Responses from Amherst College International Alumni,
Recent graduates
2013

What (if any) cultural differences have you encountered between the job search process in the U.S. and in your home country?

- Less reliance on family/personal connections; more emphasis on prior experience/internships.
- More structured in the US, networking is not looked down upon and is an important part of the process.
- The job search here places a much stronger emphasis on informal relations as access and information about vacancies are not very widely advertised. The strength of personal recommendations from well respected individuals (socially well connected) very strongly influence recruitment decisions.
- Networking with Alumni is very important in the U.S.
- Job search in the US requires a lot more alumni networking than in my home country.
- Networking is a key piece in the job search process, and it is something I learned in the U.S.
- Much more fluid than back home - a lot of it is connections/networking based, less of a rigid schedule straight out of college.

How have potential employers responded to your status as an international applicant?

- No issues - being a very large institution, BofAML has many foreign staff and is very experienced at dealing with visa issues and such.
- Large companies that have the legal resources don't mind.
- I remember about two employers who ended their interest upon learning I was international. After that I restricted my efforts to only internationally positive employers.
- Most employers I interacted with responded negatively to hiring International students. Some did not understand the OPT process, and some did not have the desire to sponsor the H1-B visa. This forces International Students to apply to the big companies which have the legal machinery that enables them to navigate the visa process.
- I have not applied for many jobs, but my status seems to be an disadvantage in the job application process.
- Usually they are explicit about whether they do or do not accept international students as applicants. This definitely cuts down the total number of firms one can apply to.

As an international applicant or employee, what skills and experiences do you think you offer that set you apart from American employees?

- International work experience, several languages.
- Languages, international perspective, resilience.
• As an African brought up in a strongly community oriented upbringing, I believe we bring a strong teamwork ethic that is ingrained in our philosophy in line with the principle of ubuntu (I am because we are). That attitude balanced with the strong American attitude of intense individual competition and excellence cultivated through my Amherst education uniquely positions us to add value to any employer.
• We are more hardworking, mature and independent. We are also generally better at working with numbers.
• Skills wise, I would think the language skills are what set me apart. Experience wise, it depends on how you phrase your answer. Focusing on experiences that demonstrates your ability to adapt to
• Multi-language and cross-cultural skills
• I have worked on projects relevant to my home country, difference perspective, more geographical knowledge.
• The biggest would be ability to adjust to a new environment. Coming to Amherst is a pretty big transition, and so is moving out into the 'real' world. That process is really important to emphasize.
• One time an international friend who had graduated told me that alums will not want anything to do with internationals. My experience has been vastly different. In fact, one of the guys who has referred me to the most number of people took interest in me because I was an international. He was really intrigued that I had come all the way to Amherst!

Tell about a time when you really enjoyed the job search process.

• Connecting w Amherst alums in the sector / companies I was interested in
• You only enjoy the job search after it ends successfully. For me it didn't but I am thankful for the lessons I learnt in retrospect. Although during that period, I was able to do a lot of leisure reading on
• When I can tell that the interviewer is really impressed by me.
• None.
• Going to interviews with economic consulting firm was really relaxing for me, since I feel like I can just be myself most of the time.
• When I got the offer
• Nothing in particular, met some very helpful people but not enjoyable.
• I really enjoyed reaching out to alumni and asking about their career path.
• The offer! Also, interviewing itself was really enjoyable, even if not all of them worked out. It's a great opportunity to get tested and have an articulate conversation with a complete stranger - and that challenge is quite exciting.
Tell about a time when you were most challenged or discouraged by the job search process and what you learned from this experience.

- Not doing well in my first few interviews, due to knowing much about finance directly due to Amherst's liberal arts curriculum. Just studied more on my own.
- When a lot of the investment banks took bail-out money and one of the restrictions was to cut the hire intl students.
- After having interviews that didn't work out or many applications that weren't taken I lost a lot of self-esteem and confidence obsessing over why only me among my mates was jobless and the weaknesses I felt were responsible (like weak GPA and other trivial stuff). By around December after summer, I increasingly withdrew inward, became more self-absorbed and bitter. What I now realize is that those responses to that difficult period was unhelpful. At those points, I should have focused on my positives (it's what you have that is of use and not what you can't change) and reached out to more people. Expanding my network would have put me into contact with more people who could point me to more solutions than I could come up with alone.
- I was most discouraged by the job search process during one incident where I got to the final interview round, but the company then told me that they won't give me an interview because of my international student status. It was a complete waste of time.
- Not being able to talk about football or baseball to close the distance with interviewers.
- I learned I needed to connect with Alumni more.
- I applied for a position and the first question I got asked was if I were an American citizen. Once I replied, I did not hear back. I think it gave me a more clear sense of my status and how hard I need to try to work in the states.
- Getting rejected after feeling really good about an interview. It's easy to get jaded after something like that, but the point is - there are MANY factors outside of the control of applicant in the job process. There are a countless number of factors that could affect the outcome of interviews - the connection between interviewer and interviewee, the mood of the interviewer, something said that could not have been anticipated, the needs of the firm.

What is the most important piece of advice about the U.S. job search that you have for current international students?

- Start early, do NOT underestimate the power of the internship!!!!!!
- Get informed early on, make a choice on what areas to pursue and start getting qualified.
- I would say that the job search process should start far earlier or at least current internationals should start thinking about it early say by freshman year ending. Because most of the experiences and contacts in terms of helping one understand yourself better by senior year when you actually start applying are gained in the years prior. I don't think I understood myself well enough by the time I actually started applying which contributed to a job search that wasn't as focused as I would have liked. It's only now after going through the grueling process having
had time to think over it now that I'm now back home that things are clear and I have a clear conception of the way forward

- International students should be encouraged to apply to internships in the US using their OPT allowance from their sophomore year. This would allow them to understand the U.S. job search process.
- 1. Time is money/gold/diamond. Start [extremely] early.  2. Visa process is complicated and stressful. Take nothing as given. Double-check the regulations yourself.  3. Always have a back-up plan (one year master program, etc.)  4. Networking, networking, networking.  5. How you tell your story matters a lot.
- Do it by trial and error: submit as many resume as you can, connect with as many Amherst alumni as you can, but don't be deterred by rejections
- Keep your options open, try to connect with as many Alumni as possible in your field of interest.
- Apply early, apply often and to everything. You might say, "oh but I don't really want to do that". But of course, once the offer is made, you have every luxury to say no. It's easy to get complacent and lazy at a place like Amherst, where we're constantly told that we're smart, capable people. There are lots of smart and capable people out there, and the only way to guarantee anything is to put something in any chance you have.

Do you have any other advice or stories you would like to share?

- Larger corporations tend to be more international student friendly!
- Take advantage of programs like SEO (Sponsors for Educational Opportunity: Internships and career development for underrepresented students of color. Black, Hispanic, and Native American)
- Thus far my experience under the Service Corps has been illuminating. I have the opportunity to mingle with other young Nigerian youths from various diverse backgrounds and cultures of my country. It's made me appreciate my Amherst education even more as I find myself able to think critically and abstractly about the current issues that plague the communities where I live and work as well as to be tolerant and accommodating and even engaging to opposing views.
- Given that the school already invests a substantial amount in International students, there should be a much more dedicated effort to ensure success after graduating from Amherst. The school needs to realize that the International student when applying for employment in the U.S. does not have the advice, network, job references, support system, etc. that most American students have, and in my opinion the school should do more. What is an Amherst degree that you cannot use?
- Consider positions that link your home cultural / language background with your experience in the US, e.g. international equity sales, etc.
- Networking doesn't end at the phone call where you ask an alum to put a good word in. It's a lifelong skill that you should start cultivating now, but really reaps dividends mostly in the long run.