



Mistakes made by international students during the job search process

Living in the U.S. as an international student comes with its share of challenges. Searching for and landing a job can be one of the most trying experience. Even the most qualified international students lose employment opportunities because of mistakes that can easily be avoided.

Here are some common mistakes international students make and practical tips on how to avoid them.



1 Not utilizing Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT allows students to build their résumé by engaging in internships and projects closely aligned to a student's academic coursework. Internships and part-time experience can really help during application for full-time opportunities when employers are looking for experience in a student's résumé.

Interstride tip: Consider utilizing your CPT program for internships even if they are short-term and unpaid.

2 Not hitting the deadline for Optional Practical Training (OPT) application

Many students either completely forget to apply or miss the deadline for OPT application submission. Not submitting the OPT application on time can be extremely costly. You will not have the required authorization to work in the U.S. upon graduation.

An easy way to avoid this mishap is to set a reminder on your calendar to contact the ISSS office 60–90 days before graduation.

Interstride tip: Make sure to download the **Interstride mobile app** and turn on the notifications so Interstride can send push notifications.

3 Not having a backup employment option in place

H-1B visas are almost always oversubscribed. Since the H-1B visa process is lottery-based, it is not a sure-shot option for any international student. Having a backup plan in place for employment is a must. You should continue to explore alternative options and build your professional network back home or in a third country, wherever you are authorized to work.

Interstride tip: We periodically host **webinars** on international job searches. We also present many immigration-related webinars. Our immigration attorneys highlight alternative immigration options available to students based on their nationality, degree, and academic major. Take advantage of these resources!

Also, strategically look for **cap-exempt jobs** (from employers that do not have to go through the H-1B lottery process) using the cap-exempt filter in **Interstride Jobs**.





4 Not utilizing the campus career services resources and alumni connections efficiently

The career services office should be the first place to start your career exploration. Typically, those offices can offer job search advice, strategic guidance, mock interviews, alumni connections, and other data and analytics on industries and jobs. Many employers recruit students directly through on-campus interviews, and career advisors continuously bring new employers to campus.

Interstride tip: Your career services office has partnered with Interstride to offer you jobs, data, webinars, access to the international student community, content and resources, and productivity tools. Make sure you utilize all the features and functionalities on the Interstride portal in your job search process.

5 Not investing time on a polished LinkedIn profile

Most employers will review a candidate's LinkedIn profile before scheduling an interview or a screening call with the candidate. Not having a clean and professional profile can sometimes be detrimental to the student's chances of scoring an interview.

Interstride tip: There is a category called "**LinkedIn resources**" in the resources section on your Interstride portal. Utilize some of these resources to build a professional LinkedIn profile.

6 Not looking beyond on-campus job boards

Campus job boards are certainly good resources for international students looking for employment opportunities. But focusing only on open job listings can be a passive way of searching for jobs.

Applying for jobs is not a numbers game – sending hundreds of resumes to every company listed on a job board will not necessarily produce the desired effect. Instead, actively contacting alumni and professionals at those companies, conducting research, and networking can open up many doors.

Interstride tip: Utilize the **Visa Insights** feature to proactively identify companies that have historically **sponsored international candidates**. Reach out to alumni and other professionals at these companies through the LinkedIn tab on the company pages, and read company reviews from other integrations on the company page.

In the **Jobs** section, use the **H-1B jobs and cap-exempt filters** to find opportunities from employers that most likely to sponsor international students.





7 Not networking

Creating and maintaining a solid network is one of the most important things an international student can do. Utilizing resources like LinkedIn, alumni groups, and international student associations are perfect places to start. Why is networking so important? As many as 85% of all available jobs are filled through networks.

Interstride tip: Use the **Network** tool on Interstride to find other international alumni who have been through the international student journey. They can provide valuable career and immigration advice to you.

8 Not pursuing internships and prior work experience

One thing that impresses employers most is prior work experience. Previous industry experience or functional expertise can make a candidate shine among a group of applicants. This can come from past employment, internships, co-ops, summer jobs, academic projects, or other professional experiences.

Without internship or work experience, international students are at a considerable disadvantage since employers are already hesitant about sponsoring entry-level international candidates.

Interstride tip: International work experience counts too! You can search for internships in your home country or elsewhere using Interstride's global job search.

9 Not preparing for the interview

Lack of adequate preparation and overconfidence in interviewing abilities are trends that we continue to see among international students.

Failure to establish value to an employer, unpolished résumé and cover letters, and a general lack of understanding of job requirements are common issues stemming from overconfidence.

Utilizing the career center resources, improving knowledge about best practices, and requesting mock interviews can help mitigate some of these challenges.

Interstride tip: Visit the Learn section of the Interstride portal. You'll find, videos, pdfs and other content created specifically for you.





10 Not communicating effectively

From résumé reviews to in-person interviews, an applicant's communication skills are tested at every stage of the recruiting process. Increasing the chances of finding employment in the U.S. depends a great deal on honing your English language skills. Good communication with employers at networking events and career fairs can open many doors for students.

Interstride tip: In the **Webinars** section, there are webinars on improving communication skills. In the **services** section, there are free language lessons from Saylor.org.

11 Not understanding company values and culture

Employers list "lack of culture fit" as one of the top reasons for not hiring international students.

Before an interview, make sure you research the values and culture of the company. Start with the company's mission and vision statements, speak to the employees if possible, and follow the company's social media channels.

You can also demonstrate culture fit to employers through successful past employment in the U.S. or an American company.

Interstride tip: The best way to learn about the culture at a particular company is to speak to the people working there. Reach out to your school alumni at the company and ask them what it is like to work there.

12 Not following up

Following up after an interview helps reinforce your interest in the position. This is a good practice after an informational interview as well. A lot of international students forgo sending follow-up emails after the interview, which is a mistake. Failing to make contact can certainly discourage an employer from maintaining interest.

Interstride tip: In the Resources section, there are videos and articles on how to follow up after your networking events, meetings, and interviews.





13 Not negotiating your job offer

Before you excitedly accept, know that you can negotiate your offer. Some employers may take advantage of an international student's time-sensitive need for employment to retain status and perceived lack of other options, leading to unfair pay. You can negotiate aspects of an offer that are important to you – such as salary, contract-to-hire, even visa sponsorship.

Negotiating a job offer requires a tactful approach. If you do decide to negotiate your job offer, first consult your career services office to understand the market trends for similar roles.

Interstride tip: In the **Tools** section, there is a checklist on **Negotiations**. It lists all the elements that you could potentially negotiate after receiving an offer.

Final word

The common mistakes listed here can lead to the loss of a visa, landing a sub-standard job, and can even cause confusion and feelings of desperation.

Take advantage of the resources at your disposal – your international friends and family, your career services and international student services offices, Interstride, and other tools. Know that you're not alone.

Creating a plan to identify areas that need further development and discussing it with your career coach will also prove helpful for long-term success. Whether you lack interview skills, experience, language skills, or anything in between, you can always benefit from the many tools built to support the areas where you need help.

