision-Making
- Navigating Handshake and other online tools
- Professional Networking and Using LinkedIn
- Career Fair Preparation

Online tools source: <https://msucareertools.campuscareerinnovations.com>

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## Make an appointment with a Career Advisor through Handshake.

Create your Handshake Account by visiting [careernetwork.msu.edu](https://careernetwork.msu.edu). Handshake is MSU's system for career advising, career events, and thousands of jobs and internships, just for MSU students.

Log into Handshake, complete your profile, and then click on the "Appointments" tab on the left-hand side of the page. Select your college or "all majors", then choose the topic you would like. Many colleges offer "drop-in hours", where students can come in without an appointment, as well as the main Career Advising main hub in the Student Services Building.

## What should I bring to my career advising appointment?

What you bring depends on what you hope to gain from your appointment.

Are you looking for a job on campus? Would you like to learn more about the kinds of careers available with your major? Do you need your resume reviewed? Do you need help finding an internship? If you have documents you would like reviewed, bring along paper copies. If you have a specific job you'd like to apply to, bring a print out of the job description, or bring the link. You could also bring a list of questions you have or goals you hope to achieve during your appointment.

**When should I see my Career Advisor?** At least once a year, and at key times when you need support in your career development. Whether it be thinking about how adding a minor or major might change your career trajectory, wondering how to incorporate new experiences on to your resume or how to talk about them in interviews, preparing for career fairs, or where to find the kind of internships that will prepare you for life after MSU.



# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAREER RESOURCES

## International Student Employment Guide

This is the guide you are looking at right now! This guide includes all the basics for international students, employers, and Career Advisors about international student employment.

## Career Path for International Students Video

Refer to *Career Path for International Students* video found on The Office for International Students and Scholars' YouTube page. It is a great way to get you started!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTwFHzagRio&t=63s>

## Career Passport

MSU's Career Services Network has developed award-winning career guides to help students—from freshmen to seniors—prepare for life after college. Click the links below to see guides for the most popular topics, or go to <http://careernetwork.msu.edu/>.

## Career Services International Student Webpage

This page offers career tips and links for international students, as well as information on the companies where our international graduates work -- both in the U.S. and around the world.

## OTHER RESOURCES

### MyVisaJobs

Reports for H1B Visas and  
Visa Sponsor Profiles  
[www.myvisajobs.com/](http://www.myvisajobs.com/)

### GoinGlobal

Provides information on employers who have  
petitioned for H-1B visas as well as cultural  
and networking information.  
[www.goinglobal.com/](http://www.goinglobal.com/)

### Global Talent Retention Initiative of Michigan

Prepares international students for the U.S. job  
market and connects them with the region's  
top employers to help fill unmet talent needs  
through mentorship and training programs.  
[www.migtri.org/](http://www.migtri.org/)

### American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)

Offers a “find a lawyer” option.  
[www.aila.org/](http://www.aila.org/)

### United States Citizenship & Immigration Service (USCIS)

Check out the “Services and Benefits” Section  
[www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)

### InternationalStudent.com

Check out the “Job Search” section.  
[www.internationalstudent.com](http://www.internationalstudent.com)

Note: OISS does not specifically endorse the  
resources listed above, but rather provides  
them for educational purposes.

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAREER RESOURCES

## MSU Career Services

The Career Services Network (CSN) offers resources and programs to build your resume writing and interviewing skills, one-on-one career advising, career workshops and fairs, and connections to jobs and internships.

In addition to the main career advising hub in the Student Services Building, there is at least one career advisor -- or an entire career office -- in every college on campus. [link to CSNmap]

556 E. Circle Drive, room 113, MSU Student Services Building, East Lansing MI 48824  
(517) 355-9510  
CareerServices@csp.msu.edu  
<http://careernetwork.msu.edu/>  
Mon-Fri: 8:00am - 5:00pm

## Office for International Students & Scholars (OISS)

OISS can explain your U.S. work authorization options, assist you with the proper documentation, and give you tips on how to talk to employers about your immigration status.

427 Shaw Lane, Room 105, International Center, East Lansing MI 48824  
(517) 353- 1720  
oiss@msu.edu  
<https://www.oiss.msu.edu>  
Walk-In Advising Hours: Monday-Friday, 1-3pm

SECTION 4

# TRANSITIONING TO THE U.S. WORKPLACE

**General guidelines and tips**

# GENERAL GUIDELINES AND TIPS

- **Build a strong first impression:** Be punctual when you arrive to work, return from your lunch break promptly, be on time for appointments, dress neatly and appropriately (find out if there is a dress code before your first day) and don't be the first to leave at the end of the day.
- **Utilize company resources, such as the employee handbook, website or training workshops offered by the company.** The human resources office can be a good source of information on company policy as well as the state and federal laws that impact your status as an employee. These resources will help you learn about the company's culture.
- **Actively participate in staff meetings.** Like the U.S. classroom, verbal input is often desired whether it is offering a new idea or reinforcing a suggestion made by another.
- **Volunteer to serve on committees.** This is a good way to learn about your colleagues in a different setting. Also, some companies encourage employees to participate in community work outside the office setting. Finally, the company may have sports teams it sponsors for recreation. Being part of a team with colleagues is another way to interact.
- **Be prepared for diverse workforces. Approximately 50% of U.S. workers are women.** You will have colleagues from many racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The U.S. workplace is very sensitive to sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior. Although you may not intend a comment to be inappropriate, a colleague may interpret it as such. There can be serious repercussions to an employee's job and future with the company, depending on the particular situation. Definitions of unacceptable behavior may vary from company to company.
- **Do not gossip about your own or others' personal lives.** Something you may have told someone privately could become information shared by many. Be discreet as to how much personal information you reveal. For example, if you need to take a day off to help a sick parent, you may not wish to go into the details of their condition, depending on the situation.
- **Schedule your time off well in advance.** Though you may be ready for a vacation after your first week, it is likely you won't be eligible until several months or a year later. Depending on the work environment and pace, it is advisable to request vacation days 2-4 weeks in advance, or earlier, whenever possible.
- **Use office property in a responsible manner.** Make sure if you take materials home, they are used for office work at home and returned to the office.
- **Likewise, use office technology in a responsible manner.** Treat email as formal correspondence, with correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Do not "surf the web" for pleasure while at work nor should you store documents of a personal nature on an office computer.
- **Understand how Americans view their employer, for example, the days of working at one company lifelong have largely passed for the majority.** On average, Americans change jobs 6-10 times in a lifetime.
- **"Networking" is a valuable tool for your professional development.** Volunteer work, professional association membership and conference participation may be ways to expand your connections within the company and the field.
- **Use your MSU connections! As an alumnus, you are able to access the resources the Career Services Network up to two years after graduation.** Also, remember to stay in touch with faculty and classmates, as they progress in their careers as well.

# GENERAL GUIDELINES AND TIPS

- **Be aware of American body language.** In general, Americans value a lot of **eye contact during a conversation.** It is routine to shake hands with someone upon introduction.
- **Treat staff at all levels as important.** In fact, you may find a secretary may greatly impact the quality of your work life. Also, when dealing with people of high status, the secretary often serves as the “gatekeeper” to access that person. Finally, in keeping with American views on personal mobility, it is not unusual for someone in a support staff position to later be promoted to a professional job.
- **It is important to learn colleagues’ names as soon as possible.** On the first day, take a notebook to jot down this information. It is routine in most companies to call the boss and colleagues by their first name.
- **Normally, companies evaluate a new employee within six months of arrival.** This is a way to gauge your strengths and weaknesses. If your company doesn’t offer this formally, you may wish to ask your supervisor for this opportunity. Many Americans value “constructive criticism.”<sup>5</sup>
- **Dating a colleague is not advisable.** Some companies have explicit policies against this. Think very hard before you pursue a social relationship with a co-worker. If it ends in an unpleasant manner, you will still be interacting with that person professionally.
- **If you decide to change jobs, it is advisable to have a new one secured prior to resigning.** Depending on the company, 2-4 weeks advance “notice”<sup>6</sup> is expected before departing. You will need to consider your specific situation to determine whether or not to inform a current employer you are job hunting. If the company culture values loyalty or is highly competitive, you may wish to keep your search private for as long as possible.
- **Be sure to maintain copies of all important correspondence and documents you both receive and produce.** Start immediately to create a logical file system, so that you can easily access such items.
- **If you have a conflict with someone at the office, it is usually best to try to resolve it directly with that person.** Reach out and have a face-to-face conversation first. If you are unable to do so, the next step would be to speak with your boss. If the situation still cannot be resolved at that level – or if it is an ongoing conflict with the boss – you may wish to use the assistance of the personnel office.

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## *Words used in these guidelines:*

- **Networking** -- *when people make alliances, often at the professional level, which can be ways to pass on information to each other, find out about recent developments, job openings, etc.*
- **Gatekeeper** -- *the person who controls the communication access for another person, often of higher status.*
- **Constructive criticism** -- *when feedback is given in a way that points out the problem, but also works with the individual to help them come up with ways to correct them.*
- **Notice** -- *when an individual informs a company that they are going to resign.*

## SECTION 5

# EMPLOYER GUIDE TO HIRING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**Benefits of Hiring International Talent**

**U.S. Work Authorization Chart**

**Employing an International Student Before  
Graduation**

**Employing an International Student After Graduation**

**Employment Options for Non-immigration Visas**

**Permanent Residency**

# BENEFITS OF HIRING INTERNATIONAL TALENT

## 1 **Cross-cultural Competencies**

International students bring cross-cultural competencies and multiple language skills to your organization.

## 2 **Diversity**

Hiring an international student not only brings diversity but also introduces a new perspective for creativity & problem-solving.

## 3 **Adaptability**

Many international students demonstrate maturity, flexibility, grit and dedication and can share business practices of other cultures and help your organization adapt to new challenges globally.

## 4 **Experiences**

The students' diversity of prior work experiences coupled with academic excellence may provide innovative approaches to business.

## 5 **Characteristics**

International students demonstrate characteristics that are appealing to top employers: knowledge of other cultures, multiple language capabilities (including English), and ability to contribute in a teamwork-centered environment.

## 6 **Skills**

Students also exhibit high quality skills such as leadership, flexibility, independence, and ability to adapt to change.



# COMMON US WORK AUTHORIZATION OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS

## CPT

### Curricular Practical Training

**Definition:** Temporary employment authorization directly related to student's academic program

**Authorized By:** Designated School Official (DSO) at OISS

**Duration:** Employment dependent but is granted on a semester basis

**Who is eligible?** F-1 visa students who have completed at least one academic year full-time

**When to Apply** When applicable but after first year of full-time status

**Start Date** Employment dependent but must have offer first before applying

**Permitted Work Hours** Part-time CPT: no more than 20 hours a week during fall and spring semester

## OPT

### Optional Practical Training

**Definition:** Temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study

**Authorized By:** United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

**Duration:** 12 Months

**Who is eligible?** Full-time F-1 visa students who will be completing degree requirements this semester

**When to Apply** 90 days prior to program end date and up to 60 days after

**Start Date** Decided by student, last date to start is 60 days after degree completion

**Permitted Work Hours** Minimum of 20 hours a week



## AT

### Academic Training

**Definition:** Training for students in their field of study as a form of experiential learning

**Authorized By:** International Student Advisor and/or Program Sponsor

**Duration:** 18 months for Bachelors/Masters Graduates. 36 months for Doctoral Graduates. Non-degree AT: length based on duration of study (1-2 semesters)

**Who is eligible?** J-1 Students

**When to Apply** Prior to program end date.

**Start Date** Can start prior to program end date. Last possible start date is 30 days after the program end date or 30 days after degree completion, whichever is sooner

**Permitted Work Hours** No limitation, Minimum 20 hours per week after program completion



# EMPLOYING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

This information will assist prospective employers in understanding basic work options for internationals who may want to work for their company.

## F-1 Visa Holders

The F-1 visa status is a temporary non-immigrant student visa, and the most common visa for MSU international students. F-1 visa holders must obtain work authorization before beginning employment off-campus. Individuals holding F-2 visa status are dependents of the F-1 visa holder and are not, under any circumstances, allowed to earn income in the United States.

***Employers do not incur processing costs for employment authorization of international students while they are on F-1 or J-1 visas.***

## J-1 Visa Holders

J-1 student visa status is granted to students who participate in international exchange programs between Michigan State University (MSU) and universities in other countries, or whose education in the U.S. is financed directly or indirectly by the U.S. government, the government of the student's home country, an international organization of which the U.S. is a member, or by another institutional sponsor. J-1s have some work authorization options that must be pre-approved.

## BEFORE GRADUATION

### On Campus Limitation

Students in F-1 and J-1 status are required to be full-time students and may work on-campus up to 20 hours or in the "practical training" options below.

### Practical Training Options

International students are eligible for temporary work authorization that permits them to engage in part- or full- time employment in their field of study.

### Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is temporary employment authorization directly related to a F-1 student's academic program and granted by the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS). CPT is typically authorized on a part-time (up to 20 hours a week) basis during the school year and can be authorized on a full-time (over 20 hours a week) or part-time basis during vacation periods. CPT gives students the possibility to work off-campus or to work for more than 20 hours a week on campus if certain qualifications are met. Some types of CPT are as follows:

- **Required for the degree program:** In order for training to be considered "required", all students in the degree program must be required to complete an internship or practicum in order to receive their degree. A few programs at MSU have such requirements.
- **Integral part of an established curriculum:** If the internship/work experience is not required, then it must be taken for academic credit. Students will work with their academic advisor to fill out the "CPT Authorization Form" issued by OISS. Please see the following link for more information: <https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/files/7515/2571/3183/cpt.pdf>

The student must receive a job offer prior to securing the employment authorization, and thus will be unable to provide documentation at the interview stage. OISS needs a signed, written offer of employment on the company's letterhead as part of the CPT application requirements.

**Proof of Work Authorization:** The employer and dates for which the student is authorized to work will appear on the student's Form I-20 (certificate of eligibility). Students cannot begin work before the start date on the Form I-20, or continue working after the end date. CPT authorization may be renewable if the student continues to be eligible.

### **J-1 Academic Training**

J-1 students may apply for temporary work

authorization called "Academic Training" (AT) either prior to or after completion of studies to accept positions within their field of study. Students seeking or completing bachelor's or master's degrees are eligible for 18 months of AT. Students seeking or completing doctoral degrees are eligible for 36 months of AT. Non-degree (exchange) students are eligible for AT authorizations matching the length of time they have spent studying in the U.S. Example: A one-semester (4-month) exchange student is eligible for up to 4 months of AT.

## **AFTER GRADUATION**

The U.S. government allows students to apply for authorization to gain practical work experience to supplement their academic programs. Many employers find this to be a useful opportunity to hire a student with valuable international perspectives.

### **F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

OPT is defined as "temporary employment authorization directly related to the field of study". F-1 students are eligible for up to 12 months of employment authorization under this category.

For students whose majors are given the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) designation, employment may

be extended for an additional 24 months, if the F-1 visa holder is employed by an E-Verify employer.

OPT is recommended by OISS at MSU and granted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The application process can take several months.

**Proof of Work Authorization:** Students on OPT will receive an employment authorization document or EAD card. USCIS issues the EAD and it specifies the dates of authorized employment.

**J-1 Academic Training:** see the "before graduation" section.

## **EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS FOR NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS**

Beyond CPT, OPT, or AT, there are options for employing internationals.

### **Temporary Worker (H-1) Visa**

The H-1B visa allows foreign nationals to work in the United States in specialty occupations. The H-1B visa category has the following key requirements:

Applicant must have theoretical and practical application of a highly specialized body of knowledge and must have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent in a specialized field. The company is the petitioner

of the H-1B and the international is the beneficiary. The company should consult their HR and legal counsel when completing these petitions.

The employer makes an H-1B visa petition to the Department of Labor and USCIS. An employer may petition for H-1B status for a maximum of 3 years at a time. An individual can hold H-1B status for up to a maximum of six years. It is advised to plan petition applications early as timing of filing is critical due to H-1B visa limits.

**O-1 Visa: Individuals with Extraordinary Ability to Achievement** The O-1 nonimmigrant visa is for the individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics, among other fields, and are recognized nationally or internationally for those achievements. An O-1 petition has an initial period of stay of up to 3 years. Subsequent extensions may last for no more than one year at a time. There is no limit to the number of extensions.

**Nonimmigrant NAFTA Professional (TN) Visa** The TN visa allows citizens of Canada and Mexico, as NAFTA professionals, to work in the U.S. in a prearranged business activity for a U.S. or foreign employer. Permanent residents, including Canadian permanent residents, are not able to apply to work as a NAFTA professional. Both Canadian and Mexican citizens can be admitted to the United States in TN status in increments of up to three years. There is no cumulative time limit on TN status. Status is renewable indefinitely, provided the stay remains temporary in nature.

**E-3 Certain Specialty Occupation Professionals from Australia** The E-3 classification applies only to nationals of Australia. The specialty occupation requires theoretical and practical application of a body of knowledge in professional fields and at least the attainment of a bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, as a minimum, for entry into the occupation in the U. S. There is no cumulative time limit on E-3. It is renewable every two years indefinitely, provided the stay remains temporary in nature.

**Intra-Company Transfer (L) Visa** L Intra-company Transferees who, within the three preceding years, have been employed abroad continuously for one year, and who will be employed by a branch, parent, affiliate, or subsidiary of that same employer in the U.S. in a managerial, executive, or specialized knowledge capacity may be eligible for an L Visa.

USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-nonimmigrant-workers>

## PERMANENT RESIDENCY

Lawful permanent residency is a status granted by the U.S. government to citizens of other countries. One option to obtain PR is through an “employer-based petition”. For example, the employer may document the need for a person’s occupational skills, or the individual must prove international recognition is his or her field. While an employer may sponsor an individual, USCIS makes the final decision. Make no promise or guarantee to the employee.

**USCIS website:** <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/permanent-workers>

## LEGAL SUPPORT

### Find an immigration attorney

OISS can only provide general information on visa categories beyond F and J. International students and U.S employers need to talk to an immigration attorney regarding specific cases.

American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Offers a “find a lawyer” option. <http://www.aila.org/>

SECTION 6

# ADVISOR GUIDE TO HELPING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**The role of OISS**

**Frequently asked questions by career advisors**

**Tips for advising international students**

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# THE ROLES OF OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS & SCHOLARS

## **Within the context of career development, OISS provides the following support:**

- Advise on international students' U.S. work authorization options
- Member of the Career Initiatives for International Students group
- Organize events in conjunction with the Career Services Network on international student career development
- Serve as liaison to the Global Talent Retention Initiative of Michigan (GTRI), an organization focused on employer education of how to employ international students for short- or long-term employment opportunities.
- Develop and contribute to resources for international students to help them navigate Career Development within U.S. higher education.

## **Contact OISS:**

Office for International Students & Scholars

Email: [oiss@msu.edu](mailto:oiss@msu.edu)

Phone: 517-353-1720

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY CAREER ADVISORS

U.S. immigration regulations, under certain circumstances, allow international students to pursue part- or full-time employment during the course of their studies. Please refer to the Work Authorization Options section for a comparison of the various work authorization options.

### **What does OISS tell international students about finding employment?**

OISS expresses the importance of having a partnership between OISS and the Career Services Network. We explain that, to be successful, students must understand both their work authorization options as well as prepare themselves for the U.S. workplace through using the large number of programs and resources that the Career Services Network has to offer.

We help to manage their expectations by explaining the difficulties one may face in finding U.S. employment, especially if the student is an undergraduate or is not pursuing a degree in any of the Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) fields. We urge them to recognize that they, ultimately, must be the best candidate for the job and are responsible for their success.

## **What do you cover during International New Student Orientation (INSO)?**

Career Services professionals have accompanied OISS to our Pre-Departure Sessions in China to speak with incoming international students, and the Career Services Network attends our Resource Fair during orientation. International Orientation Leaders are also briefed on career support information, and the international parent orientation has a focus on MSU Career Services.

## **What does OISS tell international students about talking with employers?**

Because we know this is a sensitive topic for both students and employers, OISS has created the resources: *How to Talk to Employers about Your Immigration Status* (page 9) and the *Employer's Guide to Hiring International Students* (from page 29 - 34). The resources for employers can be provided for students, Career Services staff, or prospective employers. OISS is available to come to career fairs to meet with employers and has hosted information sessions for employers in the past. We welcome further collaboration in this area to assist with employer education.

## **What can Career Services Professionals do to educate employers?**

Career Services Professionals should feel free to circulate any of the documents we have related to international student employment such as the *Employer's Guide to Hiring International Students* or work authorization information. It may be helpful to state that you're not asking them to consider international students instead of domestic students, but just for them to know they are part of the MSU talent pool. For other talking points, you can refer to the Global Talent Retention Initiative (GTRI) as just one example: [www.migtri.org](http://www.migtri.org). OISS welcomes further conversation on this topic.

## **How can we train ourselves on the cultural “norms” and customs of students?**

The best way to find out about international student challenges and what they would like in terms of programs and resources is to hold focus groups. OISS can help you connect with international students. Additionally, we would be happy to collaborate with the Career Services Network to facilitate intercultural communication workshops for Career Services professionals.

## **What does “sponsorship” mean?**

International students may often refer to “sponsorship”. They are referring to a company petitioning for them to receive an H-1B visa, which is a temporary worker visa that allows them to work in the U.S. for up to 6 years. Many students hope to transition to this visa type from their student visa. You can check the [Work Authorization Options](#) (page 4-13) section for more details.

## **Do you advise international students to get work authorization if they are volunteering?**

Volunteering is defined by the U.S. government as work for which no one else in that position is being paid. There should be absolutely no compensation. If students are unsure if they need work authorization, they should be referred to OISS. We suggest for students to always have work authorization – even if unpaid – to protect their future immigration benefits/visa renewals. Please note that once students graduate, unpaid work is still considered employment. This is just one more reason we suggest that students receive authorization.

## **Do you advise international students to get work authorization if they want to start their own business?**

You may refer them to OISS. This is a complicated issue and, many times, a student should seek immigration counsel.



## TIPS FOR ADVISING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

If a student is unsure how their immigration status affects their employment options or which U.S. work authorization options are available to them, please refer them to OISS. We have walk-in hours Monday - Friday from 1-3 p.m. in Room 105 of the International Center.

- **Be aware of cultural factors** – eye contact, projecting self-confidence, actively networking, speaking directly, or providing strong opinions. This American style may be deeply challenging to international students. Sometimes simply acknowledging the root of the challenge helps the student to feel more comfortable.
- **Many international students are worried about their communication skills.** Reassure the student that you can understand them, but encourage them to practice communicating with and interviewing with others (in English, if they are planning to work in the U.S.). OISS Coffee Hour, held each Friday from 4-6pm in the International Center, is a great place to build communication skills. <https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/about/feature/weekly-coffee-hour/>
- **A non-native English speaker may have trouble understanding interview questions** – whether it's language, the intent of the question, or sometimes figuring out the right answer. Assure them that it's okay to ask for the question to be repeated, as long as they don't ask so often that the interviewer begins question their language abilities. Provide them with alternative ways to clarify a question or to buy time to think.
- **Help students to develop their job search strategies** and direct them toward resources that may be more applicable to them such as *GoinGlobal* or *MyVisaJobs*. *GoinGlobal* provides students with cultural guides and employers most likely to sponsor H-1B visas based on state and metro area. Students may also be able to look for positions in their home country. *MyVisaJobs* also provides up-to-date lists of top H-1B employers in the U.S.
- **Help students think strategically about the types of businesses or organizations that would be interested in them** – businesses trading in their home country or expanding within a geographic region is an obvious example. Others include organizations who have a history of working with international students.