

**Office for Alumni Affairs & Career Advancement**

**Job Search Tips for International Students**

**from International Harvard Chan Alumni**

(prepared from a survey sent to alumni -- individual responses are listed below)

**1. As an international student, what were the biggest challenges you faced in your job search and how did you overcome them?**

* Institutions willing to sponsor a visa.
* Visa sponsorship issue would likely come up before CV, credentials and achievements.
* The biggest challenge was getting employers to hire me once they realized I needed sponsorship. Most of them did not know what the process looked like and were hesitant to try.
* When talking to prospective employers who are interested, especially those who don't know much about the process, it is important that you are able to explain it to them. Something like, it's a fairly simple and not expensive process. I was coached to say that by the HSPH Career Office, and it helped me, tremendously.
* Learn quickly and become hard to replace so that from the company's perspective, the cost of retraining someone to do your job would be more expensive than to sponsor your visa.
* Do your homework on the process required for you to be sponsored, especially if interested in smaller companies/organizations, so that it's not as daunting for the employer.
* My best advice to you, you may offer the employer that you can hire an immigration attorney who can solve the visa issue smoothly.
* Salary expectation, you may have to start with less-than-expected salary - this is especially important to realize if you have been working in a well-paid position in your home country, and need to readjust your mindset and understand that it will take some time before you can have what you desire and deserve!
* With a master’s, PhD and three years of post-doc at Harvard, being willing to move away from academia and find a job in the government/private sector was the biggest challenge.

**2. What strategies did you use to seek out organizations that sponsor international students?**

* Applying to well-known and large organizations that have a track record of visa sponsorship.
* Put in a lot of energy and time and sent multiple inquiries/applications to any postings I could find, also networking through Harvard Chan faculty and the career office.
* I applied like any American applicant and during the interview I brought up the issue of the visa status. I was concerned if I only focused on places that took international students or had that as part of my solicitation letter, that my application would have been rejected before they got a chance to meet with me in person and discuss what I can bring to their organization.
* I tried applying and got several interviews, but what truly worked (and I know this is true for many of my batch mates) is developing working relations with some department/projects while at school, and trying to find avenues through them.
* I sought out ALL organizations I could -- that was my strategy.

**3. Did you work as an intern to get yourself in the door? Would you recommend this approach to current students?**

* Yes!!!! I got an internship position during my practicum. That’s how I got a full time job after graduation. I would recommend this approach again and again. This gives you an opportunity to prove yourself and how you can easily fit into the US work system. Once they know how good you are, the organization will find a way to keep you.
* Yes, yes & yes - please get into some work role - project, internship, anything (paid or unpaid) - and as early as possible (definitely before spring session). Please look at opportunities within the School or at Business School or HMS; and also in organizations like JSI. My single most important reason for staying in the US was getting started with an unpaid internship.
* Internship is a good way of expanding your network and getting recommendations for whatever career option you decide to pursue.
* Yes, an internship will help you to practice what you learn in the school.

**4. How can an international student maximize his/ her opportunities during their time at Harvard Chan in order to increase their chances of successfully staying in the U.S.?**

* Network to know about all opportunities and options available especially if you want to utilize your OPT.
* Networking. Networking. Networking. Employers are more likely to take that extra step and INVEST in you if they know you and what you can offer them.
* My advice is the following: use the online alumni network, take advantage of as many career talks and many talks in your area of interest as possible. Go up to everyone and anyone and get emails! Networking in this way seemed bizarre and pointless to me at first but landed me both my internship during my MPH and my current job.
* Connections, hard work and impressing teachers enough to get stellar letters of recommendations that are coupled with phone calls to prospective employers.
* I got the job I have now by emailing the alumni network who lived in the city where I wanted to work. I emailed a handful of people asking about jobs/contacts in the area and that is how I found my current job.
* I would say, be productive. Writing as many papers as possible. Make a lot of connections.

**5. What other strategies did you employ that helped in your career search?**

* Getting input on my resume and strategy from various sources.
* Take advantage of the Career Advancement office and its resources. They recognize the fact that you are coming from a different country and provide good pointers that may not be obvious to an international student.
* I met with my faculty to discuss the result of my career search and listened to their advice and directions.
* It is better to make a career decision as early as possible: If you want to be in academia you do more research and look for a job in the universities. However, if you are interested in industry or NGO or Nonprofit work, pick the place matching with your interest. Later, it is very difficult to switch one area to another.
* Attending conferences also helped- serious conferences APHA, sigma 6 etc- having something to present was very helpful as well.
* Keeping the door open for fellowships that might aid the transition to working in the US after the program completion.
* Patience, persistence and the very difficult task of staying positive.

March 2016