Objectives

The objective of this guide is to provide tips and advice for international students seeking a job in the United States, and to help guide internationals through the US job search process. It is written by former international students based on their experiences at the Johnson School.

This guide focuses on the practical steps of planning and executing a US job search to maximize the potential for success. It is meant to be used throughout your job search, as you craft your own individual job search plan. It is up to you, not the Office of Career Management (OCM), to take control of your job search. We are here to partner with you and support your job search plan.

Note that this guide is not about determining your professional interests and deciding upon what career path you want to pursue, but rather how to pursue the professional positions you’ve already targeted.

Because of the current state of the US economy and the small number of visas available, your job search will require extra time and effort. Be prepared - international students face many more obstacles than domestic students, and the job search will become a significant time commitment alongside your coursework. The more prepared you are, the higher your chances of success.

We look forward to working with you during your time at the CIPA program. We encourage you to stop by to schedule an appointment with us. We are here to partner with you to ensure that your job search is a successful one!
CIPA International Job Search Guide

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The Big Picture

The US is an immigrant country in need of skilled people. Despite the current economic and political situation, there are careers available in the US for international CIPA students. The two major barriers to you landing a job in the US are:

- Possessing the right skills for the position; and,
- Lack of work authorization.

The #1 reason why CIPA international students find jobs in the US is because they successfully convince the employer that they possess the character and skills to excel in the position, and that they are the best candidate for the job. If you can be successful in doing this, the company will take care of the legal restrictions. You need to be worth the effort first.

In order to convince an employer that you are the ideal person, you need to know yourself better than ever before and 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
- What career you want after you leave Cornell

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

It is unlikely that a company with no ties to your home country will hire an international student unless the student has significant work experience in his or her sector. Often, employers are not fully aware that an H1-B visa can be used for up to 6 years before requiring green card sponsorship, and view sponsorship as a huge hassle. To eventually sponsor you for permanent residency, the company must prove that they were unable to find a suitable US citizen. Few companies are willing to go through the paperwork unless there is a good chance for success.

PRIORITIZE: We recommend using the simple framework below to make a first pass at prioritizing how you will approach your job search. After determining your priorities, available job and internship opportunities can be ranked based on your interest level in the job and the feasibility of an employer choosing you for the position. Some key criteria to consider:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTEREST-example criteria</th>
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<td>The industry segment you want</td>
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<td>The location you want</td>
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<td>Returning to your home country to work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The sector you want (Public, private, nonprofit)</td>
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FOCUS: Get focused and specific in your job search as soon as you can.
REMEMBER: As an international student, you need to maintain **realistic expectations** and leverage your **existing skills**. For example, you may passionately want to become a consultant at Deloitte or an investment banker, but you may have no work experience or are a career changer. In such a situation, you may be more successful convincing a consulting company to hire you to work as an entry level analyst that does business in Latin America if you speak fluent Spanish or in China if you are a native speaker. Think about opportunities in this “big picture” framework. Also, keep in mind your two to three year career goals; where can you gain the necessary experience to get to the next step? For example, you may want to work at a consulting firm or NGO, but they may want to send you to your home country initially. Considering such options will allow you to gain that additional experience and increase the chances that the company will transfer you back to the US.
Disadvantages for International Students

A job search for any student requires substantial time and effort. As an international student, you will face a few more hurdles to clear than your American counterparts:

**Familiarity**

**Problem:** Although every country has been exposed to American culture, you will be less familiar with US business culture and recruiting practices than domestic students.

**Solution:** You need to tap into the knowledge of your American classmates and be a sponge for information from TV, movies, newspapers and colleagues:

- Learn about favorite American sports, current politics, and the latest business news so that you can carry on an intelligent social conversation with prospective employers.

- If you don’t fully comprehend the US systems, there is an even higher likelihood that the American employer has no idea about the industries, politics, or school systems in your home country. Be prepared to put your past experiences and education into a context that Americans can understand by using metrics or finding an American equivalent for comparison. However, run your comparisons by domestic friends before using them on employers to make sure your comparisons are not over-inflated or discourteous.

**Example:** A student’s conversation with an employer explained her background in the following manner: “My experience as an exchange student in the US was a key factor in my decision to pursue a MPA degree at CIPA. During my time in the US, I volunteered for a local non-profit/NGO…”

**English Skills**

**Problem:** If you do not speak English as a native language, you are at a distinct disadvantage communicating with recruiters.

**Solution:** Consciously make an effort to talk with Americans:

- Make presentations, take English courses, and work tirelessly at improving your English skills.

- Ask a fellow student to be your “coach” and focus on oral communication.

- Many international students will end up hanging out with students from their own country, but the downside is that you communicate in your native language, rather than practicing English.

- By the time interviewing season arrives, you must be comfortable expressing yourself in English, without lengthy pauses and stumbles. However, remember not to apologize excessively for your English skills, as it simply draws attention to them.

- Use a notebook to write down succinct answers to common behavioral based interview questions.
**Work Authorization**

**Problem** - Especially post 9/11, the general belief is that the process of hiring an international student is extremely painful, risky, and expensive.

**Solution** - You need to educate yourself on the steps and costs to gaining work authorization, and remain flexible in what positions you are willing to accept.

- Visa options such as practical training and H1-B visas and work authorization are sketched out on page 15 of this guide, but you need to know as many specifics as you can about your particular situation.

- You need to be proactive with recruiters and minimize their effort in ensuring that legal hurdles are overcome.

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

Being international is not all doom and gloom. In fact, your foreign background can be leveraged very effectively to set you apart and differentiate you from your peers. You have three main selling points:

- Bilingual abilities
- Cultural background
- Work experience prior to enrolling at CIPA or during your summer internships and during the academic year
Advantages for International Students

**Leverage these advantages in the following ways:**

**Be Memorable** - Similar to the CIPA admissions process, being memorable is one of the keys to being successful in your job search. From networking opportunities to interviews, being from a foreign country gives you more opportunities to share remarkable stories of your past experiences.

- From the development of the European Union to the expansion of tourism in your home country, find a story that highlights why your international experience is valuable and an asset to the recruiter.

- Leverage your global experience and language abilities. The exposure becomes even more valuable if your company has operations or is considering expansion to your home country.

- Even if opportunities don’t exist with their US operations, you may be able to network with the US contact to get “Plan B” leads in your home country.

**Example:** From a past student: “I found my opportunity with PwC by talking with an alumnus in my home country. I emailed him and followed up with a phone conversation. Then, when I was home, I met him at the local office. I think the key was getting to meet and talk with the right people.”

**Be Committed** - You have proved yourself mobile and flexible by coming to the US to pursue an MPA degree, which is usually a more daunting undertaking than for a domestic student. The fact that you are at Cornell gives you an edge and shows that you are a highly motivated professional, particularly with independent job searches.

- Make sure you reinforce with recruiters your intention to stay in the US long-term; they don’t want to invest in you only to have you leave a few years later to return home.

- Have stories that illustrate how you bring tenacity and resourcefulness to a position, yet fit in well with American culture. Stories of being engaged in CIPA activities or the community would reinforce your intention to be committed for the longer term.

**Example:** A response to the common interview question from a consulting firm headquartered in NYC: “What is your preferred geographic location?”

> “During the summer prior to enrolling in CIPA, I worked in Europe overseeing treks throughout the EC. I lived in and traveled to over 10 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 done in the past to ensure I can contribute to the success of the company.”
Job Search Resources

**CIPA Office of Career Management Resources**

- **Job Listings** - Job opportunities received from employers and/or CIPA alumni are forwarded to fellows through the CIPA listserv.

- **Practical Experience Survey** - All fellows are required to complete a Practical Experience Survey (for summer internship experiences). These are a great resource for researching companies and potential summer or fulltime opportunities.

- **CIPA Website Career Development Resources** - The website includes hundreds of job opportunities from various companies, job boards, and professional associations (including both full-time and summer jobs).

**The Power of Networking**

Over the course of your work life, networking will be the single most effective method of advancing your career. Even among Cornell graduates seeking a position upon graduation, personal contact is extremely important.

- **Build a Contact List** - Networking is an active, ongoing process in which you identify people who can provide information, advice, and additional contacts. Family members, friends, faculty, staff, your peers and alumni are all contacts and potential sources of additional contacts.

- **LinkedIn** - LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional network with over 100 million members and growing rapidly. It can help you navigate your job search, build up your network, and stay informed in your industry. (www.linkedin.com) Your LinkedIn profile is discoverable through the millions of searches on search engines and on LinkedIn. You are in complete control over what others see on your profile, so leverage this to showcase your skills and talents so the right people and opportunities find you.

**Join LinkedIn and Build Your Professional Network**

- The New User Guide is an excellent resource to help you begin establishing a professional profile.

- LinkedIn gives you the keys to controlling your online identity. Have you Goggled yourself lately? You never know what might come up. LinkedIn profiles rise to the top of search results, letting you control the first impression people get when searching for you online.

- You can upload your resume and select the appropriate parts of it to include on LinkedIn.

- Keep it professional. Checking the tone of your LinkedIn profile is key; remember that LinkedIn is not as casual as Facebook or other social networking sites, but provides you with distinct features:
  - Find out how to get a new job through LinkedIn articles and contacts.
- Use LinkedIn on your mobile phone to stay up-to-date.
- Post questions and receive answers from professionals in your field.

**Stay in touch with colleagues and friends** - It’s important to begin building your network of contacts right away. You can import contacts from your address book or webmail account and look through the list for people marked with the blue “in” logo to the right of their name (this means they’re already on LinkedIn). Be selective about whom you invite. We suggest that you invite current classmates, colleagues, current and former supervisors, and family friends to join your network initially.

**Join Industry and Alumni Groups**

LinkedIn groups allow you to join communities of professionals with common interests, backgrounds, and affiliations. Consider joining a group from your undergraduate alma mater, a professional organization aligned with your career interests, or a cause that you support. Join the Official Cornell Institute for Public Affairs LinkedIn networking group.

**Search for People and Organizations**

If you want to locate CIPA or other Cornell alumni, simply type “Cornell University” or “Cornell Institute for Public Affairs” into the people search line located at the top of the LinkedIn page. If you prefer to conduct a more targeted search, use the Advanced Search feature to search by name, title, school, group, and/or company. You can also use LinkedIn to learn about the people you plan to meet through job interviews. Find out if you share common connections, interests, and groups.

**Explore Opportunities**

Whether you’re looking for a career opportunity or an informational interview, LinkedIn connects you to jobs and experts in the field that can offer you invaluable insight and advice.

**Keep Making Connections**

The secret to LinkedIn is simple: the more connections you make, the greater the chance that it can help you explore various career options as well as help you with your job search and grow your network. The more active you are, the more people you connect with, the more your profile will be viewed. Reach out for in person meetings. Just because your connections are online doesn’t mean you can’t meet in person after you establish an online relationship. You may want to meet for coffee, lunch, or just a quick phone call based on the person’s busy schedule and the rapport you have established.

**Find a Job Using Your LinkedIn Network**

LinkedIn offers a number of excellent ways to help leverage your experience, knowledge, and contacts so that you can land a professional position. Utilize the LinkedIn Learning Center and participate in the numerous webinars.
Library Database Resources

Access the Cornell Library Gateway at [http://www.career.cornell.edu/library](http://www.career.cornell.edu/library) to find databases to assist you with company research and search for jobs. The databases listed below include information on location, history, officers, financial information and much more. Additionally, there is a main career library, located at 103 Barnes Hall, which serves all Cornell students. It is one of the largest in the country, consisting of approximately 900 books, 300 websites, MP3s, and paper files of law schools, medical schools, and test prep materials. There are three kiosks for conducting library database searches in 103 Barnes Hall, as well as a media room for accessing the web, printing information, and using other media. Hours are 8:00am-4:30pm, Monday through Friday, year-round. Each College Career Office also has a career library with resources relating specifically to the academic offerings of that college. Several also have career library databases that can be found online.

Helpful Career Databases:

**Vault Guides** ([http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/6340230](http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/6340230))

70 plus industry, employer, and career guides including guides to:

- Nonprofit Careers
- Government Agency Careers
- Education Careers
- International Development
- Environmental Careers
- Career Guide to the Energy Industry
- Capitol Hill Careers
- Investment Banking
- Real Estate
- Consulting

**Wetfeet Career Resource Site** ([http://media.career.cornell.edu/wetfeet/redirect.html](http://media.career.cornell.edu/wetfeet/redirect.html)) Advice and information from the most trusted third-party source for Career Research.

**JGSM (Management School) Library** ([http://johnson.library.cornell.edu/](http://johnson.library.cornell.edu/)) Access to top business databases including Hoovers online.

**Glassdoor.com**- An inside look at jobs and companies.

On-Campus Recruiting via Cornell Handshake ([www.cornell.joinhandshake.com](http://www.cornell.joinhandshake.com))

If a company specifies that it is only interested in interviewing students with permanent U.S. work authorization, job opportunities will be identified as “U.S. citizenship or permanent residence required.” Job opportunities that do not require permanent U.S. work authorization will be identified as "work authorization: none specified." Students that do not have permanent U.S. work authorization are only allowed to sign up for companies indicating they will hire students on F-1 or J-1 visas. If non-US work authorized students sign up for companies indicating U.S. citizenship or permanent residence required, they will be removed from the resume drop process.

We encourage international students to attend company presentations if they are interested in a specific company. Often by meeting in person with a recruiter, students can articulate clearly their career interests and how they might fit with the company. Also, students are encouraged to meet with an OCM advisor to map out a job search plan based upon their career interests, skills and countries where they have work.
authorization. The OCM can also assist you in identifying companies that have hired international students in the past.

**REMEMBER:** You need to start now! There are, by nature, fewer opportunities available to international students. Consequently, proper planning and preparation is critical to maximize your chances of success with the opportunities you do have. Don’t leave everything to the last minute, and spend the extra effort practicing interviewing and interpersonal communications.
Summer Internships

- Experience is more important than money. The internship is leverage for full-time recruiting to show you can be successful in your career path. Think about the future opportunities the internship will generate and the cultural fit over dollars. Most internships in the non-profit/public sector will be unpaid.

- Discuss funding options for unpaid summer internships with the CIPA Office of Career Management. More detailed information will be sent during the Spring semester.

- Don’t expect a lot of negotiating room. Internship offers are usually standard packages, although start and end dates may be flexible. Avoid negotiating unless you have multiple offers.

- Internships are often the pipeline to full-time offers, and you are on an 8-12 week test run. Work hard, demonstrate initiative, and look for opportunities to show that you are capable rather than waiting for people to assign work to you.

- The summer is not all work; make sure you socialize and have fun, too. You need to prove you can fit in and thrive in an American work environment. Do not complain about differences; be a sponge for learning instead. Typically, you are gaining experience and testing the waters, but remember with every work experience, you are making an impression.

- Even if you plan on exploring other job options in the fall of your 2nd year and don’t want to stay with the company, an offer from the summer may give you negotiating leverage.

  Network with various individuals at an organization, ask an alumnus to give you a list of people you can meet with for “informational interviews” over the course of the summer, and view LinkedIn for additional contacts (see page 7). Collect business cards; not only will you learn more about the organization and its culture, but you are making valuable contacts for the future.

  Be willing to do even the menial tasks associated with the job. Show the organization that you are willing to do what it takes to get the job done.

- The most frustrating part of the job search is getting the opportunity to interview with the company. Often, you won’t be selected to interview because you are international. Many students are successful every year, however, and having stellar written and oral communication skills is critical.
Resumes, Cover Letters, and Thank-you Notes

Cover Letters

- Even if the Cornell Career Services’ Handshake system doesn’t ask for a cover letter, it is best to include one and highlight why you are the best candidate for the position, potentially demonstrating the value of your international background to the company or position. You need to link how your skills and experience will benefit the company as much as possible.

- **Have your cover letters proof-read!** So many times, candidates with valuable experience are “dinged” because of spelling or grammatical errors. In addition to asking classmates, have the Office of Career Management or a faculty member review your cover letter.

- See cover letter examples in CIPA Office of Career Management handouts. The key point is that cover letters are very targeted and specific to the company, not vague and general.

Resume

- Your resume must be in the American format (i.e. 1 page) and highlight the advantages of being international as well as explain your education, internship, and leadership experiences when applicable. Quantify whenever possible. (If applying to the World Bank or other international organizations you will need a CV. If you are unsure check with the Office of Career Management.)

- Have a copy of your resume on hand in the language and format of your home country. You never know when you will need it at a moment’s notice.

- If you have good grades from the beginning (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. Include your CIPA fellowship award with the dollar amount per year. In general, Americans take grades seriously and academic success is a metric that recruiters will understand.

- List relevant coursework for the position you are applying for, as well as computer and language skills.

- Never lie. You may see fellow classmates “stretching the truth,” but it usually won’t benefit you and could kill your credibility with a company.

Thank-you Notes

- It is acceptable and strongly recommended to send thank-you notes. Send an email within 48 hours of the interview. Interviewers do take notice of this follow-up, and since other students may not take the time to send a note, it can help differentiate you.

- Make sure your emails are short and succinct, about three to five sentences long. Remember, recruiters are busy and receive many emails, so don’t write paragraphs. Have a look at the example thank-you notes in the Cornell Career Services’ Career Guide.
Interviewing Tips

- **Notebook**: Start a notebook with common interview questions 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, and then pick three on the right side and tailor your response to how they benefit the organization. You need to nail the common questions to be successful! For a list of behavioral based interview questions see the Office of Career Management for a copy.

- **Preparation**: Spend sufficient time researching the company for each interview. Know the current industry/company news, read the annual report, and **talk to faculty, staff, and your classmates that have interned there**.

- **Home Country Ties**: Be knowledgeable of any recent business dealing 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 and be very clear why you want to work there. It makes a difference to a recruiter to see a candidate who is sincerely excited about his or her company.

- **Appearance**: First impressions are very important. Do a rehearsal with domestic friends and make sure you look professionally dressed.

- **Attitude**: Be polite, but not deferential or “desperate.” Stay calm, even under deliberate pressure.

- **Sell Yourself**: The American culture is to be assertive and self-confident. You need to become familiar with this style of marketing yourself, and make sure you have good stories on 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 emails/phone calls can become negative. If you are unsure, the OCM may be able to provide advice based upon the organization.

- **Be Clear**: Do not make the recruiter work hard to figure out why you are the right candidate; make sure you communicate why you are the best person. Volunteer to be an interviewer for friends practicing, and consciously recognize when you have an easy time understanding an explanation or when you struggle to keep listening. Schedule a mock interview with the Office of Career Management.

- **Research the Interviewer**: If you can, find out in advance who is doing the interviewing. If a very senior person is interviewing, you may have a better chance getting a company to make an exception and hire an international student. Senior people have more authority to bend the rules and often have a better appreciation of the value international experience can bring to their organization.

- **Cell Phone**: Make sure you have a professional message on your voicemail.

- **US Driver’s License**: It is to your advantage to get your US driver’s license; many organizations require a valid license as part of the job requirements.
Independent Job Search Tips

- **Networking** - As a CIPA student, DO NOT 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 choosing to hire an international student, despite the visa hassle.** Even if you don’t know anybody when you arrive in the US, you can network with alumni (particularly those from your own country), your classmates, faculty, guest speakers at company presentations and conferences, and anywhere there is an opportunity! You have 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 may have to design your own internship, or be flexible on compensation. Remember that it is the experience you are after. (Note: most internships CIPA students take are unpaid)

- **Rank Opportunities** - Select companies first by segment (public, private, or nonprofit), and then by the positions that are available.

- **Contacts** - Try to speak with the person in charge of hiring decisions. 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.

- **Correspondence** - DO NOT send generic emails 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…
  
  o  What their career goal is
  o  What their background is
  o  Why they chose me, and
  o  What type of help they are looking for

- **Internship and Job Resources** - [www.cipa.cornell.edu](http://www.cipa.cornell.edu) contains a listing of websites by Sector and Employment Websites, as do the resources listed on page 9 of this guide.

- **Multinationals** - If you are targeting the US as your long-term home, consider multi-national US companies that have operations in your home country. Pursue internship opportunities with these companies and look for transfers to the US later in your career ([www.uniworldbp.com](http://www.uniworldbp.com)).

- **Office of Career Management** - Continue to use the office. They might be able to officially contact the company and explain visa requirements and the process of hiring an international student. Remember, you must have the required skills and work experience. Determine first if you are a competitive candidate.

- **University Career Fair/Company Presentations/Colloquium Speaker Series** - These are all excellent venues to network. Speak with current staff regarding their organization, company cultures and potential opportunities.

- **Build Contacts with Alumni** - CIPA and Cornell alumni live and work in the US and internationally. Alumni from your undergraduate university are also important contacts.
Visa and Immigration Tips

IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHECK WITH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS OFFICE (ISSO) TO OBTAIN THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION.

THE RULES ARE CONSTANTLY CHANGING!

Many recruiters do not understand the process for hiring international students, or even have misinformation. This section gives general guidance on work authorization; however, it is your responsibility to educate yourself by visiting the ISSO on any specific details of your situations. The ISSO website can be accessed at www. isso.cornell.edu, and the office is located in B-50 Caldwell Hall.

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. This covers jobs including teaching assistant positions (TA). J-1 visa holders need permission from their sponsor to work over 20 hours per week.

The F-1 visa does not give you permission to work off-campus.

Internships in the US on an F-1 visa

The best solution is to use Curricular Practice Training (CPT) authorization for your internship. This work authorization is company-specific, and you can’t get authorization without an offer.

The basic steps are:

- You need to have been enrolled at Cornell for a full academic year.
- Your offer of employment needs to be directly related to your MPA degree.
- Your employer needs to write a letter (must be on company letterhead) or email stating the duties of the job, the EXACT beginning and ending dates of your employment, and your supervisor’s name, title, address and phone number. This is all your employer has to do for summer internship work authorization!
- You will fill out the ISSO Information Sheet and get a transcript from Day Hall.
- You need to get a letter from CIPA (294 Caldwell Hall) indicating that you are fulfilling the practical experience component to meet your graduation requirements.
- Bring the letter, CPT advisor form, ISSO Information Sheet and transcript to the ISSO for processing. Processing could take up to one week.
- Refer to the ISSO website: http://www. isso.cornell.edu/immigration/legalstatus.html for more information.
• The CPT will not reduce the 12 months Optical Practice Training (OPT) available on your F-1 visa.

• There is no cost for filing the CPT.

Upon completion of your internship, you need to have your employer complete the Practical Experience Supervisor Evaluation form before returning to campus.

*Note: The supervisor evaluation form must be sent directly to the CIPA Office of Career Management from the supervisor via fax, email or mail.*

**Work Authorization after Graduation**

The most common route is to apply for Optional Practice Training (OPT) which is a 12-month extension to your F-1 visa. This visa allows you 12 months of work authorization after you graduate. Other details are:

• Because authorization can take up to three months to obtain (you may apply for Post-graduation OPT for up to 90 days before your graduation date. You cannot apply for the visa until your final semester begins before your graduation date, and immigration services must receive your application NO LATER THAN 60 days beyond your graduation date.

• Technically, **you need to stay in the USA while processing the visa.** If you try to re-enter the USA while your visa is being processed, they could cancel it. The new regulation requires that you do have employment while on our post-graduation OPT period. You are only allowed to have a total of 90 days of unemployment in your 12 month period of OPT or 120 days if you apply for and receive the 17 month extension.

• The visa does not require company sponsorship; you can change jobs using this authorization. Authorization for OPT is granted by U.S.C.I.S and can take 2-3 months to obtain. Therefore it is important that you apply long before the date you wish to start working. The processing time can be very slow. Don’t book plane tickets until you are certain you will receive your visa.

• You cannot forward federal documents, such as your visa, so maintain the same address with which you apply.

• Meet with an ISSO advisor to ensure your paperwork is in order.

• On-line applications are available at: [http://www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/f1/opta.html](http://www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/f1/opta.html).

Other visa options are to have your company apply directly for an H1-B on your behalf, or apply for a TN visa if you are a Canadian 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 the most current information.
**Last Practical Tips**

- Remember, it is to your advantage to get your US Driver’s License.

- There are several English language programs in the Local Community, which can be found at [www.isso.cornell.edu/ithacalife/english.php](http://www.isso.cornell.edu/ithacalife/english.php). This website includes opportunities to study English as a Second Language (ESL) at Cornell and in Ithaca, as well as resources to assist you with written and spoken English.