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# WORKING IN THE US

THERE ARE MANY WORK PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE USA, BOTH PAID AND UNPAID, AND PROVIDERS REPORT THAT DEMAND IS GROWING. **BETHAN NORRIS** INVESTIGATES FURTHER.

Students wanting to work in the USA are faced with an array of choices, although the types of programmes available are largely dictated by visa requirements.

Student visa holders are able to undertake part-time unpaid internships, as long as they are also studying full-time, and some language schools have been quick to offer this option to students. At Aspect Education, students can undertake an internship programme in Chicago, New York, San Diego, San Francisco and Santa Barbara, in order to "experience American business culture and practices firsthand through a part-time, unpaid internship in a field that matches the student's interests", says Lindsay Sullivan, National Internship Coordinator at Aspect. She continues, "If a student has an advanced level of English, he or she can book a minimum 12-week internship, which includes four weeks of English study and internship preparation seminars and eight weeks – or more – of part-time work experience complemented by continued language study on a part-time basis. An F-1 visa is required because it is a full-time programme of study."

As these types of programmes appeal largely to students whose main goal is to build on the language skills already learnt in the classroom, Sullivan says that their long-term language students often undertake an internship towards the end of their course. "[Internships] are available to all academic year and semester programme students at no additional cost and is an excellent opportunity for them to practise their English

## VISAS FOR INTERNSHIP/WORK PLACEMENT CANDIDATES

**J-1 visa** – the summer work and travel category allows international post-secondary students to work with a US host employer during their summer holidays for a period of up to four months. The trainee category allows international students to receive on-the-job training with a US employer for up to 18 months. The trainee placement cannot replace a full-time position.

**H-2B visa** – available to temporary workers of non-skilled jobs for a maximum of one year. The visa is only available for non-agricultural jobs.

**F1 visa** – for students studying on full-time courses of over 18 hours a week. Students can undertake unpaid work placements as long as they are studying full-time.



PHOTOGRAPH: THE TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

skills in a professional environment as well as add to their career experience," she says.

However, paid work can also be an option for students in the USA, although for these types of programmes a different visa is needed. Aspect is one of a number of organisations that has been designated by the US Department of State as a sponsor of the J-1 summer work and travel programme, which enables international students to undertake short-term paid work placements in the USA during their summer holidays. Previously, students on the work and travel programme offered by Aspect have worked for employers such as Universal Studios, Disneyland and Hilton Hotels.

Interexchange, based in New York, NY, is another organisation that is able to offer J-1 visa programmes for students, and Damon Mastandrea says that they vet participants carefully in order to reduce the chance of visa refusals. "We use more than 35 years of experience to keep visa issues to a minimum, by selecting only qualified participants, offering thorough training for our partner organisations abroad and keeping dialogue with foreign posts open," he explains.

The J-1 summer work and travel visa only allows students to remain in the USA for up to four months and Interexchange offers students the chance to undertake internship, camp counsellor and au pair programmes. However, for students wanting a longer paid work placement, there are a few options available. Another category of the J-1 exchange visa – the trainee category – allows students to undertake paid work in the USA for up to 18 months, subject to certain conditions (see box), and Joanna Flagler, International Director at CCI: Center for Cultural Interchange in Chicago, IL, says that they are "looking at developing the J-1 trainee programme" in the future.

CCI already offers students a J-1 work and travel paid work programme, as well as

an unpaid volunteer internship programme for stays of up to four months, and is looking to expand their range of long-term work placement options in the future. "We are in the process of developing an H-2B programme," says Flagler. "The H-2B non-immigrant visa is for temporary workers coming to the USA."

Holders of H-2B visas can undertake unskilled work placements in the USA for up to one year and CCI is not alone in developing paid work placement programmes geared towards this type of visa. Mastandrea says, "An H-2B visa programme was just added to our offerings, allowing for long-term work assignments in the USA."

According to Flagler, their paid work and travel programme is, so far, the most popular with clients. "It has been expanding every year since its inception," she says, adding that paid work programmes

predominantly attract students from Russia, the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Moldova. Flagler also notes that the different opportunities available in a student's home country dictate demand for different programmes.

"For [our] work and travel [programme], the nationalities that are [most numerous] tend to be from countries where job opportunities are lacking for students with little work experience," she says. "This is the first year we have received Koreans on our [unpaid] volunteer internship programme. Universities there are stressing the need for real-world experience as well as a growing demand for English language proficiency."

Henderson at Aspect has also seen demand for internship programmes grow. "Currently, Aspect is experiencing growth in the number of internship programme students from both Korea and Japan, due to the importance of English skills for various careers in these countries," she says. "In addition, many universities now require students to complete an international internship." ■

*"Previously, students have worked for employers such as Universal Studios, Disneyland and Hilton Hotels"*



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