

Summary & Finding Report

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Context & Proposal

International students have always represented a significant and growing part of the university community and represent around 7-8% of the total student population here at KU (2023-24 Annual Report, 2023). They enrich campus life by contributing diverse perspectives to others, sharing cultural knowledge, and academic excellence. At the University of Kansas, career development resources are primarily housed within the Career Services office. The International Support Services (ISS) office provides immigration-related advising and employment authorization guidance but does not offer career development programming. As a result, international students are often caught between two service areas on opposite sides of campus. They face unique barriers when preparing for internships, on-campus employment, and post-graduation career opportunities. Often, these challenges are shaped by U.S. Immigration policies such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), and H-1B visa sponsorship. Although KU's career services offices offer a wide range of resources like resume workshops, career fairs, and one-on-one advising evidence from international students suggests that these services do not always align with their specific needs.

Method & Analysis

For this project, we used a quantitative survey design to examine international students' engagement with career services at the University of Kansas. We aimed to gather measurable data to find out three main areas: to what extent do international students use career services, and how effective do they perceive these services to meet their needs? What barriers (ex. Visa restrictions, lack of awareness, cultural differences, employer hesitancy) limit international students' access to career development opportunities? And What types of career support and

resources do international students identify as most helpful in preparing for internships, CPT/OPT, and post-grad employment?

We chose to design a survey questionnaire because it allowed us to gather data efficiently from a larger group of international students. In addition, it helped us to produce generalized insights into trends and needs within the KU's international student population. The target population for this study was current undergraduate, and graduate (F-1) international students enrolled at the University of Kansas. We used a convenient random sampling method to recruit students. The survey was conducted through Qualtrics. It included a combination of demographic questions (academic level, time at KU). Likert-scale items measuring familiarity, satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of services. Multiple-choice questions identifying barriers or challenges they face while seeking internships and job opportunities. We added one open-ended question to get additional feedback. The survey link was shared through the International Support Services Office Social media accounts (Instagram and Facebook) as well as the weekly newsletter. Additionally, we printed the survey QR code/ flyer and it was distributed to campus bulletins and with the International Student Association and International Women Association organizations WhatsApp/ GroupMe.

The survey responses were automatically populated in a spreadsheet for data analysis. Although the goal was to gather at least 50 survey responses to ensure representation from all academic levels, only 17 students responded. Among all students who responded to the survey, 29% of these students were graduates (Master's) and 24% of students were graduates (Ph.D.) and only 18% of them were in their first and second years at KU. A majority (53%) had been at KU for 3-4 years, indicating that they are very familiar with the career services and resources available for them at KU. However, the presence of ratings at 1-2 shows gaps in awareness still

exist. Overall, familiarity with career services and resources was moderate ($M=3.5$), yet nearly one-third of students had never used any career services. Students expressed diverse needs, noting that resume and cover letter workshops, career fairs, and online platforms such as Handshake or Hire Jayhawks would be the most beneficial services. Satisfaction with KU career services was generally low to neutral. This shows that there is significant room for improvement in the accessibility and effectiveness of the services provided by KU Services.

The data shows the most reported challenges when seeking jobs or internships were limited employer willingness to hire international students (81%) and visa or work authorization restrictions (69%), reflecting the systematic barriers exist for international students. Also, 44% reported a lack of information about available resources. When seeking help, students tend to go to academic advisors or ISS immigration advisor staff to get advice on jobs and internship opportunities.

Finding

Following the completion of data collection from the quantitative survey distributed to international students at the University of Kansas, several important themes emerged regarding their engagement with KU Career Services. Their responses reveal three key findings that help explain the patterns of use, barriers, and needs among international students at KU.

The data shows low engagement with KU Career Services as a primary source of information. Only 12.5% of respondents reported seeking guidance from career services, while most students rely instead on academic advisors or ISS immigration advisors. This trend suggests a disconnect between international students and Career Services, potentially due to a lack of awareness, uncertainty about service relevance, or the perception that academic and immigration advisors are more knowledgeable about international student needs.

International students face significant challenges related to CPT/OPT authorization requirements (69%) and employer hiring hesitancy (81%). These barriers were the most frequently reported in the survey and indicate that students encounter obstacles that are largely structural rather than individual. These challenges originate from federal regulations and employer perceptions, they shape how students experience the job search process regardless of their familiarity with KU's career resources.

Students expressed a strong need for more concrete, skill-building resources from career services. A majority indicated that resume and cover-letter workshops, interviewing support, and job-search tools would be highly valuable. This preference suggests that students want hands-on, structured assistance that translates directly into improved employment readiness. The high demand for skills-based programming highlights a gap between the services currently provided and the services international students find most useful.

The sample size was small, and most respondents had been enrolled at KU for several years. The data reveals that familiarity with career services does not predict actual usage. A total of 33% of students reported never using career services, and even long-term students indicated that they were not fully engaging with the available resources. The moderate familiarity rating ($M = 3.5$) demonstrates partial awareness, but insufficient understanding of what services exist, suggesting that key information is not reaching students in accessible or meaningful ways. The survey results indicate that international students are navigating structural employment barriers while simultaneously feeling under-supported in developing practical career skills. They feel uncertain about how Career Services can support them within their visa status and employment limitations. The findings emphasize the need for clearer outreach, more specialized

programming, and coordinated efforts across KU to ensure that career resources better align with the realities and priorities of international students.

Limitations

While the survey was conducted at the University of Kansas and primarily focused on international students holding an F-1 visa, only a small number of students participated. The survey did not reach a wide range of the student population and lacked representation from freshman and sophomore students. The survey captured data influenced by the university by including questions that address external implications, which could provide a clearer understanding of how students felt while completing the survey. Despite the small sample size, the survey still provided valuable information about this population and the needs they experience at the university.

Discussion

Our needs assessment highlighted many significant patterns when it comes to international students' engagement with career development resources here at KU. Our findings address the projects' guiding questions and also the existing literature on international students' career experiences.

1. International students use and perceptions of Career Services (guiding question 1)

Our survey showed that integration and engagement with the career services is low, even for students who are reported to be familiar with campus career options. We believe this means that students might be aware of these services but don't actually use them. While students might realize that this is a place they can go to seek career services, they might feel uncertain about their relevance to them. This directly mirrors national findings that international students often underutilize career services due to unclear communication and lack of tailored support (Arthur &

Flynn, 2013; Zhang & Ozogul, 2023). From our findings, the results show that career services are not perceived as the primary sources for career guidance.

2. Barriers to career development (guiding question 2)

One of the most glaring findings in our results was that visa and employer barriers pose the most significant challenges that international students face. Many students said CPT and OPT restrictions mixed with employer hesitancy limited them both access and opportunity when it came to the job searching process. This is consistent with previous research done showing that immigration regulations, limited employer knowledge, and sponsorship concerns create substantial obstacles for international students pursuing internships and post-graduation employment (Calder et al., 2022). The data also showed that international students were more likely to seek help and information from academic advisors or ISS immigration advisors over career services.

3. Preferred types of support and resources (guiding question 3)

We see that students prefer tailored career fairs and networking opportunities. Many have also expressed that they want skill building and high impact programming. We see this match of Heng's (2017) model, which emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive and practical career development opportunities. Of course, clear communication about these resources needs to be stronger across departments to help reduce confusion with our students.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen communication/collaboration between ISS and Career Services

Students rely heavily on ISS and their academic advisors for career-related questions. Creating co-led workshops between the multiple offices could help ensure students receive unified guidance rather than getting different answers.

2. Educate employers on CPT/OPT to increase confidence

Employers are frequently reluctant to hire international students with changing visa restrictions and laws. Our students showed that employer hesitancy limits their opportunities more than any other factors. It also does not help employers often misunderstand the international hiring process to begin with. We can launch a campaign where we reach out to all the employees that come to our career fair and make informative pamphlets and have sessions they can attend. This will help open the door to international hiring.

3. Create specialized programming for international students

Through our survey we found that many students wanted career fairs that were specifically tailored to international students. Although this may take a lot of resources, tailored interventions improve utilization and satisfaction among international students (Nilsson & Dodds, 2020). We could develop a program in-office that helps with resumes, mock interviews with real companies, immigration question panels, and CPT/OPT job searching strategies.

References

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