

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAREER GUIDE

F-1 VISA UNDERGRADUATE

This career guide will showcase steps to continue to grow in your professional development. It will outline various ways to get experience and utilize that experience moving forward into industry or graduate school.

Part 1: ELIGIBILITY TO WORK

Am I eligible to work on-campus?

International students can work on-campus up to 50% time (20 hours/week or less) during the academic terms and full-time during the academic break periods including summer time. Special authorization is not required to work on-campus as long as you are in valid F-1 student status, pursuing a full course of study.

Am I eligible to work off-campus?

Off-campus employment requires some form of written or documented authorization issued by either the US Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) or the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS).

You must be currently in legal status and have been enrolled as an F-1 student in the US for a minimum of one academic year (9 months) to be eligible for any form of off-campus employment. Working off-campus is limited to 50% time (20 hours per week or less) while school is in session and can be full-time during vacation or break periods.

There are three options for off-campus employment for students in F-1 status:

- 1. Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** is off-campus employment or an internship related to your major. You must be registered for a class (e.g., internship, independent study) where you will receive unit credit for the training or internship. CPT is limited to part-time while classes are in session and may be full-time during the break periods. CPT is not required if the student is working on-campus in a paid or unpaid internship. This is considered on-campus employment and is a benefit under the F-1 visa category. Authorization for CPT is granted by OISS and can take about two weeks. No fee is required. Please visit OISS for further information on necessary forms.
- 2. Optional Practical Training (OPT)** is employment or training directly related to your field of study. OPT provides an opportunity to obtain actual work experience in the U.S. related to your studies. The actual authorization is granted by USCIS and can be approved for 12 months initially. This can be extended for an additional 24 months for STEM students. Once OPT is approved, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) will be issued. USCIS can take up to 90 days to process a practical training application. Employment cannot begin until the immigration service has granted the authorization. USCIS requires an OPT application fee. Please visit OISS for further information on necessary forms, and check their quarterly OPT advising schedule.

Note: CPT is not deducted from your 12 months of OPT, unless you work full time CPT for an aggregate of 12 months. In this case you will not be eligible for any OPT.

You can also get OPT during your time in school if you want to take a summer internship to work full time and are unable to take course credit. Speak with an OISS advisor about this option.

- 3. Employment Due to Unforeseen Economic Hardship** is granted by USCIS on limited basis whereby F-1 students can apply for off-campus work permission based on economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances. For economic hardship or extenuating circumstances, consult with OISS.

Part 2: GETTING EXPERIENCE

What counts as experience?

Your career development begins with experience. Experience is any situation where you gained a skillset (technical skills, customer service, communication, problem-solving, research skills, etc.). Experience can include, but is not limited to:

- ◆ Academic Projects
- ◆ Campus Involvement (ex: departments, clubs)
- ◆ Internships
- ◆ Leadership Roles
- ◆ Personal Projects
- ◆ Part-Time Positions
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Volunteer

How do I find experience?

Career Services specializes in helping students find experience.

- ◆ **Search for on-campus opportunities at UCSB:** Check out on campus student organizations and activities through the Office of Student Life. Sign up with your department listserv to stay connected to opportunities within your academic department. Check out campus job boards such as Handshake.
- ◆ **Search for off-campus opportunities at UCSB:** Check out the Job Search section of the Career Services website for listings of various search engines or check out Book of Lists located in the Career Resource Room.
- ◆ **Make an appointment with a career counselor:** Career Services specializes in helping students find experience. A career counselor is trained to discuss your interests, skills, values, and personality to help you narrow down what types of experiential opportunities you are interested in. Talking with a counselor will help you solidify your career goals and navigate any changes in those goals.

3 Main Notes to Consider:

- ◆ Think about your internship experience/job you had before coming to the USA and consider adding this to your resume. For first year students, consider volunteer/leadership positions because this is an excellent way to gain transferrable skills since some employers require certain coursework or class level when applying for internships.
- ◆ For on-campus opportunities, F-1 visa international students are eligible to gain experience up to 20 hours per week during academic quarters and 40 hours per week during school breaks. Talk to OISS for further information.
- ◆ For off-campus opportunities, F-1 visa international students are eligible for off-campus employment that is related to your field of study. Talk to OISS for further information.

While utilizing the above services, also remember to utilize your own network.

Your network consists of:

- ◆ Friends
- ◆ Family
- ◆ Family Friends
- ◆ Faculty at UCSB & previous institutions
- ◆ Supervisors & co-workers (current & previous)
- ◆ Mentors
- ◆ Alumni

Connecting with individuals who have gone through similar experiences and have navigated hiring processes utilizing OPT or CPT would have an abundance of ideas and strategies for gaining experience and employment moving forward. You can find these individuals by attending UCSB international student panels/events at OISS, and at population-specific events such as the International Students Association.

See pages 6–7 to refer to a list of on-campus and off-campus resources.

What experience is best?

Any experience that allows you to continue to gain interpersonal and technical skills while learning more about the job function and field is good experience. Experience is not deemed better if it is paid vs. unpaid. Thinking about your current career goals as it directly relates to your major could help you determine what experience is best for you.

For instance, if you are considering attending graduate school, research, volunteer, and leadership experience could help shape your application; while if you are planning to go into an industry-specific full-time position post-graduation, internships and academic/personal relevant projects could showcase your skillset.

We encourage students to look beyond big-name companies, but explore various companies that may be willing to hire international students. The “best” experience is more about what is the best fit for you.

Do I need to provide a Social Security Number when applying for employment on-campus or off-campus?

While it is not required to have a Social Security Number (SSN) to accept or start employment, a SSN is required when receiving payment for employment. It is strongly advised that you apply for a SSN once you have received your official job offer or within the first week of employment.

Can I participate in a volunteer experience?

Volunteer experience off-campus is allowed if you are donating your time with an organization whose primary purpose is charitable or humanitarian in nature, without remuneration or any other type of compensation. Examples of these include volunteering at an animal shelter, American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity or any other non-profit groups that do not pay for volunteer services. F-1 students are free to engage in volunteer work as long as it meets the criteria previously stated. Please visit OISS for further information about participating in unpaid volunteer experience.

Can I participate in an unpaid internship?

Unpaid internships off-campus must be related to your major and require CPT authorization from OISS. Please visit the OISS office to obtain the CPT application.

It is important to understand there is a difference between engaging in an unpaid internship vs. volunteering. Unpaid internships do not usually qualify as “volunteer” experience. Internships, both paid and unpaid, are primarily offered by the private sector and related to the intern’s major field of study. Please review specific guidelines the U.S. Department of Labor has set for those seeking an unpaid internship:

www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm

Can I participate in a paid internship?

During your academic program, you are eligible to participate in a paid internship off-campus but it must be related to your major, need to earn academic credit, and requires CPT authorization from OISS. Please visit the OISS office to obtain the CPT application.

After completion of your academic degree, you are eligible to participate in a paid internship on- or off-campus but it must be related to your major and requires OPT authorization from USCIS. Please attend the quarterly OPT workshops hosted at Career Services and visit the OISS office to begin the OPT application process.

Part 3: PURSUING INDUSTRY CAREERS

Prior to graduation, what steps do I need to take before applying for a full-time position?

Make an appointment with Office of International Students and Scholars: It is important to consult with Office of International Students and Scholars to ensure the position you are applying for is directly related to your major. Furthermore, it is recommended to apply for OPT the quarter you anticipate to graduate since there is typically a minimum of 90 day waiting period to process paperwork.

Do I have to share my visa status on an application? How do I answer: “Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?”

As an international student, it is a common stressor when to inform a potential employer about your visa status. The first hurdle typically comes when filling out an application and you answer “Yes” since you are eligible to work in the US for up to 12 months (possible 24 month extension for STEM students). If there is a space for a comment on the application, a good response is, “I will have work authorization and am waiting to receive approval for OPT.”

How do I answer: “Do you now or in the future require H-1B sponsorship?”

Answer according to your future plans. If you need H-1B sponsorship after OPT, then you should answer “Yes.” However, if you are not planning on staying in the U.S., then you can answer “No.”

What are additional criteria to consider when filling out an application and interviewing with a potential employer?

When answering questions on an application, Career Services advises students to provide information that is honest and true.

Once all application materials are received and you move through the traditional hiring/interview process, the next time your status will need to be discussed is during an offer. You may choose to share earlier in the interview process to explore the types of future support for H-1B visas if you are considering this. Use your best judgment and consider meeting with a career counselor for more individualized support to discuss strategies around sharing your status.

Where can I get help with application materials?

We strongly encourage having your written materials reviewed so you can be a competitive candidate. For assistance preparing your application materials (resume, cover letter, etc.), come by Career Services to schedule an appointment or stop by for our drop-in hours (M – F, 11 am – 4pm).

It is important to demonstrate excellent written communication skills within application materials. If you need grammatical assistance, please visit Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS).

Where can I get help with preparing for an interview?

Interviewing can be quite an intimidating process. Employers typically expect applicants to demonstrate excellent verbal communication skills during an interview. In preparing for an upcoming interview, attend an Interview workshop which is offered every quarter or schedule a mock interview at Career Services (M – F, 8:30am – 4:30pm).

Can I attend UCSB’s career fair?

As a UCSB student, you are welcome and encouraged to attend. Prior to the event, it is recommended to conduct employer research as to which companies hire international students for internship or full-time positions. However, you are also encouraged to speak with other employers who interest you at the fair and see if they are interested in you and possibly able to hire international students.

Where are the best places to look?

It is hard to say whether small or mid-size companies will hire international students. Many big size companies will be interested in having the best, most qualified applicant as well as being able to hire someone who can obtain a subsequent work visa after you complete your practical training. You can look at myvisajobs.com to see which companies have a history of sponsoring H-1B visas.

U.S. federal government, national labs, and defense industries typically require a candidate to be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident to be eligible for any job positions. State and/or local governments may have positions that are open to international candidates, and some states in the U.S. may be more willing to accept international applicants.

See pages 6–7 to refer to a list of on-campus and off-campus resources.

Part 4: PREPARING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

If you plan to attend graduate school, it is important to contact OISS about transferring your record to your new school due to critical deadlines to be aware of.

What kind of graduate school is right for me?

When considering attending graduate school, there are many factors that affect which school is the right fit for you. Obtain the Graduate School Options handout in the Career Resource Room and attend an Exploring Graduate School workshop which is offered every quarter at Career Services.

For instance, what type of degree do you want to receive?

- ◆ **Master's programs** are typically a 2-3 year commitment geared toward increasing your knowledge and experience in a certain area (i.e. counseling, education, and business).
- ◆ **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs** range between 5-7 years and are focused on deeply increasing your knowledge in one area to research and teach in academia (at a university-level) or to perform a specific task in an industry environment.
- ◆ **Professional school programs** help prepare students for careers in specific fields and can range from 1-3 years. Examples include medical school, law school and education programs.

Determining which type of program best suits you is your first step in finding the best graduate school. Below are some additional questions to ask yourself regarding other factors:

- ◆ **Academic requirements:** What is the GPA requirement? What is the program's average GPA? Does my GPA meet the requirement or is it close to their average? Have I completed all of the prerequisites required for the program? Do you need to take the GRE, MCAT, LSAT, or any other entrance exam?
- ◆ **Experience requirements:** What are the experience requirements for the program? Have I completed and documented those experiences? If your academic history doesn't qualify you as a strong candidate, taking some time to gain experience in the field could boost your application.
- ◆ **Cost:** What types of financial aid are available to me? Does this program or university offer scholarships and/or assistantships?

How do I pay for graduate school?

Paying for graduate school could be the greatest stressor when deciding or accepting to go graduate school. Funding from the program may depend on which type of program you apply to. For instance, Ph.D. programs often times are fully funded by the institution since they are a longer commitment of time, while Master's programs are rarely fully funded. However, there are additional funding sources that could help alleviate the cost of graduate school.

- ◆ **Fellowships/scholarships:** Private and institutional scholarships could be available for international students. Be sure to check with your institution about what may be available to you. Fellowships may have restrictions in regards to immigration status.
- ◆ **Assistantships:** Many graduate programs will offer assistantships which allow students to work on-campus as research assistants (RAs) or teaching assistants (TAs). You've probably worked with these graduate assistants in your course labs or lectures. You may qualify to work as graduate assistant where you are paid and could also receive a stipend to cover the cost of tuition. This gives you experience in that field while also being able to financially support yourself.
- ◆ **Private loans:** Depending on restrictions with each banking institution, you may be able to receive private loans. Large student loan amounts could require a co-signer, however, some banks may allow a small private loan without one.

What if I have additional questions?

Career Services offers a variety of services tailored towards graduate school applications (Statement of Purpose critiques, graduate school mock interviews, recommendation letter strategies, etc.). Come see a career counselor to discuss these various aspects of the application process and develop a game plan tailored towards your needs. Visit the Career Resource Room to review graduate school guides and GRE preparation books.

Part 5: UNDERSTANDING U.S. EMPLOYER'S EXPECTATIONS

There may be significant differences between the US Employer expectations and the work culture in your home country. As an international student, it is important to learn these cultural differences and values to increase your chances of success during the job application process.

Characteristic	US Employer Expectations	Conflicting Values of Other Cultures
Branding & Self-Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be assertive and confident while discussing the skills and accomplishments • Follow-up with interviewers in a timely manner to send them a thank you note and ask about the application status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be modest while discussing the skills and personal accomplishments • Wait for further notification, and never follow up with employers about the application status
Directness in Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open and respond to questions in a straightforward manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be indirect when expressing personal opinions or answer questions
Interpersonal Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain eye contact with people from all authority levels • Greet others professionally with a firm handshake • Actively network with professionals, classmates, and alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct eye contact with elders, hiring manager, and interviewers • Use a greeting specific to their culture when meeting the interviewers • Find job opportunities only through family contacts or friends
Professional Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid inserting personal information, such as age, gender, and pictures into their resumes • Avoid discussing any religious beliefs with the employers as they are considered personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include pictures, gender, race, age, marital status and religious information in the resume

Part 6: RESOURCES

UCSB Resources

Big Interview: Learn and practice your interview skills through powerful video tutorials and virtual interview practice software. Big Interview gives you both “fast track” and “mastery track” systems of lessons and virtual interview practice. career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/job-search/big-interview

Career Resource Room: Our Career Peers can help you find specialized handouts and information for local, national, and international experiential opportunities. 10 minute drop-in appointments available with a career counselor: (M – F, 11am – 4pm).

Career Services Website: Check out the Job Search and Get Experience section of our website for listings of various search engines. career.sa.ucsb.edu

Handshake: Career Services’ exclusive job and internship searching tool. You can narrow your search by industry, position type, and location through the Advanced Search feature. career.sa.ucsb.edu/handshake

GoinGlobal: Check out career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/job-search/goinglobal to explore expert advice for finding jobs at home and abroad, including job search resources and information about country-specific career information.

Human Resources: General UCSB job board that posts limited and part time positions across campus. jobs.ucsb.edu

Office of Student Life: Campus directory for different student organizations on campus and explore volunteer (ex: Community Affairs Board) and leadership roles to engage in. osl.sa.ucsb.edu/campus-organizations/getting-involved-at-ucsb/browse

Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA): Check out Faculty Research Assistance Program (FRAP) www.duels.ucsb.edu/research/frap. Also consider contacting faculty to conduct your own independent research through courses such as 196 or 199.

Additional Resources

4 International Careers and Jobs: World-wide directory of job sites and career resources. Covers 190 countries and including more than 1000 job sites. www.4icj.com

Careerjet: Search for job listings by country and city worldwide. www.careerjet.com

iHipo: Job and Internship search site focused on international positions (U.S. included). www.ihipo.com

Laowai Career: Job board for international talent seeking professional jobs in China for full, part, internship or freelance opportunities. www.LaowaiCareer.com

LinkedIn: Curious about where others from UCSB work? Check out one of LinkedIn's greatest features. www.linkedin.com/edu/alumni

My Visa Jobs: Check out www.myvisajobs.com to explore what companies hire international employees and the statistics on number of H-1B visas given. Also, don't automatically rule out small businesses—they may be willing to explore this option depending on the value and expertise you bring.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: www.uscis.gov

CAREER SERVICES OVERVIEW

Mission

To educate and empower all students and recent graduates to prepare for and pursue success.

Services

Appointments:

- ◆ 30 minute general career appointments
- ◆ 15 minute drop-in appointments
- ◆ Mock interviews (1 per quarter)
- ◆ Assessment intakes/interpretations
- ◆ Statement of Purpose critiques (1 per quarter)

Career Events:

- ◆ Quarterly Career & Internship Fairs
- ◆ Employer info sessions
- ◆ Targeted workshops & panels
- ◆ Graduate & Professional School Day (Fall quarter)

Online Services:

- ◆ Phone/Zoom appointments available while you are on break or away from Santa Barbara
- ◆ Handshake
- ◆ GoinGlobal

Alumni Services:

- ◆ One year access to all events and appointments post-graduation (with exception of On-Campus Interview Program)
- ◆ One year access to Handshake post-graduation

Hours, Location, & Contact Information

Career Services

Building 599 (Pink building across from Storke Tower)
(805) 893-4412
Open: 8:30am – 4:30pm
career.sa.ucsb.edu

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