

Resources for International Students

WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS OFFICE (ISSO)

GSAS Compass staff and our colleagues at the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) work collaboratively to support international students and alumni of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. We encourage you to build relationships with people at both of our offices to learn about our services and resources and to understand how your visa status influences your career search.

The [International Student and Scholars Office](#) (ISSO) provides [services and support](#) to international students including:

- Maintaining visa status
- Immigration and document services
- Obtaining U.S. employment authorization
- Programs, workshops, and resources related to your visa and job search
- Advisors to discuss your status maintenance related questions
- See ISSO's [updates and resources](#) page for FAQs and current updates from the ISSO
- ISSO [Program Calendar](#), including employment authorization workshops

GSAS Compass provides relevant services and support including:

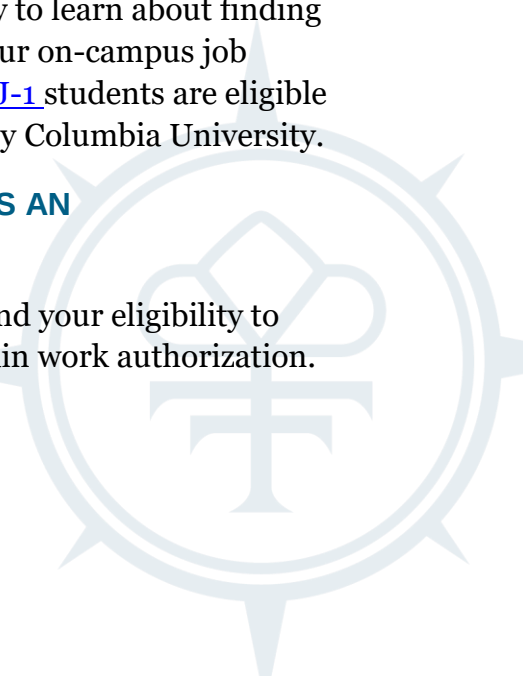
- [Career advising](#) and resources to understand your employment options
- Development of a plan for your job and internship search strategy
- Events tailored to international students' needs and challenges
- Engaging employers willing to sponsor international students

ON-CAMPUS JOBS AND INTERNSHIPS

Read the [following article](#) in the GSAS Compass Resource Library to learn about finding on-campus jobs and make an advising appointment to discuss your on-campus job search strategy with a career advisor. Note that full time [F-1 and J-1](#) students are eligible for “casual” employment on campus, which means you are paid by Columbia University.

SEARCHING FOR AN OFF-CAMPUS JOB OR INTERNSHIP AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

As an international student, it is essential that you fully understand your eligibility to work in the location of the internship or job and the process to gain work authorization. Eligibility to work considerations include:



- Location of the internship or job, i.e., is it in the U.S. or another country?
- Your visa/work authorization for the location of the internship or job
- Requirements specified by the employer for the internship or job
- Whether the position is paid or [unpaid](#) (Note: for off-campus positions in the US, any wages or other compensation like a stipend or housing, requires authorization through Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Curricular Practical Training (CPT)).

Employers should meet all requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) before you accept an internship. Learn about the six criteria for unpaid internships as outlined by the [U.S. Department of Labor](#). If any of these criteria are not met, you should be paid. Unless you are working on campus, all internship experiences should use either your OPT or CPT. Please meet with [ISSO](#) before accepting any positions to ensure you maintain your legal status.

Avoiding Scams and Fraudulent Opportunities

GSAS Compass is committed to partnering with employment professionals that comply with employment laws in all recruiting activities. As you conduct your job search avoid scams and fraud activity by [identifying fraudulent postings](#). If you suspect a position or employer you encountered through GSAS Compass job search database is fraudulent, please contact us at gsas-compass@columbia.edu.

Illegal Interview Questions

Any questions that are meant to reveal your age, race, national origin, citizenship, gender, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, or arrest records are illegal. See the Center for Career Education's resources on "[Illegal Questions and How to Respond](#)."

OPT, CPT AND WORK AUTHORIZATION IN THE USA

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 student status that allows students to gain experience in their field of study by applying for off-campus work authorization. To learn more about pre-completion OPT, post-completion OPT and STEM extension, please visit the [ISSO website](#).

You may use a small portion of your OPT as students to gain off-campus experience and save the remainder of your OPT time for after graduation. If you prefer not to use your OPT until after graduation, there are other ways you can supplement your experience such as joining a [student organization](#) on campus, volunteering through [Community Impact at Columbia University](#) or applying for internationally based summer opportunities abroad.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is authorization for employment that is an integral part of the established curriculum of your degree program. Find out more about CPT by

visiting the [ISSO website](#). Also, check with your academic advisor, major department, and ISSO to determine your eligibility.

Employment sponsorship is when a company supports your application for an employment visa to stay and work in the US. [Here](#) is a directory of the different U.S. visa categories.

COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYERS

Networking With Employers and Alumni

For many international students, connecting with employers and alumni can be daunting and vary widely from networking back home. A great way to start is to find alumni who are from similar backgrounds. Having an instant connection about your cultural background can help ease the nerves of networking. You'll also gain valuable tips about how they networked effectively. Take advantage of attending events on and off campus. We also encourage you to [make an appointment](#) and practice with a career advisor because networking is a skill that you can develop.

Finding Employers Who Will Hire International Students and Graduates

Some employers in the United States are open to hiring international individuals, and others do not have the resources to assist with sponsorship. A company who accepts OPT and/or CPT means that they are willing to hire international students who have OPT and/or CPT. This does not necessarily mean they will provide H-1B visa sponsorship and it is up to you to talk to your employer about whether they sponsor in order for you to stay with the organization after your OPT finishes.

If you are interested in working and living in the U.S. for longer than the duration of your Optional Practical Training (OPT), you need to work for an employer who would consider sponsoring you for an [H-1B Visa](#). The following websites can assist you with identifying which employers have sponsored H-1B visas in the past, which are the best indicators that they will continue to sponsor international people.

- [GoZeno](#), is a platform that provides a list of employers who are hiring and ready to sponsor visas. It also gives the contact name, email, and a website.
- [GoinGlobal](#), offers lists of employers who have sponsored visas in the past. Once logged in, go to the "H1B Info" tab at the top for the list of employers, and then utilize this list to begin searching for opportunities of interest.
- [MyVisaJobs](#), Provides lists of employers who have sponsored visas in the past and other career information for international students.
- [Uniworld](#), Provides a directory of US firms in foreign countries and foreign firms in the US.

- [H-1B Employer Data Hub](#), Data on employers in every industry who have submitted petitions to employ H-1B, nonimmigrant workers.
- [Ultimate H1B Sponsor Checker](#), A Chrome extension to find if a company sponsored H1B in the past couple of years when searching for jobs in LinkedIn and Indeed.
- [Interstride](#), A platform that provides international students with resources to help them navigate the job search in the United States, which includes networking groups and a searchable database of jobs and employers that sponsor H-1B Visas . Log in with your Columbia uni and password.
- [Database of E-Verified Employers](#), students who graduate with OPT STEM extension need to work for an employer who is E-verified to receive the additional two years of OPT. Use the following database to search for employers who are E-Verified and can accept your STEM extension.

The H-1B Cap and H-1B Cap-Exempt

There is a limit, or “**cap**,” on the number of individuals who can receive H-1B status every fiscal year. Because there is a lot of demand for this visa, there is a limited number of visas that can be issued each year. In 2023, the cap is at 65,000 visas per fiscal year. However, if you have a master’s degree from a U.S. institution, there are an extra 20,000 visas available for those who have a master’s degree or higher.

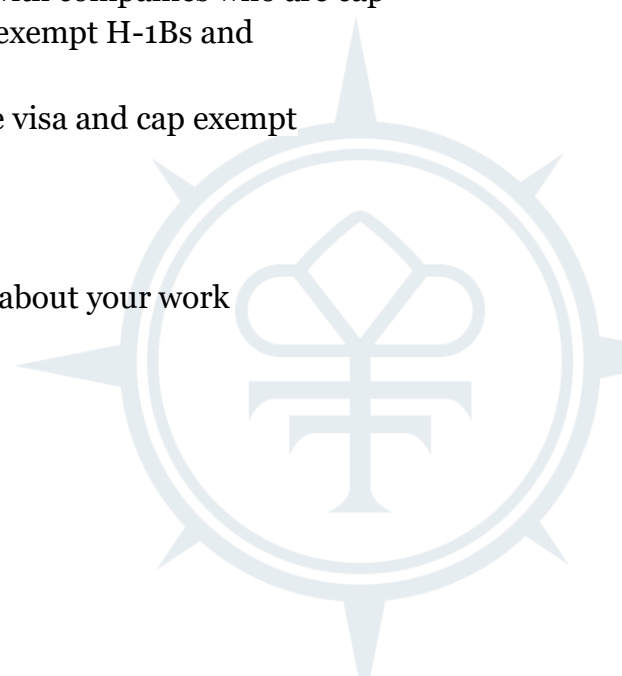
H-1B cap-exempt refers to US employers that are **not subject** to the annual numerical limit applied to H-1B petitions. If the employer sponsoring you is an institution of higher education, a nonprofit organization connected to an institute of higher education, or a government research organization, then the visa cap does not apply. Search [Interstride](#) for jobs and click on” cap-exempt” to find H-1B cap-exempt employers. The following websites provide more information about the H-1B cap-Exempt visa.

- [Open Avenues Foundation](#), Open Avenues works with companies who are cap exempt to find talent. Watch their video series on cap-exempt H-1Bs and sponsorship from employers.
- [VisaNation](#), Provides articles to learn more about the visa and cap exempt employers.

Job Applications

On job applications, you will often run into two questions about your work authorization:

- 1) Are you legally authorized to work in the US?



The answer to this question is “Yes,” if you apply for OPT after you graduate, Columbia will provide you with sponsorship for 1 to 3 years, depending on your type of OPT. Learn more about OPT and work authorization on the [ISSO website](#).

2) Will you now or in the future require sponsorship?

Answer “Yes” to this question because you will require your employer to sponsor you if you are to remain working in the US after your OPT expires.

YOUR NEXT STEPS

We encourage you to explore a three-pronged approach to your career search, including searching for opportunities in the US and globally as you progress through your studies. Meet with a career advisor to discuss your plans after graduation.

You might also want to consider apply for work visas in other countries, such as [Canada](#) or the [UK](#), that have less restrictive work authorization requirements.

Additional Columbia Resources

- [American Language Program](#)
- [Columbia Alumni Association International Clubs](#)
- [International Students & Scholars Office](#)

