

## Guide to Career Exploration and Preparation for International Students

MIT's Global Education and Career Development center (GECD) has created career resources with international students' needs in mind. The following is a guide that helps you navigate the intricacies of the U.S. job search, from communicating your visa requirements to negotiating job offers. We hope these tips aid you in preparing for your U.S. job search.

### 1. Know your visa requirements and how to communicate them with employers

Meet with an [MIT ISO](#) advisor to determine your visa requirements before and after graduation. As an international student, the type of visa you are classified on determines your eligibility to work in the United States while studying. Your ISO advisor will help you understand and explore your employment options, and also how to properly obtain work authorization and gather proper documentation.

It is important be knowledgeable about your visa status and to know how to effectively communicate your visa requirements with an employer. If you are asked any questions regarding your status, respond in a clear and confident manner. The purpose of an interview is to highlight your skills related to the available position; avoid letting the visa issue dominate your conversation.

### 2. Explore Career Options

Once you have a thorough understanding of your visa requirements, schedule a meeting with a GECD career counselor to discuss your interests, skills, and values. This is an important step in exploring career options in **your field of study**. American employers appreciate candidates who have taken the time to clarify their career goals and who have a sense of how they fit into a certain industry and/or company. This is also a chance for you to explore the unique skill set you have to offer as an international student, such as language skills, intercultural sensitivity, international work or internship experiences and other valuable assets that differentiates you from other students.

Career counselors have [Self-Assessment](#) tools that can help you in effectively mapping your career goals. Please visit the [Discover Your Career Path](#) section of our website for more information.

### 3. Networking

During your career exploration, it is critical that you consider networking as part of your strategy. [Networking](#) is the process of discovering and utilizing connections between people. These network connections can be formal, informal, or both. For example, networking can be as informal as talking to your family and friends or as formal as attending a career event with prospective employers. Over 80% of jobs are in the "hidden market" and are never posted because they are acquired through networking, personal connections and referrals (NACE, 2009). Your network may include family, friends, faculty, co-workers, former supervisors, fellow MIT students and alumni. They may also be professionals that are currently working

in an organization you are interested in and may potentially help you get connected with a hiring manager or send your resume directly to another colleague.

Here are a few places you can get started:

- [MIT Alumni Association Infinite Connection](#): Connect with MIT alums in your field. You can gain valuable industry information through informational interviews, as well as make connections with MIT alums across the globe.
- [Association of Student Activities](#): Joining student organizations is a great way to meet people and make connections in your personal and professional interests.
- **Professional Organizations**: Joining organizations in your field or country-specific associations will allow you to meet professionals who share similar career interests, gain insight into the professional atmosphere of the industry, and potentially learn about job or internship opportunities abroad.
- **Attend Professional Conferences**: Attending a professional conference in your field of study will maximize your networking potential and is a great venue to learn from other professionals in your industry of interest and make future connections and employment opportunities.
- **Set up [Informational Interviews](#) with professionals in your field**. This will allow you to gather career information from people who are already working in occupations, organizations, or geographic locations you are interested in.
- **Join [LinkedIn Groups](#) that reflect your personal and professional interests**. This is a great way to connect with others in your field. Here are a few types of groups that are currently on LinkedIn:
  - Corporate
  - College alumni
  - Nonprofit
  - Trade organizations
  - Conferences
  - Industry-specific

#### 4. US Job Search- Do Your Research

Once you have identified your career goals, the next step is to research the industry and specific company information. This can give you valuable insight into what sectors might be a good fit for you, based on your interests and values. Here are a few tips that may help in your research:

- Talk with employees and alumni in your industry of interest
- Research U.S. companies with branches in your home country
- Research companies in your home country with branches in the U.S.
- Review annual reports and look for:
  - Company goals and objectives
  - Future plans and strategies
  - Mission statements and core values
- Review business magazines/newspapers

See “**8. Resources**” for a list of online company search databases.

## 5. Preparing Documents

It is important to keep in mind the difference between a [resume](#) and a [CV](#) when applying for a job in the U.S. A resume is one-page document that showcases your education, relevant work experience, and other activities. It is a concise way to present your qualifications to the employer, while a CV is typically a multiple page document only used for academic positions.

You will also want to prepare a [cover letter](#) explaining your background, personal interest in the position, and why you are a good match for the job.

Here are some tips to make your documents **stand out** to U.S. employers:

- Highlight the positives that you bring to the workplace such as your adaptability, ability to handle change in diverse environments, willingness to live and work abroad, cultural awareness, and language proficiency.
- Do not include personal information such as date of birth, gender, marital status, religious affiliation, nationality or photos of yourself. U.S. federal law prohibits employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, age, race, national origin, or religion.
- Provide a frame of reference for companies/institutes. For example, this could include the size of the company you worked for, or the the rank of the institution.
- Demonstrate strong English writing skills. [The Writing Center](#) is a great place to have your materials reviewed for structure and grammatical errors.
- Review the [GECD Career Handbook](#) for tips, templates and suggestions on how to successfully write a cover letter and/or resume.
- Have your application documents including resume and cover letters reviewed by GECD staff.

## 6. Being Aware of Cultural Differences

Communication with employers, document format, and interviews in the U.S. may differ greatly from your home country. Here is a list of general guidelines that may help you navigate cultural and communication differences in the U.S.:

- Review the difference between a [resume](#) and a [CV](#). The majority of industry positions require a resume.
- Arrive 5-10 minutes early for an interview.
- Speak clearly and confidently about your unique attributes and accomplishment and discuss your strengths, weaknesses and personality.
- Keep in mind the importance of eye contact as it displays confidence.
- Know your rights. Employers are prohibited by U.S. law to ask questions about age, race, sex or marital status.
- Following up on an interview with a thank you note or email shows your enthusiasm and excitement for the position.

## 7. Interviewing and Negotiating

Once you have secured an interview with an employer, we recommend that you schedule a mock interview with a [GECD staff member](#). These appointments are 50 minutes in length and help you to practice potential interview questions before meeting with the employer. Many employers will use a combination of general, behavioral and case questions during your interview. Please refer to the [Interview Tips](#) section on our website.

If you receive a job offer, you should review tips on [negotiating](#). Negotiating may seem uncomfortable, but it is a normal aspect of the employment process in the U.S. This may also be the appropriate time to discuss your visa requirements and potential sponsorship by the employer. Again, you should meet with an [MIT ISO](#) advisor with any questions you may have about the hiring process.

## 8. Resources

Below is a list of online resources and databases that may be helpful for international students in researching career options in the U.S.:

- [CareerBridge](#)
- **GoingGlobal** – Search for job openings and internship opportunities in countries around the world, Career Guides, and H-1B visa information. You must log in through your [CareerBridge account](#) in order to get full access.
- [MIT Alumni Network](#)- Connect with MIT alums in your field. You can gain valuable industry information through informational interviews, as well as make connections with MIT alums across the globe.
- [Reference USA](#) – Searchable directory for millions of public and private companies in the U.S. You must log in through MIT Library Services.
- [My Visa Jobs](#) - you can search for employers by industry, career, city, job title and review reports on H-1B visa submissions
- [Computer Jobs](#) – This database contains a section designated for H1-B jobs: [www.h1b.computerjobs.com/](http://www.h1b.computerjobs.com/)