

Employers' Thoughts on International Students for Internships and Full-time Positions

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Every year colleagues at colleges and universities and employers who hire talent from these campuses are requested to send topics for possible inclusion in CERI's Recruiting Trends survey. Over the past five years an increasing number of submissions have been received that target international students. We began including questions on the international student hiring process in 2010 and have done so every year since. The first set of questions focused on the hiring process for international students who are likely to be sourced back to their home company. A paper has been prepared from these questions and can be found on the CERI website.

In 2011 employers asked to include questions on the sponsorship of international talent on H1B1 visas. The information gleaned from these questions will be available in Research Brief 2-2013 which is still in draft form.

In 2012 college and university colleagues wanted to know whether employers were receptive to assisting and supporting international students for internships and co-ops. This short brief presents the basic findings from two questions. (1) How serious are employers' hiring intentions for international BA/BS and advanced degree graduates. (2) How willing are employers to assist and support undergraduate international students by providing internships or related pre-professional work experiences.

Part I: Intentions for Hiring International Graduates for Full-time Positions.

Throughout this recessionary period, CERI's Recruiting Trends survey monitored employers' perceptions on the vulnerability of different cohorts (new college graduates to employees with more than 20 years experience) to employment disruptions. Between 2008 and 2011 when the recessionary situation began to ease, young adults under the age of 30 and with little professional work experience were considered to be the most seriously impacted by the poor labor market. In the 2012-2013 annual survey the question was rephrased as to how serious organizations would focus the recruiting efforts toward different groups (new graduates, recent graduates with little experience, and veterans, for example) for full-time positions. International undergraduate (BA and BS) and international graduate students were also included. This section presents the hiring effort employers expect to extend toward these two international groups.

From the nearly 2000 employers that responded to this question, 15% indicated that their organizations were not permitted to recruit and hire international undergraduates or graduate students for full time positions. Among those who responded to this question, 60% at both degree levels indicated that they were not interested in international students for full-time positions at this time. An additional 20%, at both degree levels, took an opportunistic position. In this case employers might consider a well qualified international student for a certain position once in awhile when the need arose and they could complete the formalities easily.

The remaining 20% of the respondents indicated that they were modestly serious to very serious about pursuing either international students with bachelor’s degrees or advanced degrees for full-time positions.

A. Profiling employers that were **interested in international students with bachelor’s degrees for full-time positions**, we learned the following:

Economic Sector: The two sectors which provide the largest number of respondents to the survey are the key sectors in considering international students for full-time positions. Key subsectors include computer design services, automotive & light truck manufacturing, and computer & electronic products.

- 24% Professional, Business & Scientific Services
- 17% Manufacturing companies
- 8% Non-profit organizations
- 8% Educational Services
- 6% Health Care Services

Within the leading two sectors these subsectors were the most common:

- **Professional, Business & Scientific Services**
 - Computer Design, Programming Consulting Services 40%
 - Accounting: CPA firms 12%
 - Advertising & Public Relations 9%
 - Management Consulting 8%
- **Manufacturing**
 - Computer and Electronic Products 13%
 - Automotive, Truck & Equipment 19%
 - Machinery 9%
 - Electrical Equipment & Appliances 9%
 - Surgical & Medical Equipment 7%

Organization Size (number of employees): Small employers are slightly over represented (compared to the total sample) in seeking international students for full-time positions.

- Small companies less than 500 employees 64%
- Mid-size companies 500 to 4000 employees 19%
- Large Companies 4000 plus employees 16%

Recruiting Region: Employers who are interested in international students are slightly stronger in the eastern United States and California. Small employers tend to be located in California, greater New York City area (including New Jersey) and Boston. Larger companies interested in international students tend to be from the Great Lakes and Southeast.

- Recruit throughout the entire U.S. 19%
- Recruit throughout the Great Lakes region 24%
- Recruit throughout the Southeast region 16%
- Recruit throughout the Middle Atlantic region 15%
- Recruit globally 14%

Academic Majors: Employers indicated the academic majors that they were interested in for full-time positions. This particular group of employers cast a wide net, seeking graduates from a range of academic majors. Beyond seeking “all majors,” employers eagerly sought computer science, followed by business majors. We cannot tell, however, from which of these academic majors employers are likely to recruit international students. This list contains the majors most frequently selected by employers in this group.

- **All Majors** (will consider any student) 44%
- **Computer Science**
 - Computer Science 36%
 - Computer Programming 32%
 - MIS 29%
 - CIS 29%
 - Information Systems 26%
 - Multimedia 22%
- **Business**
 - Accounting 40%
 - Finance 38%
 - Marketing 37%
 - MIS 32%
 - Human Resources 29%
 - Economics 25%
 - Supply Chain 23%
 - International Business 22%
- **Engineering**
 - Electrical 26%
 - Computer 22%
 - Mechanical 22%
 - Engineering Technology 21%
- **Arts & Sciences and Communications**
 - Communications 28%
 - Public Relations 26%
 - Psychology 18%
 - English 17%
 - Advertising 16%
 - International Relations 16%
 - Chemistry & Mathematics 12%

B. Profiling employers in this latter group that were **interested in international students with graduate degrees for full-time employment**, we learned the following:

Economic Sector: The major economic sectors are similar to the undergraduate list. However, in the two key sectors, the major subsectors are more likely to be concerned with research, design, and consulting.

- 25% Professional, Business & Scientific Services
- 18% Manufacturing companies
- 9% Non-profit organizations
- 9% Educational Services
- 5% Health Care Services
- 5% Government

Within the leading two sectors these subsectors were the most common:

- **Professional, Business & Scientific Services**
 - Computer Design, Programming Consulting Services 37%
 - Scientific Services & Technical Consulting 17%
 - Accounting: CPA firms 11%
 - Management Consulting 9%

- **Manufacturing**
 - Automotive, Truck & Equipment 22%
 - Computer and Electronic Products 13%
 - Chemical Products 9%
 - Surgical Equipment 7%
 - Electrical Equipment 7%
 - Plastics 6%

Organization Size (number of employees): Large organizations appear more interested in graduate students than they did undergraduates.

- Small companies less than 500 employees 61%
- Mid-size companies 500 to 4000 employees 21%
- Large Companies 4000 plus employees 18%

Recruiting Region: Employers, who are interested in international graduate students, recruit across the US. Regional employer in the eastern half of the country appeared to be more active in seeking international graduate students.

- Recruit throughout the entire U.S. 26%
- Recruit throughout the Great Lakes region 24%
- Recruit throughout the Southeast region 18%
- Recruit throughout the Middle Atlantic region 15%
- Recruit globally 14%

Academic Major: The tabulation of academic major does not allow us to delineate clearly which majors at the graduate level employers place their attention. By extrapolating from several questions, the majors these more serious employers will likely recruit include:

- Masters in Accounting
- Masters and PhD in computer science (all fields)
- Masters and PhD in engineering (electrical, chemical, computer and mechanical, primarily)
- PhD in physical and biological sciences
- Masters in Business Administration

Part II: Willingness to assist and support international undergraduate students in obtaining internship or co-op experiences.

Another challenging assignment for career advisors is to find appropriate internships, co-ops or relevant professional work experiences for international students. Numerous requests were made to CERI to determine the willingness of organizations to host international students in an internship. We found that only about one-third of 1900 employers who answered this question would be interested in assisting international students:

- 35 % indicated that they do not provide international students with internships.
- 32% indicated that they might provide, at some future date, an internship experience to an international student but were not considering doing so now or in the near future.
- 22% indicated that occasionally provide international students with internships and will continue to do so.
- 11% indicated that they regularly provide internships to international students.

Before focusing on those organizations that occasionally or regularly provide internships, several findings are presented that might get lost because certain large categories may influence the results in particular direction.

- Several economic sectors that are represented by a small number of respondents tend to have a higher likelihood of sponsoring international students for internships: oil and energy (43%), arts & entertainment (41%), and information services (40%).
- While larger companies were more likely not to provide internships to international students, those that did were more likely to do so on a regular basis. Among small organizations (less than 500 employees), less than 30% indicated that they would not provide internships; however, 40% fell into the might consider category and were not offering international students these opportunities at the present time.

When we examine those companies that occasionally to regularly provide internships, we obtain the following profile:

Economic Sector:

- 24% Professional, Business & Scientific Services
- 19% Manufacturing companies
- 10% Non-profit organizations
- 8% Financial Services
- 5% Information Sciences

Within the leading two sectors these subsectors were the most common:

- **Professional, Business & Scientific Services**
 - Computer Design, Programming Consulting Services 34%
 - Accounting: CPA firms 12%
 - Engineering Services 12%
 - Advertising & Public Relations 11%
 - Scientific Research 6%
- **Manufacturing**
 - Computer and Electronic Products 10%
 - Automotive, Truck & Equipment 15%
 - Machinery 10%
 - Chemical Manufacturing 9%
 - Electrical Equipment & Appliances 8%
 - Surgical & Medical Equipment 7%
 - Primary Metals 7%
- **Information Services**
 - Telecommunications 42%
 - Internet Providers 32%

Organization Size (number of employees): Large organizations have a much higher presence in seeking international students for internship than full-time positions.

- Small companies less than 500 employees 58%
- Mid-size companies 500 to 4000 employees 20%
- Large Companies 4000 plus employees 22%

Recruiting Region: Employers who recruit on campuses across the U.S. are much more likely to be seeking international students for internship positions. Regional employers, in general, are less enthusiastic about assisting international students, except in the Great Lakes region.

- Recruit throughout the entire U.S. 27%
- Recruit throughout the Great Lakes region 23%
- Recruit throughout the Southeast region 12%
- Recruit throughout the Middle Atlantic region 13%
- Recruit globally 11%

Academic Majors: Employers indicated the range of academic majors that they were interested in for their internship positions. Heavy focus has been placed on business majors, especially marketing, finance and accounting, computer science, and engineering. We cannot determine from this list the specific majors that employers will tap for international students.

- **All Majors** (will consider any student) 39%
- **Computer Science**
 - Computer Science 38%
 - Computer Programming 31%
 - MIS 28%
 - CIS 29%
 - Information Systems 25%
 - Multimedia 21%
- **Business**
 - Accounting 38%
 - Finance 37%
 - Marketing 40%
 - MIS 28%
 - Human Resources 26%
 - Economics 26%
 - Supply Chain 21%
 - International Business 22%
- **Engineering**
 - Electrical 28%
 - Computer 22%
 - Mechanical 21%
 - Engineering Technology 19%
- **Arts & Sciences and Communications**
 - Communications 30%
 - Public Relations 25%
 - Psychology 15%
 - English 15%
 - Advertising 19%
 - International Relations 14%
 - Chemistry & Mathematics 10%

Major Challenges. Employers were asked to describe the biggest obstacle they faced in placing an international student into an internship in their organizations. The comments were sorted into categories that reflected four themes. Before presenting these themes, we need to recognize that the issues are influenced by the perceptions of all the parties. For example, in a recent article in the local paper on the adjustment of Chinese students to Michigan State University, Chinese students discussed how difficult it was to mix with American students who already have a number of friends from high school and do not seem interested in making new friends. American students see the Chinese students clustering together and assume they do not want to mix with them.

- **Language.** Not being proficient in English, especially the terms used in the work setting, make for stressful interactions between team members, supervisors, and clients (depending on what

the intern is being asked to do). Employers complained of the struggle they had in making assignments clearly understood to international interns. They were also disappointed in the written work as part of the assignment.

- **Cultural awareness.** Often international students have only a rudimentary knowledge of the business culture in the U.S. The dynamics of the U.S. workplace may be very different than the business culture in their home countries. Employers spoke of their frustration on the length of time it takes international students to adjust to the workplace. Too often the international student preferred to work alone rather than within the work team they were assigned.
- **Return on investment.** Most companies that invest in an intern have an expectation that the intern will become a full-time employee. Internships are the number one strategy U.S. employers utilize to find full-time talent. If it is not possible to convert an international intern to a full-time employee, the investment being made in the intern cannot be recouped.
- **Moral issue.** Simply the economy is working against international students at the present time. Many employers, especially those in the “might provide internships at a later time”, felt that they could not morally provide an international student an internship when so many American students are struggling to find internship opportunities and full-time positions. As the labor market conditions continue to improve, a time will approach where international students will have more opportunities because the market will be expanding faster than the available students. Unfortunately, international students who desire an internship now cannot be placated by a promise of improvement at some arbitrary time in the future.

Final Thoughts

The good news is that there are a number of organizations that are willing to work with international students; albeit, not a large number. Slightly more organizations will assist with internships than full-time employment. The organizations, both large and small, will work with international students. The large organizations will be easy to identify and most will have a presence on college campuses. It is likely that these organizations will be besieged with requests to assist international students; probably way more than they can commit to assisting. Small employers on the other hand are invisible and may not be known on campus. To reach these organizations, career staff will have to expend time and other resources to connect international students with willing employers. Making connections like this, beg questions about the availability of resource, the type of staff, and the extent to which international students can be better socialized to work effectively in American organizations.

Resources: Depending on the number of international students on your campus, financial resources will have to be allocated to programs to locate and then place students in desirable positions. Finding an economy of scale may be difficult, as each international student may have to be treated as an individual case. Most career operations are already under-resourced in this economic climate. To expand support will either require an infusion of new dollars or a reallocation from current operating budgets. It probably will not be easy to integrate international students job and intern placement program into existing operations.

Staff: Where the number of international students is small compared to the total study body, staffing to support them may not be an issue. However, if your campus has several large blocks of international students from very different cultures, staffing can become a major issue. Take the situation at Michigan State where the number of Chinese students has increased dramatically over the past five years. The career office has no one on staff that is familiar with Chinese culture, career development practices, nor broad connections to employers that will likely assist them. The number one drawback is that no one on state speaks Mandarin. Potential staffing issues abound.

Cultural Socialization: If employers have major concerns about the language proficiency and awareness of American business among international students, colleges and universities have to consider if the arrangements they make for international students hinders their emersion into American culture. We know how difficult it is to bring two or more cultures together. But somehow, if we wish to advance international students, institutions have to, at least, have a discussion about how they socialize on campus.