

The International Job Search for US Students

Chapter Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to help you:

- Begin an international job search
- Understand the differences between an international job search and one in the US
- Understand that you must be prepared

Below are questions that can help you understand your objectives and abilities before beginning your international job search:

• Objectives

1.) What do I hope to gain?

2.) Where do I want to go? And why?

3.) Am I looking for cultural experience or career enhancement?

4.) What's more important: money or experience? Why?

• Abilities

1.) What special skills or knowledge can I bring to my target country?

2.) What type of career would be a good fit for me?

If you had trouble answering the questions above, you may find that you need to take a step back and re-evaluate what it is that you really want. Do you really want to work abroad? Maybe you want to work domestically with an international company or with an organization that works primarily with cultures different from your own. Answering the questions above will help you when looking for an international career. You will have clearer answers for employers when they ask questions related to your career goals, skills, and why you want to work abroad.

The bottom line is to know who you are, what you want, and what you can do for the employer.

Once you have decided “what you hope to gain” and “where you want to go” as you make the transition from living/working in the US to living/working abroad there are some realities to consider.

The Realities of an International Career:

- It's not always glamorous.
- You will be away from family and friends.
- You may need to speak the language.
- You need to be adaptable.
- Pay and benefits may not be as good.
- You may start at a lower level than you would in your home country.

Steps for Working Abroad:

- The first step to a career abroad is staying focused. Set realistic goals for your job search, and review and re-adjust accordingly.
- Use a calendar system to schedule follow-ups, phone calls, or appointments.
- Manage your contact information effectively.
- Develop a support system since finding a job won't happen overnight.
- Follow up with every lead on time, and always send thank you notes via email.
- Keep a balanced perspective, and plan time for fun, too.

Opportunities Abroad

Students find all kinds of jobs overseas, some offering valuable professional training, others perhaps just a paycheck and a chance to relax and experience life in another culture. The positions that students find, through whatever agency or route, generally fall into one of the following categories:

– Study abroad programs

Study abroad programs provide logistical assistance and a structured learning environment, which can be especially valuable if you are going abroad for the first time. They provide the quickest way to achieve fluency in a foreign language, a prerequisite for many international careers. For those interested in working abroad, the study abroad program can also provide a secure base from which to explore job possibilities and make contacts with potential employers. The Vanderbilt Study Abroad Program provides students with the opportunity to experience different cultures while in college. See www.vanderbilt.edu/studyabroad.

– Volunteer opportunities

There are literally hundreds of opportunities for volunteering abroad. Volunteering abroad is the best option for working in developing countries or for social causes anywhere. Many volunteer positions do "pay," at least room and board, and it may be possible to defer educational loans during the volunteer assignment. With international volunteer organizations, typical locations include Africa, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, and North America.

– Internships abroad (paid and unpaid)

Hundreds of overseas internships are sponsored by universities, and, for undergraduates, are the most easily available option. Advantages include course credit, applicability of financial aid, and a variety of subjects and locations. Disadvantages are cost and sometimes unpredictability of

placement. A few reciprocal exchange programs offer paying internships in applied fields. If you find your own internship abroad, these organizations can also assist you in obtaining a work permit. Paid internships are somewhat rare abroad and are available mainly in applied fields such as business and engineering.

– **International Careers**

If you have special skills (bilingual, proficient in a specific area) or appropriate background for the applied position, and if you are available for a longer period of time (up to a year), you may find that there are some opportunities for full-time employment. Graduating seniors will certainly be better placed to explore such options than undergraduates are. U.S.-based firms that have an active overseas market and global offices are obvious targets for your search, as are foreign firms with a significant U.S. presence. You may find it easier to be employed by firms here in the U.S. to begin with, seeking a transfer to an overseas posting after you have gained some experience (and demonstrated your value) to the firm. If you have or can gain residency rights in another country in which you'd like to work, this will also greatly ease your path towards professional employment there.

– **Teaching internships or jobs**

Teaching remains one of the most pursued routes to international employment for many young Americans. You are already qualified in some basic sense to serve as a native English language instructor and also may be well-suited to teach or intern in an overseas American or International school. Most teaching positions will look for a college degree (the discipline in which your degree was taken is often less crucial), and contracts will generally be for at least a year.

– **Summer and other temporary paid jobs**

If you're looking for an inexpensive way to experience total cultural immersion or simply to earn your way through an adventure abroad, here's a good place to start. There are several opportunities for students looking for summer or temporary employment abroad such as a sports instructors, bar staff, holiday company reps, kibbutz volunteers, English teachers, tour guides, farm hands, archaeologists, fruit pickers, etc.

Use a Variety of Search Strategies

You can start working on your goal of an overseas career right here at Vanderbilt University. Take advantage of resources around you on campus as a way to prepare for a job overseas. Take courses that focus on other cultures and histories, such as political science, comparative religion, and language classes. Participate in activities on campus that expose you to new cultures and ways of life such as experiential education programs like internships and study abroad experiences. Keep in mind that job search strategies vary by country, and take the time to research the job search strategies that are specific to your target country. For more details, see our recommended resources online.

Local newspapers, international job websites, and magazines and trade publications can provide additional information needed for the job search. However, the most effective job search method is still networking! Build your contacts list, and develop a relationship with each contact. Ask if you can meet. Conduct informational interviews, and always ask, "Is there anyone else you know that I should talk to?" Refer to Networking (Chapter 2) and Informational Interviewing (Chapter 3) for additional information.

Be patient and persistent! Your first job might not be overseas, but you will eventually get there!

Do your Homework

Research your Target Country/City

Learn key industrial sectors, economic trends, and relevant employment laws. Research volunteer or educational programs. Learn about any cross-cultural issues. Find students or professors from that country: what can they share with you? Many foreign corporations will often give first priority for jobs to citizens of their country. Show the employer that you have unique skills and abilities not possessed by local citizens.

Work Permits/Visas

One of the first things you'll need to do in preparing for your move or extended stay abroad is to secure the necessary travel documents and complete other paperwork that may be required for a prolonged stay. This is a process that should begin well ahead of departure.

Documentation requirements and procedures are detailed, complicated, and often subject to change. Each country has its own set of requirements, so you cannot assume that your familiarity with one country necessarily prepares you for another. The consular office of your host country's embassy is the best place to start when determining what types of documents, including passports, visas, permits, and registration requirements, you will need. It is also essential to determine from the consulate exactly what papers, documents, forms, and other information you will be expected to complete or provide.

It is advisable to check back with the consulate periodically to be sure that your information is up to date. Documentation regulations may change on short notice.

Resume/Cover Letter Abroad

You will need a polished resume for your international job search in which you emphasize your international experience and list any languages in which you are fluent enough to conduct business conversations. Study abroad and international travel are relevant because they reflect an interest in other cultures. However, the key components of your resume will be the experience, training, and skills related to the specific job for which you are applying.

Investigate how to write a resume and a cover letter that is tailored to the country and industry you are interested in working. The resume abroad may simply detail academic and formal work experience in chronological order. Some countries may require additional information, such as age, marital status, race, and/or religion. Some international employers expect to receive a two-or-more-page resume or curriculum vita (CV). Check reference materials to be sure you're using the correct form, content, and tone. Information you want to find out includes:

- Do you list GPA or percentage in class?
- Do you include a photo?
- Do you include work authorization information?

For more information and examples, visit www.eurograduate.com.

Keep in Mind the Skills You Need for International Jobs:

- Language skills
- Adventurous spirit

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Functional skills (skills listed in the position description, i.e. computer skills, written and communication skills)
- Initiative
- Sense of humor
- Sensitivity, adaptability, and flexibility
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Tenacity
- Willingness to take risks
- Cross-cultural competence; being sensitive to multicultural customs, and effectively practicing them (probably the most important)

Prepare to Interview Abroad (as compared to the U.S.)

To prepare yourself for an interview, research the background and operation of the industry and the company, and review your own qualifications for the position. **Interviews vary by country;** below are things to consider as you prepare:

- The interviewer may do the bulk of the talking.
- Making eye contact—especially with people of a higher status—may be perceived as disrespectful; check the countries' practices.
- Age, race, sex, and/or marital status may be issues in the interview. Males may be expected to dominate interactions with females, and younger people may be expected to show deference to their elders.
- You may be considered boastful, self-serving, or too individualistic if you cite your accomplishments and skills.
- Jobs may be assigned by the government or family. You may be viewed as disloyal if you question your role in the company. Sometimes, companies assign work and expect individuals to accept whatever is available. If a student's family has a company overseas and the student has the opportunity to work for the company, he/she may not have an option to select the position.
- The employer often expects a long-term commitment from employees; consequently, you're not expected to be immediately competent in your job.
- Questions about strengths and weaknesses, leadership style, and problem-solving abilities may be considered an invasion of privacy.
- Researching an organization in advance could be perceived as showing too much initiative and independence. You may be considered rude or forward if you ask an employer where the company is in the interview process and when you can expect to hear back from them (When researching an organization know cultural practices so you can share what is appropriate during the interview).
- Research national firms with international interests, but only work for a firm that can arrange a work permit for you (Work permits are required for getting hired.).

For additional information on interviewing tips for international jobs, visit <http://www.goinglobal.com/default.asp>.

Research Your Target Country and Organization

- Check the Library for:
 - International or local newspapers

- Country-specific reports or databases
- World consumer markets and world fact books

- Utilize the Career Center's Resource Library, located in Suite 220 of the Student Life Center, for additional resources
- Search international websites/job postings
- Check local Chambers of Commerce
- Contact the following resources on campus to ask for help:
 - International language professors
 - International Student Services (ISS)
 - Study Abroad Office
 - Alumni office to ask about attending Alumni networking events
 - Student organizations

Work and Volunteer Abroad Opportunities Web Links

There are numerous websites that can assist you in your search for an international job. The annotated list below is divided into websites specific to Vanderbilt, student work, career work, and internships.

Vanderbilt University Websites

- **Study Abroad:** Vanderbilt offers a variety of study abroad programs around the world. <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/studyabroad/home>
- **Office Active Citizenship & Service:** Provides students with the opportunity to volunteer in the Nashville community and abroad. <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/index.html>

Student Work Abroad

- **AIIESEC** (pronounced EYE-sek): This is the local chapter of a student-managed, not-for-profit educational organization that sends students on paid internships overseas in eighty-seven countries. <http://www.us.aiesec.org/>
- **BUNAC (the British Universities North America Club):** BUNAC offers work abroad programs in England and Australia with work visa services. <http://www.bunac.org/>
- **CIEE Work Abroad Program:** CIEE is a great resource to get information about working abroad. CIEE also assists job seekers with obtaining visas and other necessary work-abroad items. <http://www.councilexchanges.org/>
- **GoAbroad.com:** This site is a comprehensive online source for internships, international volunteer positions, teaching abroad, jobs abroad, and more. <http://goabroad.com/>
- **IAESTE: International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience:** IAESTE provides internships for juniors, seniors, or graduate students in the physical sciences, engineering, architecture, math, computer sciences, and natural sciences. <http://www.iaeste.org>
- **Transitions Abroad Work Abroad Information:** This organization provides a wealth of information about traveling, working, teaching and volunteering abroad. They also print a magazine in which you have an opportunity to publish your work. <http://www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/work/index.shtml>
- **Tennessee Foreign Language Institute:** Located in Nashville, this organization offers intensive training in ESL, Foreign Language, and TESL in preparation for entry-level

teaching positions. You can volunteer at the institute in exchange for tuition.

<http://foreignlanguages.org/index2.shtm>

- **University of California-Irvine International Opportunities Programs:** Great resource! This site provides a very comprehensive list of links on working, teaching, volunteering, and internships abroad. <http://www.cie.uci.edu/~cie/iop/work.html>
- **University of Michigan International Center:** This center gives links to websites with information on volunteering, working, and teaching abroad. In addition, there is information about internships and how to go about finding and procuring a job in the foreign country of your choice. <http://www.umich.edu/~icenter/overseas/work/index.html>
- **Washington and Lee University's Work Abroad site:** This site gives tips on how to go about finding an overseas job and includes great personal statements from work-abroad and Peace Corps alumni. http://internationaleducation.wlu.edu/work%20abroad/work_abroad.htm
- **Transitions Abroad:** This site offers a guide to work abroad, study abroad, cultural travel overseas, and international living. <http://www.transitionsabroad.com/>

Career Work Abroad

- **Campus Career Center:** CCC is a campus recruiting company that provides undergraduate and graduate students with a network of companies hiring around the world. <http://www.campuscareercenter.com/students/foreignexchange.asp>
- **Vanderbilt Career Services:** <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/career>
- **Monster.Com Work Abroad:** Monster.com offers a work abroad website with a search engine of job listings all over the world, as well as a list of helpful resources. <http://international.monster.com/>
- **Headhunter International Gateway:** This website also offers a search engine of job listings in other countries. <http://www.headhunter.net/jobseeker/jobs/jobfindil.asp>
- **OverseasJobs.Com:** This is an online recruitment network that provides career resources and employment opportunities to college students, resort and hospitality staff, expatriates and international job seekers, part-time workers, and adventure seekers. <http://www.overseasjobs.com/>
- **US State Department Career Site:** This site gives information on working for the US Department of State. Jobs include Foreign Service Officer, Foreign Service Specialist, or Civil Service employee, working either in the US or abroad. Internships are also available. <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/hr/>
- **Eurograduate.com:** Eurograduate Live features thousands of graduate job opportunities across Europe. <http://www.eurograduate.com/>
- **How to Acquire a Visa to Work in the Nation You Want to Work:** This site will keep you up to date with visa and embassy information for all countries. <http://www.embpage.org/>

Volunteer Abroad

- **CIEE International Volunteer Program:** CIEE places you with a group of other volunteers from across the world and helps organize short-term volunteer missions abroad. <http://www.ciee.org/volunteerproj.cfm?subnav=Volunteer%20Projects>
- **Cross-Cultural Solutions:** Cross-Cultural Solutions is an international, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to operate volunteer programs around the world in partnership with sustainable community initiatives, bringing people together to work side-by-side while sharing perspectives and fostering cultural understanding. <http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org/>

- **Idealist - "Action Without Borders":** An independent organization committed to assisting people in finding volunteer, work and teaching positions abroad. They have information on 20,000 volunteer organizations in 125 countries. <http://www.idealists.org/>
- **InterAction:** A non-governmental organization with members in every developing country, InterAction's mission is to provide aid and assistance to impoverished peoples. They have 165 nonprofit US-based organizations working overseas. <http://www.interaction.org/>
- **Institute for International Education:** Although the listings on this site are primarily for study abroad programs, it is possible to search by internships and volunteer programs, too. <http://www.iiepassport.org/>
- **International Volunteer Programs Association (IVPA):** IVPA is a US-based professional association for administrators of volunteer abroad programs that sets standards for volunteer abroad programs. The IVPA website lists programs for volunteering abroad that adhere to the IVPA standards. <http://www.volunteerinternational.org/>
- **Peace Corps:** The Peace Corps is an organization sending volunteers to over seventy countries worldwide. Volunteers learn the local language, help with environmental engineering, teach children, assist in starting small businesses, and educate people on health and the spread of diseases. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/home.html>
- **Volunteers for Peace:** Volunteers for Peace is a non-profit group sending volunteers to international work camps for a short-term experience abroad. <http://www.vfp.org/>
- **Volunteer International:** This independent organization provides internship exchanges and international volunteer opportunities. <http://www.volunteerinternational.org/>

Internships Abroad

- **Transitions Abroad:** Transitions Abroad offers guide to work abroad, study abroad, cultural travel overseas, and international living. <http://www.transitionsabroad.com/>
- **InternAbroad.com:** This site provides information on many types of international internships: paid, volunteer, and academic. You can search by country or your field of study. Most listings are unpaid internships for credit. <http://www.internabroad.com>
- **AIIESEC:** AIIESEC's site has information on internships and exchange programs. <http://www.aiesec.org/about/>
- **ASF (American Scandinavian Foundation):** This organization offers placements in Scandinavia and has Business and Exchange Opportunities. <http://www.amscan.org>
- **CDS International:** CDS International provides world-wide placement in a wide range of opportunities. <http://www.cdsintl.org>
- **Contact Singapore:** This organization provides opportunities in a variety of areas in Singapore, including Healthcare, Banking and Finance, and Engineering. <http://www.contactsingapore.org.sg>
- **DISCO International:** This site lists internship possibilities that are primarily for Japanese- and Korean-speaking students. www.careerforum.net

Preparing for the Unexpected while Traveling Abroad

Before going, you should consider:

- Car Insurance
- Accommodations/transportation
- Appropriate health insurance
- Living Expenses (estimate cost for food, room/board, travel, and souvenirs)

- Packing (pack light)

You should take the following with you:

- International work permit/visa (Contact employer)
- Relevant credit card/traveler's check numbers
- Local phone number of the US Embassy
- Passport/Visa (make a copy of Passport I.D.)
- Plane ticket
- Money (for taxi rides to and from airports, phone calls, emergencies, etc.)
- International Student Identity Card
- Calling Cards
- Vaccinations
- Health items (prescription medicine)
- Glasses/contact lenses
- Proof of health insurance
- Doctor's note (proving you're free from certain diseases; may be required for entry into Germany)
- Money belt
- Backpack (for class and for day-trips)
- Sleeping bag (for camping or hostel stays)
- Pocket knife (don't put this in your carry-on!)
- Camera/journal
- A few family photos (so you don't get homesick)
- Dress set of clothes (just in case you go somewhere fancy)
- Gift (it may be appropriate to bring your host family a simple gift from home)
- An inventory list of the items you packed in your checked baggage, in case you need to make an insurance claim on lost luggage
- Identification tags with your contact information on them, attached both outside and inside your checked bags and carry-on bags