

# International Students & the Job Search

## From A Student's Perspective



by Stephen Ahn • CCD Peer Career Advisor • Hanszen '12

Stephen is an active member of the Center for Career Development's Peer Career Advisor (PCA) program. To learn more about the program and how you can assist your fellow students, contact [ccd@rice.edu](mailto:ccd@rice.edu).

### WHO AM I?

I am a senior at Hanszen College, majoring in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering with a Business minor. Although I am originally from South Korea, I have travelled around the world and lived in numerous places, including Tyre, Lebanon for six months as a part of the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces while serving in the Korean Army. These traveling experiences have enabled me to adapt to new environments quickly and make friends easily. I am not shy, and I believe that this is very important in finding internships and full-time positions in the United States. You should actively go tell them that you are interested and not wait for them to come find you.

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The job application process is not that different from any other type of application process: there is still a set procedure and deadline. However, it is important to keep in mind that the job search is not as cyclical as other application processes. You should be looking for jobs year in and year out, whether it is a job on campus or a summer internship. There are more companies than you can imagine, and they all have different hiring periods. That's why you need to update your resume frequently and be on the market for jobs. Additionally, there are numerous conferences and professional opportunities on and off campus that can help you broaden your network.

One of the biggest challenges that I had was the fact that I did not get a returning offer from the company I interned with. My boss tried to work with their HR to find a way, but hiring international students for a full-time position was against the corporate policy. As a result, I had to restart the process. But it was definitely easier than the first time because I knew most of the big companies that do have a corporate policy of not sponsoring international students for various reasons. One common misconception that most hiring managers from those companies have is that the company will deal with the

international situation case by case; however, that usually does not apply to undergraduate students. Therefore, I tried to concentrate my time and effort into smaller but still well-known companies that are rapidly growing. The approach I took was to look up specific companies online and emailed their hiring manager, explaining my qualifications and interest of the company. I think the fact that I started this process early, freshman year in my case, was the key in my success. Now I have an offer from a company that is as good as the one I interned with, if not better.

“ Make sure to show them how you would be a positive asset and a great fit with their organization. ”

### THE INTERVIEW

At this point of the selection process, all the other interviewees were just as capable of performing the tasks in the job descriptions as I was. Therefore, I had to show my prospective employers that I was unique in a way that would suit their company and vision. Many international students tend to not discuss the fact that they are internationals because they fear that it might immediately terminate the interview. However, I used that as an ice breaker, emphasizing that I needed to be sponsored. I backed this up with my relevant experiences and accomplishments to show the skill set that I could bring to the company. Many students focus on academics, which is fine, but that is not something that makes you unique. I always try to get involved with events or experiences that others are unlikely to go through.

For example, I traveled through foreign countries for a week without any money. As I mentioned above, I served in

Lebanon as part of the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces for six months and received a Peacekeeping Medal from the UN Secretary-General.

Remember that your interviewer has already heard about your design project from your classmate, but the problem was that your classmate was the leader, not you. Make sure to show them how you would be a positive asset and a great fit with their organization. During behavioral interviews, do not forget to tell them not only what you did in certain situations, but also the positive results from those decisions. Ask me, or a CCD staff member, about the STAR approach.

“ Always follow up with the people you meet and remember to offer genuine help, because networking is a two-way relationship. ”

## NETWORKING

Networking is incredibly important: it helps you show prospective hiring managers that you are a social and outgoing person, and it also helps you build relationships that you can use later in life. Companies are much less likely to hire those who do not explicitly describe their value as a candidate, even if they are much smarter than other candidates who are more outgoing. Make sure to prove to them that international students can have good communication and interpersonal skills, disproving those common stereotypes. As I mentioned earlier, there are numerous opportunities for professional networking. Take advantage of those opportunities and use them as practice. What I like to do is have my business cards ready to network with people at all times. Always follow up with the people you meet and remember to offer genuine help, because networking is a two-way relationship.

Companies can find qualified people from the resume itself, but they go through numerous rounds of interviews to find the ones that can fit into their organization, not to mention the effort to find the ones that they like. This is similar to how you picked your project members based on how much you like the person and not how smart the person is. However, it is important to be honest and sincere during networking and interviewing, even if you are not treated the same way. Although they might not have the right position for you at the time, they are more likely to get back to you when positions open up if you made a good impression.

Take advantage of the fact that many recruiters on campus have Rice affiliates. Treat everyone with respect, because the person sitting next to you in your Organic Chemistry Lab could

be your next interviewer. This actually happened to me, when I was interviewing for an internship position. One of the three people who interviewed me for the company I interned with was my lab partner from Rice.

## FINAL TIPS

It might not be as hard as you think to get an internship or a job after graduating in the United States. However, it is not that easy either. Just keep in mind that there will be times when you will get really frustrated, especially when your friends who were born in the United States have summer internships lined up but you still have not had any interviews, and most of the companies refuse to even consider your resume. I have been there, but I did not give up.

Keep in mind that there are smaller but equally respected companies that come to Rice University to recruit that are willing to consider international students. You just need to find a way to reach them, and as I mentioned earlier, networking is your greatest asset. Even if nothing happens with this extra effort, you should not give up. There will be times when you will be frustrated, but remember that internship opportunities from your respective country are just as valuable as those in the United States. Working in your respective country could help you get an internship or job in the United States the following year. Be active and keep trying until you find your dream job.

## Center for Career Development

Huff House | Rice University  
6100 Main Street MS-521  
Houston, TX 77005  
713.348.4055 | [ccd@rice.edu](mailto:ccd@rice.edu)  
[ccd.rice.edu](http://ccd.rice.edu) | [facebook.com/riceccd](https://facebook.com/riceccd)