

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CAREER GUIDE

## F-1 VISA GRADUATE STUDENTS

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 various careers post 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 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 degree. You must be enrolled in a course (generally an independent study course). Students receive CPT approval from OISS and it is given on a quarter-by-quarter basis, employer specific. CPT is required in some graduate programs such as an MA in Global Study and PhD in Psychology. 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. International students receive this approval in order to work in the US after you graduate. Students receive OPT approval from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and can be approved for 12 months initially. This can be extended for an additional 24 months for STEM students (to review STEM discipline eligibility, visit OISS website or speak with an OISS advisor). Once OPT is approved, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) will be issued. An EAD card is essentially a “work permit” that provides temporary employment authorization to non citizens in the US. Timing issues are important to OPT so be sure to visit with an OISS advisor for help with starting the OPT process at least 2 quarters prior to graduation. USCIS requires an OPT application fee. Please visit OISS for further information on necessary forms, and check their quarterly OPT Advising Schedule.

**NOTE:** The CPT/OPT rules are subject to change. Please refer to OISS website or consult with OISS advisor for latest information.

### Additional Considerations:

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: GET 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 is gained on- and off-campus during your graduate training. Experience can include, but is not limited to:

- ◆ Academic Research
- ◆ Campus Organizations (e.g., department, clubs)
- ◆ Internships
- ◆ Leadership Roles
- ◆ Part-Time Positions
- ◆ Personal Projects (e.g., consulting, programming)
- ◆ Research Assistant
- ◆ Training/Skill Development (e.g., Lynda.com, Coursera, EdX)
- ◆ 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 clubs and activities through the Office of Student Life. Sign up with your department listserv to stay connected to opportunities within your department or other departments. Consider talking to your Advisor, Graduate Program Assistant, and other students about opportunities that may exist. Check out campus job boards such as Handshake and UCSB's HR Website.
- ◆ **Search for off-campus opportunities at UCSB:** Check out the graduate student section of the Career Services website for listings of various search engines or speak with a career counselor at the GSRC or 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, personality, and challenges 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.

While utilizing the above services, also remember to utilize your own network. Your network consists of:

- ◆ Family
- ◆ Family Friends
- ◆ Faculty at UCSB and previous institutions
- ◆ Mentors, coworkers, previous supervisors
- ◆ Alumni

### 3 Main Notes to Consider:

- ◆ Think about work experience you had before coming to the USA and consider adding it to your resume. You can talk with a career counselor about how to write about your experience in a way that targets the positions you are after.
- ◆ 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.

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?*

Participating in CPT opportunities can lead to full-time jobs after graduation, so we strongly encourage you to participate in an internship while earning your degree at UCSB.

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 could help you determine what experience is best for you.

For instance, if you are considering the academic career track, teaching experience, being in a leadership position for a club, and gaining an interdisciplinary emphasis could help shape your application; while if you are planning to go into an industry-specific/non-academic job, internships, personal relevant projects, gaining skills in a particular area, and the Graduate Program in Management Practice certificate 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 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 above criteria.](#) 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: [dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm](http://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 degree, 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 field of study 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/ NON-ACADEMIC CAREERS AFTER GRADUATION

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

**Note that timing issues are critical to receiving OPT.** 1) Graduate students must visit OISS to get advising and help with starting the OPT process **2 quarters prior to graduation**. 2) 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. Graduate students do not need a job to apply for OPT, but once OPT authorization is approved, students need to have a job/internship/volunteer position **within 90 days of receiving OPT approval**. 3) Employment cannot begin until the immigration service has granted the authorization. Please visit OISS for further information on necessary forms, and check their quarterly OPT Advising Schedule.

*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 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, UCSB Career Services and OISS advises all students in providing 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 status with an employer.

*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, 11am – 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. For assistance 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. This information is available on the Career Services’ website for each event. 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](http://myvisajobs.com) to see which companies have a history of sponsoring H-1B visas. Remember that most employers are interested in finding a more long-term employee, since it is an expensive process.

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 on-campus resources.

## **Part 4: PURSUING ACADEMIC CAREERS AFTER GRADUATION**

### *Tenure-Track Careers*

Most tenure-track employment positions will be accommodated by an H-1B visa. The H-1B non-immigrant visa is an employment-based visa category intended for temporary employment in the United States for positions that are considered “Specialty Occupation,” that is, the job description must require a Bachelor’s degree at a minimum and the employee must meet the minimum requirements for the position.

The H-1B visa request is submitted to USCIS by the employer, and includes a requirement for a certification from the US Department of Labor, so the process of preparing an H-1B petition can take several weeks. Unlike employers in Industry, Academic Institutions are not subject to the H-1B “cap,” (a limitation on the number of H-1B applications that will be accepted per fiscal year). H-1B visa status may be requested for up to three years at a time, and H-1B status may be held for no longer than six years, continuously.

Employees with full-time teaching appointments may be eligible to apply for an employer-sponsored green card, through PERM Labor Certification in the EB2 category. Tenure-track employees may be eligible to apply for a green card through the EB1-B, (“Outstanding Professor or Researcher”) category. Both of these categories establish green card eligibility through sponsorship of the employer, so eligibility/sponsorship is dependent on the individual employer’s practices. Alternate routes to obtaining a green card would be through self-sponsorship, or family sponsorship.

Please talk with an OISS advisor for more information.

### *Post-Doc Careers*

Post-Doc careers, depending on the employer and funding source, may be accommodated by a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa or by the H-1B visa. Some employers use the J-1 visa category as the only or preferred category for Post-Doc employees. The J-1 research scholar category has a five year limitation, and J-1 exchange visitors may become subject to the two-year home residence requirement, depending on their home country, subject area, and funding source(s). If subject to this requirement, the exchange visitor would either need to fulfill the requirement or obtain a waiver in order to be eligible to hold H-1B status or to obtain a green card, or to file a change of status from within the United States.

The H-1B visa may be offered to Post-Doc employees, if they are on payroll and if it is the employer’s practice to use H-1B visa status to accommodate Post-Doc appointments. Preparation and filing of the H-1B petition can take several months. H-1B status may be requested for up to three years at a time, and H-1B status may be held for up to six years continuously.

Please talk with an OISS advisor for more information.

### *Where can I get help with application materials?*

For assistance preparing your application materials (resume, cover letter, etc.) or navigating the hiring process, call Career Services to make an appointment or email a GSRC writing, career, or professional development peer (check out the GradPost for more information on hours).

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

## 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](http://career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/job-search/big-interview)

**Career Services:** Schedule an appointment to meet with a career counselor by calling the appointment line at: (805) 893-4412.

**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. Summer quarter/breaks hours vary.

**Career Services Website:** Check out the Graduate Student section of our website for information on job search engines and visit the Get Experience section. [career.sa.ucsb.edu/gradstudents](http://career.sa.ucsb.edu/gradstudents)

**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](http://career.sa.ucsb.edu/handshake)

**GradPost:** The GradPost ([gradpost.ucsb.edu](http://gradpost.ucsb.edu)) is the primary source for grad student-related news and events, job and funding opportunities, and professional development advice. Subscribe to receive email updates: [gradpost.ucsb.edu/subscribe](http://gradpost.ucsb.edu/subscribe)

**Grad Student Peer Advisors:** The Graduate Division has an international peer and other peer advisors to help grad students with writing, funding, career, professional development and more. You can email them for advice or drop in during office hours (check hours on GradPost).

**GSRC:** The graduate Student Resource Center is a resource for graduate students seeking help with many aspects of graduate student life, including funding applications, writing and editing, and navigating the job search process. Come stop by the SRB Room 1215.

**GoinGlobal:** Check out [career.sa.ucsb.edu/students/job-search/goinglobal](http://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](http://jobs.ucsb.edu)

**OISS:** the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) serves UCSB's international students and scholars as well as departments who work with the international population. OISS provides immigration support for the UCSB community, advising for international students, cultural programming, and campus resources referrals. [oiss.sa.ucsb.edu](http://oiss.sa.ucsb.edu)

**Office of Student Life:** Campus directory for different student organizations on campus. [osl.sa.ucsb.edu/campus-organizations/getting-involved-at-ucsb/browse](http://osl.sa.ucsb.edu/campus-organizations/getting-involved-at-ucsb/browse)

### Additional Resources

**4 International Careers and Jobs:** Worldwide directory of job sites and career resources. Covers 190 countries and includes more than 1000 job sites. [4icj.com](http://4icj.com)

**Careerjet:** Search for job listings by country and city worldwide. [careerjet.com](http://careerjet.com)

**iHipo:** Job and Internship search site focused on international positions (US included). [ihipo.com](http://ihipo.com)

**Laowai Career:** Job board for international talent seeking professional jobs in China for full, part, internship or freelance opportunities. [Laowaicareer.com](http://Laowaicareer.com)

**LinkedIn:** Curious about where others from UCSB work? Check out one of LinkedIn's greatest features. [linkedin.com/edu/alumni](http://linkedin.com/edu/alumni)

**My Visa Jobs:** Check out [myvisajobs.com](http://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.

**PhD Career Guide:** Career exploration, online community, job board, and blog. [phdcareerguide.com](http://phdcareerguide.com)

**United States Citizenship and Immigration Services:** [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov)

**VersatilePhD:** Oldest and largest online community dedicated to non-academic and non-faculty careers for PhDs across all disciplines. [graddiv.ucsb.edu/versatile-phd](http://graddiv.ucsb.edu/versatile-phd)

## MORE QUESTIONS? GET HELP HERE:

1. The International Graduate Student Peer at the GSRC is available for one-on-one appointments to help you identify appropriate UCSB resources for career counseling and immigration policies.
2. UCSB Career Services offers a variety of services tailored towards graduate school applications (personal statement 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.
3. OISS advisors are available to answer questions regarding your Visa questions and related questions about forms.

## CAREER SERVICES

### *Graduate Student Career Services*

Student Resource Building (SRB), Graduate Student Resource Center Room 1216 (under stairs on first floor)  
Call to schedule appointments: (805) 893-4412

**Lana Smith-Hale, LCSW, Graduate Student Career Counselor**

[Lana.Smith-Hale@sa.ucsb.edu](mailto:Lana.Smith-Hale@sa.ucsb.edu) (805) 893-4649

### **Career Grad Peer**

[careergradpeer@sa.ucsb.edu](mailto:careergradpeer@sa.ucsb.edu)

Career Resource Room

Main Career Services Building 599

## GRADUATE STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER

### *Graduate Student Resource Center (GSRC)*

Student Resource Building (SRB), Graduate Student Resource Center Room 1216 (under stairs on first floor)

### **International Peer**

[internationalpeer@graddiv.ucsb.edu](mailto:internationalpeer@graddiv.ucsb.edu)

## OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS (OISS)

[oiss.sa.ucsb.edu](http://oiss.sa.ucsb.edu)

Student Resource Building (SRB), Room 3130

[OISS@sa.ucsb.edu](mailto:OISS@sa.ucsb.edu) or call (805) 893-2929

*Developed by: Lana Smith-Hale, LCSW & Jo Ann Villanueva-Salvador, MA*

*With thanks to our guide's contributors:*

*Yuan Yao & Caroline Schanche, Career Peers*

*Simeng Karen Li, International Peer*

*Erik Williams, Simran Singh & Kayleen McDonald, OISS*

*Erin Ryan & Lilly Erickson, Graphic Designers*