

International student employment trends 2025

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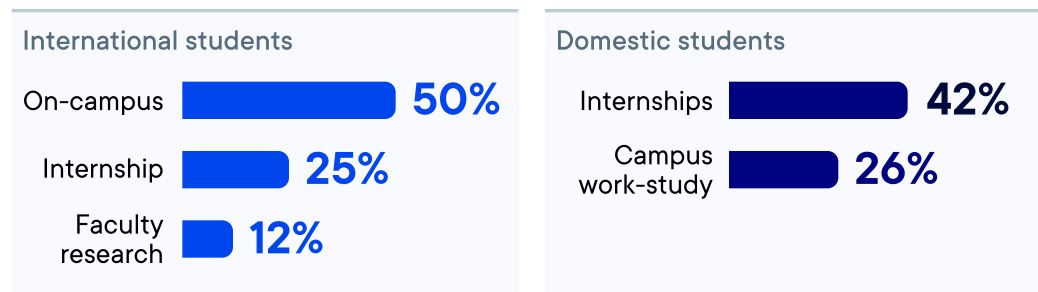


Introduction

International students studying in the US often choose their programs based on the promise of strong career outcomes. These outcomes are not just financial—they are tied directly to visa pathways, long-term goals, and the ability to offset the high cost of a US degree. Understanding these employment trends is key for institutions to attract, retain, and support international students in an increasingly competitive landscape.

The employment trends of international students often differ significantly from those of domestic students. For example, while many students participate in some form of experiential learning during their studies, **50% of international students work on campus**, while **42% of domestic students engage in internships**. This difference underscores the importance of analyzing data at the institutional level to understand student needs and support structures.

Experiential learning for international students vs. domestic students



To help unpack these patterns, this report highlights key trends in employment and experiential learning before and after graduation. It draws on findings from the NACE Class of 2023 First Destination Survey Results, the NACE 2024 Student Survey Results, and insights shared during the NAFSA: Successful Career Transitions for International Students Leadership Summit.



Internships

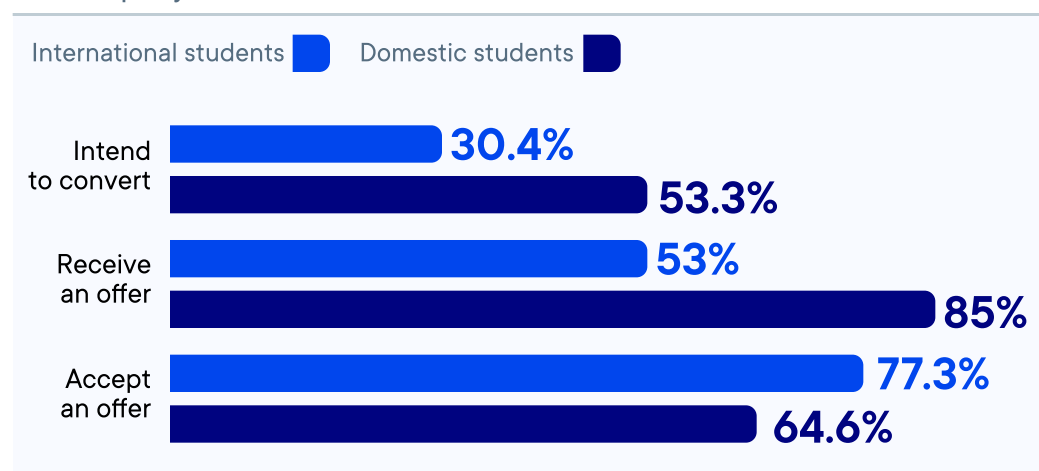
Only 25% of international students participate in off-campus internships, compared to 42% of their domestic peers. A possible reason for this gap is confusion around Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Misunderstandings about CPT rules by both students and employers may limit participation. Despite lower participation rates, international students report high-quality internship experiences:

- **73% of international interns are paid**, compared to 57% of domestic interns.
- **Nearly all** international students report their internships require complex skill application.

First-generation international students report the highest satisfaction with their internship experiences. However, international students are:

- **30% less likely to receive a job offer** from their internship employer.
- **Less likely to try to convert their internship to a job** (30.4% vs. 53.3% of domestic students).
- **12.7% more likely to accept the job** when offered.

Internship to job conversion



These trends may reflect structural barriers such as work authorization limits, rather than lack of interest or performance.



Post-graduation employment

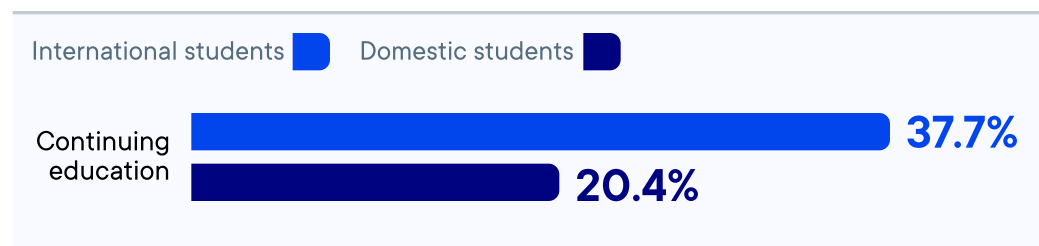
International students with bachelor's degrees experience lower post-graduation employment rates:

- **44.6%** of international students are employed after graduation, compared to 62.1% of domestic students.
- **38.1%** are in standard full-time roles, compared to 53.7% of domestic peers.
- **37.7%** of international students continue their education, versus 20.3% of domestic students.

Factors influencing these gaps include:

- **Work sponsorship challenges** – Many employers are unfamiliar with or hesitant about sponsoring international candidates.
- **H-1B visa lottery** – In 2024, applicants had only a 25% chance of being selected.
- **Higher graduate school enrollment** – International students are more likely to pursue advanced degrees.

Percentage of students who choose to continue their education after completing undergraduate school





Job search strategies and challenges

International students often face more challenges in the job market, yet they are notably more proactive in their job searches. They submit **more than double the number of job applications** (45.4 vs. 22.1) **but receive 30% fewer offers**.

Despite these hurdles, international students are deeply engaged in the job search process:

- **85%** use career center services, compared to **59%** of domestic students.
- On average, they visit their career center **3.3 times**, compared to 2.3 for domestic peers.
- They attend more total recruiting events, though they participate in a **narrower range** of event types overall.



Salary, job benefits, and location preferences

Despite job search challenges, **international students report strong outcomes when hired**. The average starting salary for international students is \$80,785, which is \$17,064 more than the average salary for domestic graduates (\$63,721). This salary gap can largely be attributed to international students' higher representation in high-paying STEM fields.

When evaluating job offers, international students also prioritize different benefits than their domestic peers. While domestic students tend to value job stability, a healthy work culture, and retirement plans like a 401(k), international students place greater importance on:

- Gaining job-specific skills
- Medical insurance
- Salary increases
- A family-friendly work environment

Location is another important factor in international students' job decisions. While cost of living still matters, it is 20% less of a concern for international students than for domestic graduates. Instead, they are more likely to prioritize:

- Diverse and tolerant communities (top priority)
- Green spaces
- Access to public transportation

These differences reflect both the practical needs and long-term priorities of international students navigating immigration systems, adapting to new environments, and building sustainable lives in the US.



Key takeaways

Nearly all international students feel their degree directly relates to their job, reinforcing the value of a US education. Yet they continue to face steeper barriers, including visa limitations and employer hesitancy, even as they invest more time and effort into their job searches than domestic students.

These trends highlight the importance of designing career support services, employer outreach strategies, and post-graduation programming tailored specifically to the international student experience. By addressing these specific needs, institutions can strengthen career outcomes, improve retention, and support the long-term success of international students in the US workforce.



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