

Common Cultural Barriers

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The first step in designing an effective job search strategy which will lead to employment in the United States is to clearly understand the setting in which you are operating. As a student, you may not have had much experience job-hunting in your home country. Even if you have, you are likely to find job-hunting in the U.S. a different process.

The differences are culturally based and, therefore, you may have to work very hard at overcoming the natural inclination to conduct yourself as you would if you were looking for a job in your home country. Different cultures have different sensibilities. Be aware of the setting in which you are interviewing.

Below is a list of common cultural barriers you as an international student may experience in your job search. Please note that these factors are not indigenous to one particular society, but represent a cross-section of countries and continents.

Value	Expectations in U.S.	Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture
Self promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Assertiveness, openly discussing ❖ Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries, thank you notes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Unless presented as part of a group activity, citing achieved goals, accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving and too individualistic ❖ Asking employers directly about status of application may be viewed as rude
Directness in communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Open and direct responses to questions ❖ Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture, and other appropriate nonverbal behavior ❖ Discussion of salary and benefits only when initiated by interviewer or at time of job offer ❖ Candidate asks questions about the job at the end of the interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g., employer/interviewer), is disrespectful ❖ Appearance of criticism must be avoided to save face ❖ Asking open-ended questions about the job may be seen as rude and inappropriately direct

Self Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses ❖ Answers to questions related to personality (e.g., leadership style and problem solving abilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Personal questions about likes, dislikes, etc. are considered an invasion of privacy and are discussed only with close friends and family ❖ Or, these kinds of questions sometimes are seen as irrelevant to a candidate's qualifications ❖ Revealing outside interests may be considered a threat to time, energy and other resources invested by a candidate into the job
Value	Expectations in U.S.	Possible Conflicting Values of Another Culture
Career Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Demonstration of knowledge of self, career goals and how they relate to job ❖ Discussion of long-range career plans ❖ Ability to be self-directed in one's career development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Questions about role in company indicate potential disloyalty ❖ Jobs are assigned by government or family or determined by school or test score ❖ Individual must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available without regard to their own career goals
Individual Responsibility in Finding Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Use of a wide variety of resources in identifying jobs (e.g. friends, family, contacts, associations, career services, academic mentors, etc.) ❖ Networking by candidates; personal referrals can carry great weight in evaluating a candidate's potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Jobs are found for the individual by government, school or family ❖ Dependency relationships in job search are fostered. One resource (e.g. academic advisor or employment agent) will find work for job seeker with little proactive action on the part of the individual
Informality in the Interview Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking and exchange of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sitting with a person of higher status requires deference. The job applicant is very polite and does not ask questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer's position. Handshaking, touching, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate
Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Arrive 5-15 minutes before appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Personal relationships are more than time. Anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours lateness from agreed meeting time is not insulting

<p>Effective Letters of Application and Resumes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ One page, error-free, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experience, skills, accomplishments and academic credentials ❖ Personalized to reflect each individual's strengths and capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Resumes are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion
<p>Individual Equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Race, sex, and age are legally not supposed to affect the interview process ❖ Politeness and respect are shown to all employees a candidate meets, whether receptionist or CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Males and older persons may expect to assume dominance in interactions with females and younger persons ❖ Level of organizational hierarchy may determine the amount of respect an individual is given ❖ Attitudes on gender, race, and other individual characteristics and how they impact hiring decisions vary from culture to culture
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<p>Knowledge of Organization Prior to Interview</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Obtain as much information as possible about the company before the interview. Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application and during the interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Research about organization may indicate excessive and undesirable initiative or independence

(Source: "International Students and the Job Search." Goodman, A.P., J.A. Hartt, M.K. Pennington and K.P. Terrell *Journal of Career Planning & Employment*, Summer 1988).