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How Young Professionals Find International Jobs

By Jean-Marc Hachey

By analyzing and dispelling the myths and misconceptions associated with finding professional international work, this article will help career services professionals guide college students and young professionals toward a more effective international job-search strategy.

The global economy affects the working environment and career paths for most of today's U.S. college students, no matter what discipline they are studying. Inside the workplace in many companies across America, managers and staff at every level work directly with professionals located in India, Malaysia, Argentina, France, and China, to name but a few countries. Work is now often being performed 24/7 across time zones and with project teams composed of professionals located around the world. College students are aware that they will need a set of international skills to be effective in this new type of global workplace.

Many students are reaching out and doing things to build international credentials and experience. They study abroad, undertake long-term cross-cultural travel, learn a second language, take international courses, befriend foreign students at home and abroad, join international clubs and associations, network with foreign experts, volunteer abroad, and perhaps most important in this hierarchy of building international experience, land one—or more—international internships in their field of expertise.

College career professionals will have to deal with this new breed of “internationalized” student who will ask about internationally oriented work. Questions, such as the following, often revolve around “country-specific” job-search issues.

- How do I find a job in a specific country?

- How do I get a visa to work in that country?
- How do I write a country-specific resume?
- Where can I find a list of employers in a specific country?

The short answer to these questions is this: It is very difficult (if not impossible) to do a country-specific job search for a professional job, and especially for an entry-level professional job. A country-specific job search generally implies that a student is looking for low-skilled work, which can help in building international experience. However, for professional international jobs and internships, students must undertake a “sector-specific” job search, and most often with U.S.-based organizations that regularly send American citizens abroad. (See Figure 1.)

World Travelers Looking for Low-Skilled Work Abroad

Career advisers can be helpful to students by explaining that there is a big difference between looking for low-skilled, seasonal international jobs and international employment as a young professional.

For the backpacking world traveler or student studying abroad who wants to find work in a specific country, legal work permits are always a challenge. Students often find work abroad by working under the table or by prearranging a short-term work permit or

student work visa. Organizations such as BUNAC (British Universities North America Club, an organization that offers work and volunteer abroad opportunities) or a foreign embassy in Washington, D.C., can help arrange these types of visas for many of the most popular countries. In these circumstances, the job seeker is concerned with understanding the host country's domestic job market and how to write a resume geared specifically to the norms of that country. These jobs are often low skilled, tend to be in the retail and service sectors, and are often seasonal and/or tourist-oriented. Working in a pub or hotel are a few examples. Even teaching English abroad is a job that fits this category. (While teaching English is not a low-skilled job, these jobs are easy to find and are found in almost every country.)

The best advice to give to students seeking jobs under these circumstances is to suggest they travel to the target country and speak to employers directly. They will have to be entrepreneurial and make face-to-face contact with potential employers while abroad. As an outsider, the traditional approaches to job hunting, such as communicating with employers by email, will generally not be very effective. Students need to impress employers directly with their charm, personality, and an in-person sales pitch. Risk taking is part and parcel of this type of international job search.

The long-term value for students performing low-skilled work abroad is not inherent to the job, but in the cross-cultural experiences gained while surviving and thriving in a culture other than one's own. These types of survival skills will impress future international employers when students are looking for professional international work.

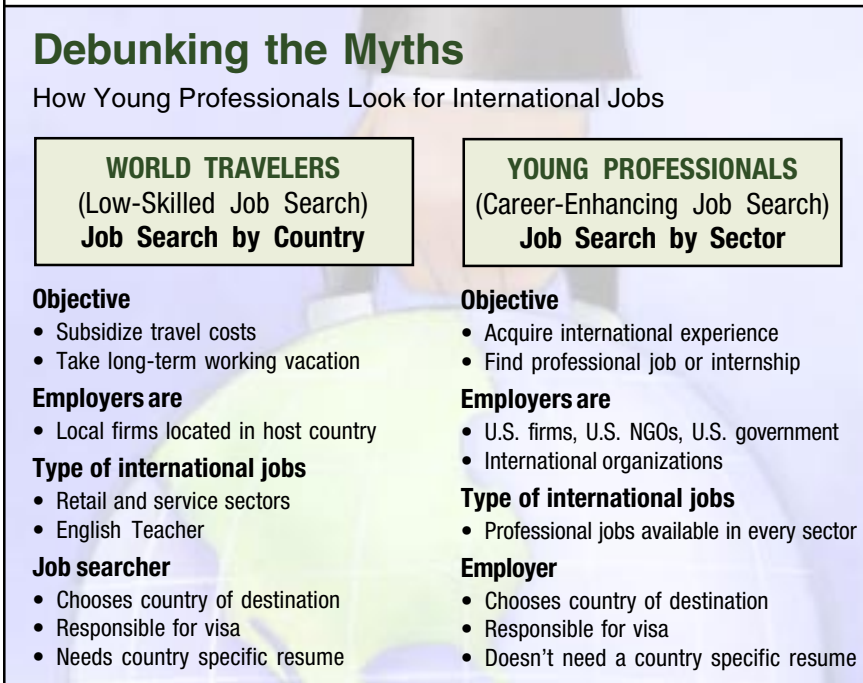
Young Professionals Looking for International Work

For the young professional interested in an international career, the job search is very different from that of a



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Figure 1



backpacker on a six-month working vacation. While finding low-skilled work overseas is an integral part of building international experience, college students who are serious about scoring a professional international job or internship will need to ramp up their understanding of the international job-search process. International job hunting is different from a domestic job search.

Many of the myths surrounding international jobs are debunked when we identify international employers. It is a surprise to many that young professionals almost never work abroad directly with a domestic foreign firm. The great majority of Americans (and perhaps 85 percent of American entry-level professionals) who work internationally do so with U.S.-based firms, U.S.-based NGOs (non-governmental organizations), the U.S. government, and, to a lesser extent, with international organizations. It is very rare that young American professionals will work abroad with a firm local to that country unless they are more advanced in their careers and have established their credentials.

When young professionals go abroad with a U.S.-based employer, there is no need for them to do a coun-

try-specific job search, research country-specific visa requirements, or write a country-specific resume. When the student goes abroad with a U.S.-based organization, the employer arranges the visa and designates the country in which the student will work.

So, how does one find an international job when the employer is based in the United States? The answer is to do a sector-specific job search. A sector-based job search requires students to target their search in one sector and find out who the international players are within that field. Every field of work has an international aspect; therefore, students need to research the companies and organizations operating within that field.

For example, an engineering student looking for an international job or internship would target U.S. engineering firms that have overseas contracts and aim at a specific job-search target such as "international mining engineering." After doing some research, the student would find that many of the U.S.-based international mining engineering firms are based in Dallas. The student would then write a targeted resume for the specific industry and job type while highlighting his or her international

credentials. In this scenario, the U.S.-based engineering/mining firm will choose the country of destination and arrange the visa. There would be no need for a country-specific resume since the international employer is American.

International jobs are not only about living abroad for a two- to three-year posting. While the long-term posting still exists as a model, there are a multitude of other models that are prevalent for today's global worker. A mining engineer may be rotated to work two months abroad followed by four weeks at home. An international consulting engineer may be on the road sporadically for six months each year or assigned for three-month stint abroad. One big surprise to many who desire international jobs is that 50 percent of all international jobs do not even require international travel. Many international project managers never leave the United States, but they do make use of their international skills on a daily basis.

As such, these arguments all lend credence to shattering the myths surrounding the necessity of undertaking a country-specific job search for professional jobs. First, 85 percent of all international jobs for entry-level positions are based with U.S. organizations. Second, 50 percent of these international jobs are located inside the United States. Therefore, only a small portion of job seekers looking for an international job need to perform a country-specific job search.

Student job seekers must identify employers who "regularly" send employees abroad. Contrary to conventional thinking, international employers are almost never large multinationals. Multinationals rarely send staff abroad, and, if they do, they send senior or long-term employees, rarely entry-level employees. Students will need to identify organizations where the nature of the work is "international," such as international engineering, finance, accounting, sales, health, disaster relief, teaching, research, and so forth. International consulting firms are another good target for young professionals. There are international consulting firms in almost every area

Figure 2



of specialization. Don't ignore small- and medium-size firms—they often send junior workers abroad.

There is, in fact, an international aspect to almost every field of work. It is helpful to students when career service professionals point them in the direction of how to find international employers. (See Figure 2.)

There are international jobs in every discipline. To begin a search for international employers, students need to research the international hierarchy in their field of work. They can start by identifying a specific job target and deciding on the desired type of organization: a private firm, NGO, government, or international organization. Then they can focus on the type of work, such as a project officer working on AIDS projects in Africa or a program officer working with an international NGO in Boston. Once students have identified the targeted field and type of organization, they should research the international players in this field. At this point it can be very helpful to track down an international expert in the area of interest and ask for career advice about the major players and how people traditionally break into the field.

The ultimate goal is to uncover the international hierarchy of organizations within the student's targeted area of work. Students should begin research by first identifying the world umbrella organizations that represent the target field. These types of world organizations will have regional bodies, national associations, and, most importantly, institutional members (private-sector firms, NGOs, government departments) that are located within the United States. At each level in this hierarchy, there is a rich layer of potential international employers and networking contacts.

This research will lead students to uncover web sites and trade journals that focus on the international aspects of the chosen field. These sources point directly to organizations that are active internationally and will describe current international projects. World umbrella organizations will list regional organizations and institutional members along with specializations. Their web sites and trade journals may list job openings and point to job boards and other related job links. Students will be able to find the names of international experts and detailed lists of firms with active international contracts offering international consulting opportunities. There will be

postings for internships and scholarships programs, research grants, professional courses, and international conferences. By researching the international hierarchy in a specific field, students will find a treasure trove of leads for scoring big in the international job-search process.

With this cache of research material, college-educated job seekers will need to apply an entrepreneurial zeal to their search. Students will need to be bold and forthright when contacting international employers. International employers know that international work requires acumen, independence, and an open mind. Students who exhibit these qualities during the job-search phase are providing proof of their future success in the international arena.

When a college career services office decides to actively support students undertaking an international job search, it is explicitly supporting U.S.-based organizations and strengthening America's international competitiveness. Internationally skilled U.S.-college graduates are an important part of this equation, and college career offices have an obligation to step up and help guide this new generation of students who are embracing their career potential as global citizens. 