



The three most important ways to show your value to employers



Imagine your job application on the desk of a hiring manager.

Next to yours is another one, but this one belongs to a domestic student who is also nearing graduation. Your résumés look almost identical.

Who gets a job interview?

If you guessed the domestic student, you are correct. Unfortunately, many employers still see visa sponsorship and other responsibilities when hiring international students as a hurdle.

But, just because you start with a disadvantage, doesn't mean all hope is lost. Plenty of international students have landed great first jobs because they were able to prove their value through some thoughtful self-promotion. They made the employers understand that they were worth hiring, no matter what.

Being successful requires you to think like that hiring manager. How can you stand out to him or her in a field full of domestic students? You need to maximize three key selling points:

- **Your industry knowledge**
- **Your functional experience**
- **Your professional experience**

Start Early

These three selling points are key features in telling your story to employers. And that story should be a cohesive arc. That means if you aspire to work in a specific field, your industry knowledge, functional experience, and professional experience should line up with your career goal.

For example, if you studied finance, but you want a career as a marketer, that's a hard sell.

So, if you have the time, it's best to start thinking about your career as early in your college experience as possible. That way you can create a story that works. Line up your classes, projects, degree, and internships with your post-graduation aspirations.





Industry knowledge

Industry knowledge is fairly self-explanatory. If you are applying for a job at Boeing, can you prove that you know the aviation industry? If you are applying for a job at Google, can you prove that you know the tech sector?

Industry knowledge from your home country is relevant, but somewhat limiting in the eyes of employers. On the other hand, professional experience in the U.S. carries weight not only in that country, but also globally.

If you are lacking industry knowledge, now is the time to start looking for internship opportunities. If you cannot find a paid internship, an unpaid internship with a U.S. company will pay off in the long run. You can also gain relevant experience from classes and projects.



Functional experience

Simply put, these are your hard skills.



Can you program software?

Do you understand accounting?

Can you engineer automotive parts?

It's important to understand that "general management" positions are becoming a thing of the past. Even among middle managers, employers want to see tangible, industry-related skill sets.

It's difficult for anyone to compete as a generalist anymore. But it's especially difficult for international students given the pre-existing biases they must overcome.

Furthermore, you should consider specializing as much as possible. For example, if you are going into marketing, you might consider becoming an expert in digital marketing. Or take it even one step further and become an expert in social media marketing.

We are living in an era of specialization.



Professional experience

This is less about the narrowly focused hard skills of functional experience and more about the broad, soft skills of navigating office life. Regardless of which business sector you are pursuing, employers want to know that you will fit in and be a good teammate.

They want to know that you know how to work hard, that you know how to work collaboratively, and that you will embrace the corporate culture.

By default, your degree gives you some professional experience. Graduating college is, after all, an accomplishment that is likely to predict future success in the work environment.

But, for international students, having a degree is not enough to stand out from the crowd. While you are still in school, seek out internships and meaningful work opportunities that prepare you for life in the real world.

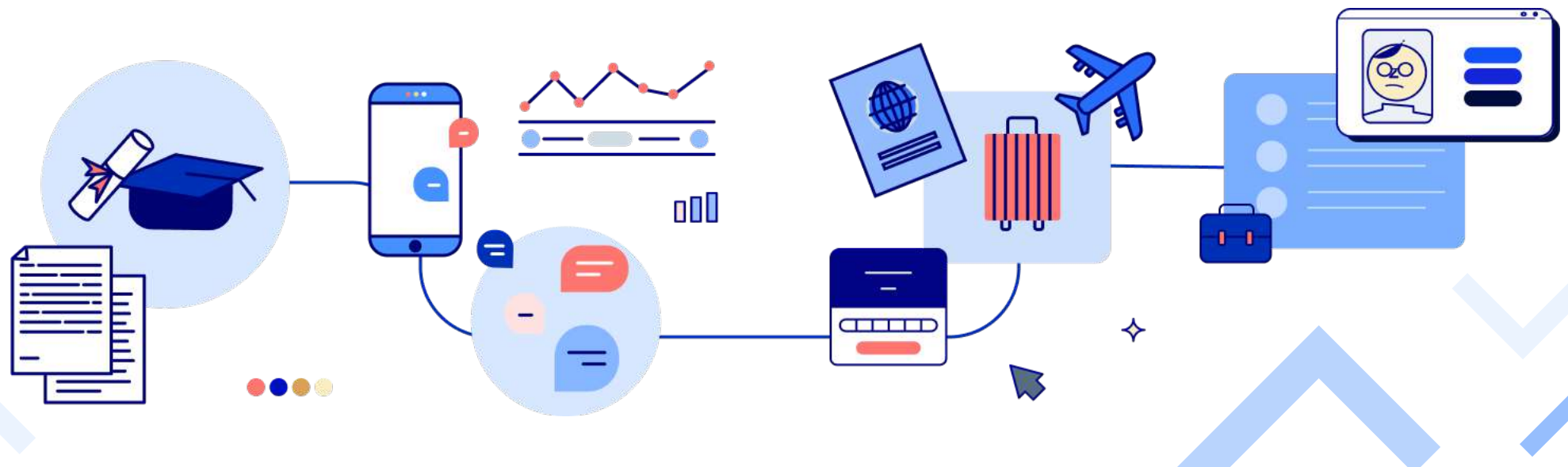
Rethinking your “disadvantage”

For every career opportunity where being an international student puts you at a disadvantage, there is another opportunity out there where it gives you an edge.

The U.S. is full of international companies with operations across the globe. Maybe Cummins Engine Company needs a regional manager in southern Africa, and you happen to be a business student from Kenya. Your identity, life experiences, and primary speaking language can work in your favor in many instances.

Furthermore, there are some companies that understand that diverse teams are high-performing teams. They know that when different people collaborate, they can more easily identify opportunities and novel solutions to old problems than a homogenous crew of workers who all think the same.

Seek out these companies.





Now, what next?

First, really assess your industry knowledge, functional experience and professional experience. Then, craft your application materials in a way that makes your strengths in those areas as obvious as possible, including your cover letters and résumé.

In fact, it might be a good idea to organize your résumé according to those three key points.

After assessing yourself, it's time to start assessing your opportunities.

And this is where Interstride can help. Our Visa Insights page allows you to job hunt for companies willing to sponsor international students.

Start your job search now. (Call-to-action button link to Visa Insights page)

