Information for International Students

The tips and suggestions presented here have been provided by former international students based on their own experiences at the School of Hotel Administration.

This is meant only as a guide, and uses the best information possible at the time it was written. But U.S. government rules about visas, immigration, and all international student issues are constantly changing, so **it is your responsibility** to consult the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) for the most up-to-date information, at: 607.255.5243 or isso@cornell.edu (web site: [www.isso.cornell.edu](http://www.isso.cornell.edu)).

Along the Way

- **Become friends with American students!** The best way to learn new languages is by practicing with native speakers. Try to associate with American friends along with friends from your own country of origin. This may seem difficult or feel uncomfortable at first, but it will get easier as time goes on, and it will be very beneficial to you.

- **Network!** Attend seminars and events. Don’t be passive—try to actively take part, so that you don’t miss out on getting to know all the wonderful people at Cornell. Participating in events and activities outside of classes is a great way to become active in the Cornell community.

- **Participate!** Be active in classes. Class participation is important in U.S. schools.

Help Is There

Use on-campus academic resources. Many academic and language resources are available to you at Cornell. Feel free to contact any of these people if you are having any issues or concerns with adjusting to Cornell classes.

- **Gail Sakai**—English language support tutor
  Gail is a great resource for building your English clarity and confidence in both business and social English. She can be reached at gs49@cornell.edu for further information on her teaching background and tuition fees.

- **Kimberly Kenyon**—Director, International Teaching Assistant Program (ITAP)
  The International Teaching Assistant Program (ITAP) is one of three programs in the Center for Teaching Excellence. The ITAP program fosters excellence in pedagogy through innovative programming that helps ITAs reach their full potential as classroom leaders. The program offers four courses, EDUC 5780, EDUC 5790, ALS 5800, and ALS 5810, that are designed to help international teaching assistants (ITAs) develop effective communication and teaching skills. For more information, please see our website: [http://cte.cornell.edu](http://cte.cornell.edu).

- **Deborah Campbell**—Department of English
  You can contact Deborah Campbell for tutoring or recommendations on possible tutors on campus. E-mail: dc20@cornell.edu

- **Michael Chen**—Study Skills Advisor
  You may need to develop the study skills that are necessary for American courses. If you are not familiar with the American education system, Michael Chen can teach you these helpful skills. E-mail: msc7@cornell.edu
Be Prepared When Searching for Jobs

International students face some additional obstacles in looking for employment in the U.S., and the job-search process can become a significant time commitment that you will need to balance with your coursework. The more prepared you are, the better your chance of success.

There are two major barriers to landing a job in the U.S.:
- Not possessing the right skills for the position; and
- Lack of work authorization. International MMH students who find jobs in the U.S. have successfully convinced the prospective employer that they possess the character and skills to excel in the job for which they are applying. If you can do this, the company will usually take care of handling the legal regulations that must be dealt with before you can begin work. To convince a potential employer that you are a desirable candidate, you need to learn to clarify for yourself, and then be able to clearly communicate, the following:
  - What strengths you possess
  - What areas you need to improve upon
  - What differentiates you from your peers
  - What your career aspirations and interests are
  - Why you are pursuing an MMH degree
  - What career you want after you leave Cornell

What you choose as your career path will develop and be modified over your time at the Hotel School, but constant, conscious attention to this process is critical to a successful search.

During the academic year, companies will visit campus to interview students. These opportunities will be posted through Cornell CareerNet (CCNet). In the current economy, many employers who participate in this program are limiting their opportunities to candidates who are authorized to work in the U.S. You can utilize the CCNet system to apply for positions where you meet the qualification and visa requirements and/or you can use the system to obtain company contacts. However, keep in mind that this is just one job search resource! Be sure your job search includes exploring companies in countries where you are work authorized.

It is unlikely that a company with no ties to your home country will hire an international student, unless that student has significant work experience in their industry. Often, employers are not fully aware that an H1-B visa can be used for up to six years before requiring green card sponsorship, and some see sponsorship as very difficult. To sponsor you for permanent residency, the company must prove that they are unable to find a suitable U.S. citizen to fill the position. Few companies are willing to go through the paperwork unless there is a good chance of success at hiring the international applicant.

We recommend using a simple test to prioritize how you will approach your job search. You can rank each opportunity based on:
1) your interest level in the job (e.g., is it the industry/segment you want to work in?; is it what you want to be doing?; will you be comfortable in that location?), and
2) the feasibility of an employer choosing you for the position (e.g., do your current skills match the job description?; has the company has hired internationals in the past?; do you have solid networking opportunities there?; do the job environment and culture feel good to you?).
Remember: As an international student, you need to maintain realistic expectations and leverage your existing skills. For example, if you passionately want to become a consultant, but have no hotel experience, you may be more successful in selling yourself to a big hotel company in operations management than in hotel consulting. Be aware of what of types of employees the economy is demanding at the time of your job search.

Disadvantages for International Students

- **Familiarity**—From a cultural standpoint, you may not know certain issues and concepts as well as your native counterparts do. This being the case, make sure to spend time keeping abreast of current issues and events that may affect the areas and regions that you would like to work in. Take time to learn about U.S. business culture and recruiting processes.

- **English Skills**—If you don’t speak English as a native language, you may be at a distinct disadvantage in communicating with employers. To improve your skills, make a conscious effort to speak with Americans as much as possible during your time at Cornell.

- **Work Authorization**—Many employers may believe that the process of hiring an international student is extremely challenging, risky, and expensive. Educate yourself on the steps and costs of gaining work authorization, and remain flexible in what positions you are willing to accept. Become well-informed about your status so that you can assure prospective employers that you have the necessary prerequisites to work in the U.S. Be proactive with employers and minimize the effort they will need to expend to overcome legal hurdles. Visa options such as practical training (OPT) and H1-B visas and work authorization are outlined on the ISSO web site, and you will need to know all the specifics about your particular situation.

  **Example:** "I am a Canadian citizen and do not have U.S. citizenship. However, under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), I am eligible for a TN visa, which grants renewable work authorization in the United States with minimal processing costs. If it would be helpful, I would be happy to explain my work authorization further before we meet at the interview."

Advantages for International Students

Being an international student is not all doom and gloom! In fact, your foreign background can be leveraged very effectively to set you apart from your peers, especially in the hospitality industry, where diversity of backgrounds and experiences is highly valued. You have three main selling points:

- Your ability to speak multiple languages
- Your cultural background
- Your professional experience

You can leverage these advantages in the following ways:

**Be memorable**—Similar to the MMH admissions process, being memorable is one of the keys to being successful in your job search. From company presentations to interviews, being from a foreign country gives you more opportunity to share remarkable stories of your experience.

- Find a story that highlights why your international experience is valuable and an asset to the employer.

- Leverage your global experience and language abilities. These attributes become even more valuable if the company has operations in or is considering expansion to your home country.

- Even if opportunities don’t exist with their U.S. operations, you may be able to network with the on-campus recruiter to get ‘Plan B’ leads in your home country.
Example: “I found my opportunity with Hyatt International by talking with an alum in my home country. I e-mailed him and followed up with a phone conversation. Then, when I was home, I met with him and the GM of the local property. I think the key was getting to meet and talk with the right people.”

Be committed—You have proven yourself to be mobile and flexible by coming to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree, which can be a daunting undertaking. Also, the Cornell name gives you an edge with independent job searches as it demonstrates that you are highly motivated and talented.

- Make sure you reinforce with employers your intention to stay in the U.S. long-term; they don’t want to invest in you only to have you leave a few years later to return home.
- Prepare stories that illustrate the tenacity and resourcefulness you bring to a position, and that are applicable to jobs you are applying for in the U.S. Stories of being engaged in school activities or your community would reinforce your intention to be committed for the long term.

Example: A response to the common interview question from a major hotel company headquartered in New York City, “Where do you want to be located for work?” Answer: “When I worked in Europe overseeing treks throughout the EU, I lived and traveled to more than ten countries and have extensive experience negotiating contracts in several languages. I am available to work in New York City; however, I am flexible and willing to travel, as I have in the past, to ensure I can contribute to the success of the company.”

The Job Search

Library Database Resources
Access the Nestle Library at [www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/research/library](http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/research/library) to find databases that can assist you with company research. The following databases include information on location, history, officers, financial information, and much more:

- CareerSearch
- Factiva
- Hoovers
- Hotel Horizons
- Mergent Online
- Technomics

For a comprehensive list of database resources, visit the Nestle Library web site, stop by the library to speak with a reference librarian, or email the reference staff at [hotelref@cornell.edu](mailto:hotelref@cornell.edu).

Remember: You need to start early! There are fewer opportunities available to international students. Consequently, proper planning and preparation is critical to maximizing your chances of success with the opportunities available. Do not leave everything to the last minute, and be sure to spend extra effort practicing interview and interpersonal communication skills.

Independent Job Search Tips

- **Attend the Fall Career Fair/Atrium Company Showcases/Spring Real Estate Career Fair**—These in-school events have been a consistent source of job connections for MMH students.
- **Consider Multinationals**—If you are targeting the U.S. as your long-term home, consider multinational U.S. companies that have operations in your home country. Pursue externship opportunities with these companies and look for transfers to the U.S. later in your career.
• **Explore Companies in Countries Where You are Work Authorized**—Obtaining work experience that supports your hospitality career track choice—even if it is not in your preferred geographic location—may help you later on to obtain a position in a U.S. based company.

• **Make and Use Contacts**—Make sure you speak with the person in charge of hiring decisions. If you do not get to speak with that person, you may be wasting your time. In general, go as high up in the company as feasible; those people will have more leveraging power if they want you. Be persistent, yet diplomatic.

• **Network**—Never underestimate the importance of networking to find a position. It is a fundamental part of American culture and job searching. It may make the difference in a company choosing to hire an international student, despite the extra work involved with visa processing. Even if you do not know anyone when you arrive in the U.S., you can network with alumni (particularly those from your own country), your classmates, your professors, and guest speakers. Be sure to attend job fairs and conferences, as well. There are many opportunities! You will need to be comfortable reaching out and building relationships.

*Remember:* You are at an advantage because you are contacting the company and taking the initiative. You do not have the competition that surrounds on-campus recruiting and your chances of success can be much higher.

• **Rank Your Opportunities**—Select companies first by industry segment, and then by the positions that are available.

• **Tailor Your Correspondence**—Do not send generic e-mails or vague correspondence to company contacts or alumni! This is a sure way to destroy an opportunity. In the words of a recruiter and alumnus of the school, “When I receive an inquiry from a student, I want to know:
  - What their career goal is
  - What their background is
  - Why they chose me
  - What type of help they are looking for

• **Take the Initiative**—You will likely have to do more work in educating companies on the MMH externship, as they may not have had previous experience with the MMH program. You may even have the opportunity to design your own externship.

• **Use Employment Web Sites**—No single job search strategy can guarantee success. Implementing multiple job-search methods will help you identify the right position and should include using the Permanent Jobs listings available on the Career Management web site as well as Company Employment web sites.

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**Preparing for an Interview**

Résumés, Cover Letters, Thank You Notes, and Interviewing Tips

The most frustrating part of the job search is the process of obtaining an interview with the company. Often, you may not be selected to interview because you are an international student. Remember, many students are successful every year, and having stellar written communication is a key component to this success.

**Résumés**

- Your résumé must be in the American format (i.e., on a single page [see the handout, “Elements of an Excellent Resume”]) and highlight the advantages of being international, as well as explain your background/education. Quantify whenever possible, for example: “increased revenues by 20
percent by using targeted marketing, decreased labor costs by...”

There are some key differences between the résumé (CV) to which you are accustomed, and the American résumé. In many countries, describing your experience by stating accomplishments is considered aggressive. In an American résumé for a job in the United States, it is expected. American résumés are also written in short phrases, as you can see in the sample provided in the “Elements of an Excellent Resume” handout. These phrases are concise and somewhat terse, written without reference to the first person (“I,” “me,” or “my”).

If you are directing your résumé to American employers for jobs in the United States, it is helpful to translate your education and experience into American English. For example, in many countries, “faculty” means the school or department in which you studied. In the U.S., “faculty members” are teachers. You might list “Engineering Faculty” as “Engineering College” or “Engineering Department” on an American résumé.

Your language skills are an asset. Be sure to indicate your languages and proficiency.

The OSS can help you learn these new ways of writing about your background, so be sure to make an appointment with the MMH advisor.

• Have a copy of your résumé on hand that is in the language and format of your home country. You never know when you will need it on a moment’s notice.
• If you have excellent grades from the core (i.e., GPA of 3.0 or above), include that achievement. Academic honors such as scholarships are even better indicators that you stand out among your peers. In general, Americans take grades seriously, especially for hospitality consulting, finance, and real estate positions. Academic success is a metric that recruiters will understand.
• Never lie—You may see fellow classmates ‘stretching the truth,’ but it doesn’t benefit you and could ruin your credibility with a company.

Cover Letters

• Even if the Cornell CareerNet system does not ask for a cover letter, consider including one to highlight why you are the best candidate for the position. Demonstrate the value of your international experience to the company.
• Have your cover letters proofread by more than one person! Many times, candidates with valuable experience are passed over because of spelling or grammatical errors in their correspondence. In addition to asking classmates, have the MMH advisor or a faculty member review your documents.
• See the examples of cover letters available in the “Business Correspondence” handout available at the Office of Student Services or on Blackboard. Remember that letters need to be targeted and specific to the company and position, not vague and general.

Thank You Notes

• It is strongly recommended that you send thank you notes. You can send these by e-mail or as a hard copy; but e-mail ensures rapid delivery. Notes should be sent within 48 hours of the interview. Interviewers do take notice of the follow-up and since other students may not take time to send a note, it can help to set you apart from the competition.
• Make sure your e-mails are short and succinct, about three to five sentences long. Remember, the interviewers are busy and get lots of e-mail, so don’t write long paragraphs.
Interviewing Tips

- Keep an interviewing notebook—Start a notebook with a common interview question on the left page and your notes to answer it, and then your succinct answer on the right page. Example question: What are your strengths? Write down several on the left side. Then pick three and write a brief response on the right side. Tailor your response to how they would benefit the company you want to work for. You need to prepare good answers the common questions to be successful!

- Preparation—Spend at least two hours researching the company for each interview. Know the current industry/company news, read the annual report, and talk to students who have interned there, faculty members, and the MMH advisor.

- Home country ties—Be knowledgeable of any recent business dealings with your home country and find ways to leverage this association in the interview—it may be why they decided to interview you.

- Enthusiasm—Nothing beats genuine, professional enthusiasm. If the company truly is your number-one choice, let them know that and make it very clear why you want to work there. It makes a difference to a recruiter to see a candidate sincerely excited about his/her company.

- Appearance—Follow the guidelines on American dress. Do a dress rehearsal with U.S. friends to make sure you look professional. Americans can also be obsessive about personal hygiene. In the past, recruiters have made negative comments about the following things:
  - Body odor—Make sure you are freshly showered, and wearing a non-perfumed deodorant (this is the most common complaint).
  - Facial hair—Make sure beards and mustaches are very neatly trimmed.
  - Cologne/perfume—Do not wear perfume or cologne; some interviewers are allergic or find some scents disagreeable.
  - Smoking—Do not smoke before an interview and make sure your clothes do not smell like smoke.
  - Breath—Make sure you have freshly brushed your teeth. Do not chew gum or eat candies during an interview.

- Attitude—Be polite, but not deferential or desperate. Stay calm, even under deliberate pressure.

- Selling yourself—The American culture respects assertiveness and self-confidence. You need to be familiar with this style of marketing, and make sure you have good stories to tell about how you work well with Americans and diverse cultural groups. Being ‘diplomatically assertive’ is not easy. You want to get in touch with potential employers, but too many e-mails/phone calls can be seen as a negative. Talk with the MMH advisor—she may be able to provide advice based upon the specific company.

- Be clear—Do not make the employer work hard to figure out why you are the right candidate. Make sure you can clearly communicate why you are the best person for the job. Volunteer to be an interviewer for friends practicing their interview skills, and consciously recognize when you have an easy time understanding an explanation or when you struggle to keep listening.

- Cell phone—You will need a cell phone so that you are able to respond to employer calls promptly and professionally. You may have to post a deposit, but it will also help you develop a credit rating in the U.S.

- U.S. driver’s license—It is to your advantage to get your U.S. driver’s license; many companies list a valid driver’s license as one of the job requirements.
Visa and Immigration Tips

It is your responsibility to check with the ISSO, at www.isso.cornell.edu, and obtain the most current information—the rules are constantly changing!

Many recruiters do not understand the process for hiring international students, or may even have incorrect information. This section gives general guidance on work authorization, but it is your responsibility to educate yourself on the specific details of your situation by visiting the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO; www.isso.cornell.edu).

Working on Campus

- Your F-1 visa gives you automatic work authorization to work on campus for Cornell University for a maximum of 20 hours per week during the academic year, and 40 hours per week during winter and summer breaks when you are not registered. This covers such issues as accepting teaching assistant positions (also known as “TAing”). J-1 visa holders need permission from their sponsor to work more than 20 hours per week.

Externships in the U.S. on an F-1 Visa

- The best solution is to use Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization for externships. Complete information can be found at: www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/f1/curricular.php.
- The CPT will not reduce the twelve month Optional Practical Training (OPT) available on your F-1 visa.
- There is no cost for filing the CPT.

Work Authorization after Graduation

- The most common route is to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), which is a twelve-month extension to your F-1 visa. The visa gives you twelve months work authorization after you graduate. Complete information can be found at: www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/f1/opta.php.
- Other visa options include having your company apply directly for an H1-B visa on your behalf, or applying for a TN visa if you are a Canadian or Mexican with an eligible position. Because so many of the rules surrounding OPT, H1-B, and TN visas are changing, please refer directly to the ISSO for current information.