

Building a Bridge to Success: Mastering the International Student Visa and H1B Journey Part 2 Podcast Transcript

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Patrick Lageraen:

Hello, and welcome to another installment of UB School of Management's Manage-A-Bull Podcast. My name is Patrick Lageraen. I'm a second year MBA student, and I'm your host for this episode. This episode is going to be all about the path from UB student to an alumni working in the United States from the perspective of international students. To those of you who listen to the first part of this series, you'll remember my first two guests. The first is Jenna Lenz. She's an international student advisor with the University of Buffalo's office of International Student Services. The second is Shashwat Raj Singh. He's also a second year stem, MBA student here at UB. He's the president of the GMA and he's an international student coming from India.

So part one was more about the experience of being an international student and coming to the US in the first place. On that one, we had Jenna, Shashwat and another classmate of ours, Akshay. And we talked about the application process, the visa process, and overall what it's like. In this episode, we're going to be talking more about the backside of the education funnel, which is the path from student to a graduate or alumni in the workforce. So for this part, I brought in Katie Rusek. She's a career advisor and assistant director of the School of Management's Career Resource Center. The reason I wanted to bring Katie in is that she works with students every single day and she sees their path and successes. She knows the questions to ask better than anybody, and she's also a wealth of career related information. Katie, thanks so much for being here.

Katie:

Thanks Patrick. Happy to be here.

Patrick Lageraen:

Finally, I'd like to introduce our main guest Dipin. He's the principal program director at Microsoft, and he's also an MBA graduate from UB School of Management. Dipin, thanks for being here.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Happy to be here. Hi everyone.

Patrick Lageraen:

So maybe Dipin you could start with a brief introduction of yourself and how you found your way from an MBA student to the role that you have today.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Sure. So while in UB I was part of the class of 2014 MBA program and I did my specialization in marketing and consulting. I was lucky enough to land a job at Deloitte even before I graduated. So soon after I graduated, I joined the Deloitte's Cybersecurity Department as a consultant and I worked with them for almost three and a half years before I moved to Seattle to join Microsoft. Since then, I've been working with Microsoft for the past six, six and a half years, and currently I work as a principal program manager and my primary focus is in the privacy domain. So that's my journey from being an MBA student to where I am today.

Patrick Lageraen:

That's a really interesting career path. I think that's one that a lot of our fellow classmates envision for themselves as well. So maybe you could speak to a little bit more to your time at UB. How'd you enjoy it? Were there any moments that you found particularly memorable?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

I enjoyed my MBA school experience at UB thoroughly. For me, I came from a country where the means by which we are educated was completely different from how the education system in US is. So for me, my entire time at UB was highly liberating. One of the main reasons why I enjoyed UB was the diverse set of classmates that I had who came with diverse set of experiences and it was an entire learning opportunity for me. I think the one interesting memory that I have is because you said that Shashwat was the GMA president was running for the role of Vice President GMA, where we had organized a wholly party at my house and we had the entire class, most of them at least come out of my house for a wholly party because that was part of the campaign I was running and we had a great time. The fact that all of us got to enjoy such different cultural experiences while I was in UB was definitely a memorable experience for me.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, really interesting. Shashwat, could you just quickly define what the GMA is?

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Yes. So GMA stands for Graduate Management Association, which is one of the seven student governing bodies of UB and one for the MBA students in the School of Management. So yeah, I'm very happy to hear that you ran for the vice. Did you win? That's my question.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

I did not win.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Okay.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah. Well we tried.

Patrick Lageraen:

All right, there've been a couple more clarifying questions. So are you an international student?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yes, I'm an international student.

Patrick Lageraen:

What country did you come from?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

So I came from India to the US. Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay. What kind of visa did you come here on?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

So when I moved to the US I came on an F-1 visa.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay. And then if you don't mind sharing, what's your current citizenship status?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

So currently I'm on a H-1B visa, but I'm on the path to getting a green card, which means that my employer has filed what they call a I-140, which helps me renew my H-1B visa until I'm able to file for a green card. But my current status is H-1B visa.

Patrick Lageraen:

All right, so my next question I'm going to direct towards Jenna. Jenna, maybe you could share an overview of the employment opportunities that students have after completing the program at UB.

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, absolutely. So for most international students, like we said in episode One, at UB most international students come here on an F-1 visa just like Dipin. So after graduation, if you want to work in the US using your student status, you would apply for something called OPT or Optional Practical Training. The after graduation component is called Post-completion OPT. So usually at some point during your final semester you would work with ISS to begin that application process. You would get updated I-20 from US and then you would apply with that USCIS government agency that we talked about last time and they would process the application.

If it's approved, you get something called an EAD or an Employment Authorization Document. Most people just call it an EAD card. But for post completion OPT, usually you have 12 months to work in the US using your F-1 status. For those who are part of STEM eligible majors, you would then potentially be eligible to apply for an additional 24 months of OPT and that application process would happen near the end of your post completion. So for people who are in STEM degrees, it's possible that using your F-1 visa status, you could work in the US for up to three years. And then oftentimes students will follow a similar path to what you just heard about where maybe they have an employer who might sponsor them for a different type of visa, like an H-1B visa for example.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay. And then I just wanted to clarify one more thing. So Jenna, you're from the ISS, which is International Student Services. That deals more with visas and the legality of working here in the US as

an international student. And then Katie, you're from the CRC or Career Resource Center, which is more about applying to jobs and overall career planning.

Katie:

That's correct. So the nice thing about any student who comes in, especially to the School of Management, is that we have a dedicated career office just for School of Management students, which is really nice. So all students, especially at the master's level, MBA and MS students have a dedicated career advisor who they can work with. And especially for an international student, that's so important because we help them navigate that whole process. Whether it's connecting with alums who have gone through a similar process of being an international student, utilizing tools such as myvisajobs.com to help identify companies that are open to sponsorship.

And just generally supporting them throughout the process because Dipin you said just how different it was coming from where you were coming from. So we understand those nuances, but we also want to help students sell and leverage their experiences and own those experiences because they're still so important as they navigate life here in the US as a student. So absolutely we're here for the students as they navigate that journey.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, absolutely. I absolutely see the value in the CRC, especially for myself. Jenna, I just want to clarify-

Dipin Vidyadharan:

I just want to jump in.

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh, go ahead.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

I just wanted jump in and add that for me as an international student and many international students who are listening to this podcast would echo my sentiment. Having such resources like the ISS or CRC really took most of the stress away from us as international students. Because for us we are coming into a different country, it's very difficult for us to adjust to the culture, the education system, and then we also need to worry about landing a job if we graduate. And having such robust resources like the ISS and

CRC just made our life more easy. I still recollect conversations that I have had with my CRC representative who really helped me plan my career journey and then I had to lean on to, and I was able to lean onto ISS to make sure that I had the right level of authorizations to be able to work in the US. So I just want to say that I feel very fortunate that I had those resources in UB.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, great point. Thank you. Next question is to Jenna again. You mentioned EAD. Could you just clarify what is EAD and then how that works in with OPT?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, absolutely. That's a good question. So EAD is that authorization document. It's proof that your OPT application has been approved by the US government. So as far as the timeline looks like, for example, our students who are graduating this fall semester, starting in mid-fall, they will start working with our office to get the application process started. They usually submit their application to the government. USCIS can take anywhere on average from about two to four months to process. So it is definitely something where you need to plan ahead. To Dipin's point, there's a lot of great resources on campus, so people who are planning and who apply early tend to feel a little bit less stressed because there's a lot to manage. So starting as early as possible is always recommended. But right now USCIS is taking, they say about two and a half months to process.

So people who are applying for OPT because they're graduating this semester, we'll start working with them soon. Once you submit your application to USCIS, you then have to wait for that EAD, it will be mailed to the address. It's a physical card that you get, and then once you start working, likely your employer will ask for a copy of your EAD. It's going to now be one of your immigration documents that you'll need to present for work, for travel if you're traveling on OPT because you can still travel after graduation. And so it's really a very important document. And so planning is really important because you cannot start working on OPT until you have it. So really once you submit your application to the government, it's a matter of waiting for their decision. The other thing I wanted to mention is for students who are STEM eligible, if they do want to apply for the additional two years, they need to make sure that they apply while they're on their original 12 months of OPT.

So for those of you who would hope to continue through all three years of OPT, you apply for OPT the first time around, usually while you're finishing your classes. And then these second application to the government for a new EAD because there's one for post-completion and then you get a new EAD for

STEM OPT, that would be another application to the government. So again, it will take more planning and so that's why we're involved. CRC is always going to be there to help with these type of planning or tools or whatever you might need.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Okay. So Jenna, my question was your 12-month period starts from the time you submit your application or when you get your approval for the OPT?

Jenna Lenz:

That's a great question and we get this one a lot. So I'm going to try to explain it and we're going to work with some dates and timelines without any visuals. So if you need clarification, please stop me. When you apply for OPT, you get to choose your requested start date. Now you can choose a start date, anything after your end of your I-20 program and then 60 days later. So for students who maintain their status, if you don't take any actions at the end of your degree program, you have a grace period or a time that you can be in the US and then take action, like go to a new school or apply for OPT. So when you apply for OPT, you can choose a start date at any time in that 60 day grace period. So for example, our June conferral, right at UB, if you're graduating in spring, the conferral date is June 1st.

So anyone graduating in spring, their I-20 ends June 1st. So they could potentially choose an OPT start date of June 2nd through July 31st. That's 60 day window. When you get your OPT I-20 from us, you let us know what you want your requested start date to be. So when ISS updates your SEVIS, we will put in, okay, Shashwat really wanted, let's say July 1st for his OPT requested date. So when you get your OPT I-20, it will say July 1st on it. Step two, you send your application to the USCIS. They are the ones who ultimately approve or deny a request, and when they create your EAD, whatever your approved date is will be printed on that card. Now, if you've applied ahead of time and you've given them enough processing time, you will likely get your requested start date. So you would get an EAD that says your OPT starts July 1st, and so your 12-month period begins from the start date on your EAD.

Now if you wait to apply and they don't have a lot of time, maybe you apply and you request a start date that's three weeks in advance. You may not get your card by that date because of how long USCIS takes. In that situation they may push your start date back. So again, this comes into all the planning requirement, but the short answer is your 12-month window starts from whatever your approved start date is on your EAD card. So it's not the day that you submit your application to us. It's not the day that

you get your I-20. It's not the day that you submit to USCIS, it's the day that's printed on your official authorization document that you get from the government. That is what begins your 12-month period.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Thank you, Jenna. That was very, very helpful.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, I was just going to say, it sounds like there's some strategy required there both with planning time in the US as well as looking for work and then organizing your start date at that employer.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah. But you have to think, right, we're talking about 60 day grace period. And I remember in my time when I was at UB, I had classmates who would think and plan in such a way that they don't want to lose even a single day. But my advice to students is that your strategy should be to start early because job hunting and getting a job, landing a job itself is such a stressful process-

Patrick Lageraen:

Interesting.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

... that don't mix getting a OPT along with that. So if you can start early and not worry about the couple of days you'll lose here and there because your joining date was 10 days after your OPT start date. I think that would be your best strategy because the last thing you want is you land a job but you don't have an OPT to start. So that's my piece of advice.

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah. And that actually brings up a really good point. And another question we get a lot, sometimes people want to know, can I apply for OPT if I don't have a job yet? If I don't have a job offer? And the answer is yes, OPT is a work benefit that's part of your F-1 status. I would say actually most students do not have job offers in hand when they begin this process. And to Dipin's point, really starting early is to your benefit, it gives you time to say, "Okay, I've already applied for OPT, now I can focus on the job search." It gives you USCIS more time. So even if you don't have that job offer secured yet, or you have a potential offer but you want to keep looking and seeing if there's anything else out there for you that

shouldn't stop you from doing the OPT. They are related, but they are separate. So there's a lot to stress about, but a lot to be excited about and trying to over plan is maybe stress you don't need.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Indeed.

Patrick Lageraen:

So is the benefit of applying to OPT early so that when you're going into these jobs and interviewing, you can show them that you're already approved and you can start immediately?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, absolutely. So again, you can't start working until your OPT is approved and you have your EAD in hand. So employers who are not familiar necessarily with hiring international students, they are more comfortable when they know that your OPT is approved. And employers who are used to working with international students, because we do have a lot of employers out there who work with our alumni. They often will ask, "Well, how long has your OPT been pending? Did you just submit it or are you hoping to get it soon?" Because that can really dictate when you might be able to start. So being able to get that process going may potentially mean that you can start working earlier. Absolutely.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

The other thing to note is that let's say you graduated, but you don't have a job offer, but you have an approved OPT. And when you're applying for jobs, most employers ask questions like, are you legally authorized to work in the US? And because you have an approved OPT in hand, you will be able to answer that question as yes. Right? Because in some cases-

Patrick Lageraen:

That's the key.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

... employers may choose to screen out applications where the candidate is not legally authorized to work in the US yet, although they might be sponsoring some work organization for the employer. So again, it's still in your benefit to plan early and have it approved quickly.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

So my follow-up to Jenna's point was, so for example, if an international student applies for OPT and they get an OPT approved, but they still do not have a job after the approval date. So how long after your OPT approval can you still live in the US and look for a job?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, that's a good question. So from the time that your post-completion OPT begins, you have 90 days, so 90, 90 days of unemployment to use. So if you don't have a job when it begins, that's really not a problem. You have about three months before you need to be able to start working. And so if you have two months and then you secure the job, you're still maintaining status. The other thing to note is that those 90 days are cumulative for the whole year. So say for example, you start OPT, maybe 30 days later you start working and so you have now reserved 60 days of unemployment still. So if later on in the year maybe you want to change jobs, there's going to be a gap between your positions or something else happens and you end that employment, you would then begin again with the remaining 60 days. So all told in the year, you have 90 days of unemployment that you can use and still be maintaining your status.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Thank you, Jenna.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, that makes sense. Thank you. So my next question is also about OPT. Jenna, maybe you can answer it and Dipin you can give your experiences. It seems like OPT is this one key checkpoint that every international student has to pass through if they want to work and live inside the US. So what's important to know is what kind of jobs can students accept for OPT approval?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, that's a good question. The biggest thing to always keep in mind is OPT is tied directly to your student status, right? And as a student, your primary objective is to study and to learn. And then OPT allows you to get that practical hands-on experience after your degree. So any job on OPT has to be directly related to your field of study. So if you are in the MBA program, once you're on OPT, you want to make sure that any work that you do is always tied to your degree, the skills that you learned,

practicing the techniques or the theories that you had in your degree program. Similar if you are in business analytics when you're on OPT, any work that you do should be directly related to your business analytics degree. And that's going to be true for any type of OPT. It's always going to be directly related to your field of study.

Now, as far as the types of jobs that you can have, on post-completion OPT there's actually quite a lot of flexibility. It could be a paid full-time position. It could be contract work, sometimes referred to as 1099 employment. You are able to do multiple employers. So maybe you have a full-time position and then you have a part-time position at the same time. As long as both of those are related to your degree, you can do them both. It's also possible to do an unpaid internship or volunteer work related to your field of study. Maybe there is an intern position with a company you really love, but it's not a paid position, but you know it's related to your field of study and you know that that might potentially lead to a job in that company after. You should still count that. It will still count as OPT employment.

If anyone's curious about it, you can always go to our website, buffalo.edu/iss. One of our pages is about maintaining status on OPT and it lists all the different types of employment. But the takeaway is for post-completion, there's a lot of flexibility about the type of job, whether it's part-time or full-time, direct employment, contract employment. But it always has to be something where you can say it's tied to my degree and I'm getting practical experience from the skills that I learned in my program.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

The only thing that I would add is that our stress is a point that Jenna made about unpaid internships. I think students have to really be flexible and think long-term, right? If there's unpaid internship with my OPT status can eventually land me a job at the same company or give me the experience I need to make my profile strong for application to another company, you should seriously consider it. That's my advice.

Patrick Lageraen:

Jenna, you might've said this, I just want to clarify. Is there a difference between working full-time and part-time under OPT?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, that's a good question. We may have touched upon it in the first episode, I'm not sure. But for F-1 status, there are slightly different definitions than there might be if you're talking about an HR definition of part-time and full-time. So for F-1 status, anything that is 20 hours a week or more is considered to be

full-time employment. So even if we have an unpaid internship that is 25 hours a week in your employer record, you may be listed as a part-time employee, but for your OPT, for your F-1 status, it's considered. So anytime we're talking about part-time or full-time with OPT, also even with CPT, but part-time and full-time for F-1 students, the number to keep in mind is 20. If it's 20 hours or more its full-time and if it's less than 20 hours, then it would be part-time.

Patrick Lageraen:

Got it. So 20 hours a week is that cutoff.

Jenna Lenz:

Mm-hmm.

Patrick Lageraen:

So after graduating, how long do international students continue to work with the ISS? Additionally, Katie, you mentioned this earlier, how long do they continue to work with the CRC?

Jenna Lenz:

Sure. So I'll take the ISS part. So for ISS, we will work with students through the duration of their F-1 status. Now that could mean that they graduate and they do a year on OPT and then they transition to another visa status for example. And you would continue to work with us up until you report that you've changed status, example, a change of status to H-1B. Once you're in that new status, you no longer need to report to us. Of course, if you have questions about your old F-1 record or anything like that, you can always reach out to us, but you no longer need to.

So it's possible that after graduation you could keep working with us for up to three years basically, as long as you're in F-1 status, you still have to report to us. Depending on the type of OPT you're on, there will be different reporting requirements. But either when your F-1 status ends, whether that's it ends because you've changed status or it ends because you've reached the end of your OPT and you want to return home or you take a job in another country, but you can continue... Well, you have to continue working with us through that time. So when you get that OPT I-20 from us, we will wish you the best of luck, but you're not free of us just yet. And I think that for the CRC, they actually offer a lot of support. Is that right, Katie?

Katie:

That's correct. Yeah. We actually, in addition to having a dedicated career office for our School of Management students, we have lifetime services for our alums. So I guess maybe not enough alums know this, but we do tout that every time the students are on the way out into their full-time careers. But that is a benefit for all alums that they can always come back to us, get support with resumes, cover letters, interview prep, negotiation for jobs. So we offer all those services to both current and our alums as well. So definitely a good benefit to have.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Katie, I did not know that. So next time I'm looking for a job, I'll definitely reach out to you and your team.

Katie:

Absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

Katie, do you often have alumni reaching out to you for assistance on things?

Katie:

It's not as common as you might think, but we do. I mean usually every semester we have a handful, especially if that person has worked with a member of our team in the past and they do tend to stay in touch with us. Our alumni are fantastic in the School of Management, and so we often are connected with those folks on LinkedIn, so we have a pulse of what they're up to. But whether it's reaching out via LinkedIn or email to check in with those people, we always have a hand in what our alums are up to and they often like to volunteer for things like such as this. So thank you Dipin for being here again. So our alums are fantastic, and just the engagement in general is just I think a testament to the students and their experience here in the program.

Patrick Lageraen:

I would gather that it's pretty gratifying when you work with a student and then you're managing their resume with the limited experience that they have as well as their degree. And then they come back to you and you get to see their updated resume and you're just crafting it into a more advanced resume for more advanced positions.

Katie:

That's so true. And actually I will say I will advocate for our international students that most, I would say most of them are coming in with just wonderful experiences as I mentioned before. So often it's just all about what they're supplementing from their time here at UB. But most of our international students have prior work experience. Many of them have multiple degrees coming into UB. So I am just blown away half the time with helping international students with their resume. And half the time we're just trying to make space for them on their resume because they have so much experience they're bringing, they're doing so much while they're here at UB. That's not a bad problem to have, but it just shows that how hard they work and how much they're eager to succeed here at UB and beyond.

Patrick Lageraen:

That's a really great point.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

It's similar in my case as well. I came into UB with almost three and a half years of experience, but I think I would still say I cannot thank CRC enough. They really help us think about how to represent our past experience in a way that will help us land a job and how we should plan for gathering new experiences to be able to represent a resume that will help us with our job search. And I think the most important thing is it's not just about landing that first job. I think CRC always thinks about how you can build your career with the degree or education that you have had with UB, I think, which is the best part of working with the CRC I would say.

Patrick Lageraen:

And then there's also other opportunities at the school School of Management for building your resume for example, the GMA.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

So the Dipin, I was actually going to connect with you on that in terms of networking opportunities for international students. So my question to you on that would be what are the things that you did that helped you in terms of networking... That helped you in finding your job?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

I would say networking starts the day you land in the US as an international student. And the one thing that I will always encourage students is yes, you need to find time to finish those assignments on time and complete all the different teamwork activities that you have to do. But you should be very intentional about landing a job right from the day you step in UB. And that means networking, and that means that you should be the first person to show up in a networking event or probably the last person to leave so that you get that face time with whoever is there spending their valuable time to speak with you. That's one thing. The other tip that I would give students is that let's say you are interested in a particular job or a particular company. For example, when I joined UB, I knew that Deloitte comes on campus for recruitment and every single time Deloitte came to campus for recruitment, no matter which group that they were going to, right, they would not have an MBA event for example, they would have an MIS event for example, right?

But if it's UB coming to... Sorry, Deloitte coming to campus, I would make it a point to go there and show my face to the HR or the recruiter so that they know my name and my face. And at the time that you are applying for a job, you are remembered. So I would say if you have a dream company, if you have a dream job and you know that they come to the campus, go for every single recruiting event that they have and show your face.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Thank you.

Patrick Lageraen:

So Dipin, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like the CRC and the ISS play two equally important roles, especially for international students. Is that right?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Absolutely. And I think you tend to appreciate that more after you graduate from UB because you realize how maintaining a status or having work authorization in the US is a difficult endeavor. And you don't tend to realize that when you're in UB because ISS and CRC do such a wonderful job that you tend to appreciate them more once you graduate. So shout out to both the ISS and CRC and thanks to both the teams here.

Patrick Lageraen:

So next I'd like to talk about the H-1B visa. So we talked about OPT and obviously the next step is going to be H-1B. Jenna, is there anything you can tell us about this? I know this goes a little bit beyond what the ISS handles, but do you have any information for us?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, absolutely. So as you said, I definitely want to clarify that we are not trained on H-1B visas. We certainly help students with the transition from OPT to H-1B in making sure that they meet all of their F-1 reporting requirements. But really we can talk about what we have seen and experienced anecdotally. But number one piece of advice that we always tell students is if you're looking for a change of status, make sure you're working with an attorney who's trained on that subject. If people are curious, we usually have an event every year. I think it was actually mentioned earlier, I can't remember by who, but we do offer a session where we bring attorneys in who are trained on the subject to talk about this process. That'll be happening during International Education week this semester. So that'll be November 14th information is on buffalo.edu/iss/iew.

But for H-1B, usually what happens is that H-1B is an employment based visa. So if you have an employer who wants to sponsor you for that, they would work usually with an attorney to file a petition on your behalf. So the person who would be changing status is the beneficiary. That means they are benefiting from the petition, but the person who applies is the employer. So it's a little bit different than OPT because OPT the student is applying for their own work authorization. And so this is something that's more complex and it happens with an attorney. What we often see for our students is that you will be on OPT, you will have an employer, and they're so impressed with the amazing work of our UB alums that they want to keep them on longer and so they apply for that H-1B on their behalf.

Now if you are on OPT, there's different types of H-1Bs that have different processes and different deadlines. But what we see for the most part is a type of H-1B where your change of status would take effect very specifically on October 1st. So you would maintain your current status up through the time that that change of status takes place.

Patrick Lageraen:

Dipin, do you have anything to add to that? Maybe you could talk about your process of getting the H-1B.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah, sure. So in my case, like I had mentioned before, I was... I think from the day I joined UB, because I knew Deloitte comes to campus, it was my dream company and I knew Deloitte comes to campus and I knew Deloitte usually recruits around the October November, December timeframe before we graduate. So in my case, what happened was I applied to Deloitte and I got a job offer in December, which was six months before I graduate. I did apply for my OPT early on following the timeline, and in fact, I had requested my start date to be the first day after I graduate. So in my case, what really happened was I got an offer in December. I had an OPT for the next day after I graduated, but Deloitte had sponsored my H-1B in April, which is even before I graduated. And it was a lottery system as H-1B applications usually are, and it was picked up in lottery.

So even though my H-1B was picked up in lottery, like Jenna mentioned, once the processing is done and once your H-1B is approved, it usually kicks in on October 1st. So since the day I joined Deloitte till October 1st, I was on my OPT status and then once H-1B kicked in, I moved to H-1B because usually employees file H-1B as a change of status application, meaning you are moving from the status of F-1 a student to H-1B, a specialty occupation employee. So that's what happened in my case.

Jenna Lenz:

I do just want to add to that. So for students who maybe don't get sponsored while they're still studying, if they apply for OPT sometimes the concern is I am going to be on OPT and my OPT, my EAD ends let's say July 30th, but my company is sponsoring me and the H-1B wouldn't kick in until October 1st. So what do I do between July 30th and October 1st? And the good news is there's something called cap gap OPT, and it is something that would cover the gap between the end of your OPT and the start of H-1B for people who had H-1Bs filed through the lottery system that Dipin just mentioned.

So part of when we're talking about OPT, sometimes students ask, do I have to worry about my OPT dates if I'm also worrying about potentially long-term planning for H-1B? And thinking about details is always good, but keep in mind that there is one more type of OPT called cap gap that is specific to people with pending or approved H-1Bs that would help them basically bridge the gaps. They could continue working from the end of their EAD through the start of their H-1B. So there is a system in place for that as well.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Jenna mentioned, right? Usually what happens is that when you do land a job offer, before you join the company, you will have a team of attorney or an immigration team within the employer reach out to

you to discuss your specific case and work with you closely to have your H-1B filed and applied for. So usually you work very closely with lawyers within the employer with who you got the job offer.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Okay. So I had a follow-up on what Jenna mentioned. So for example, so is there any timeframe for that cap OPT? Like we're talking about July 30th through October 1st, so how early can an employment on OPT be over, like terminated and that would still be a gap for before you can join on your H-1B status? So is there a timeframe or minimum or maximum number of time that you can be in that gap period?

Jenna Lenz:

Yeah, that's a really good question. And so the exact number might change from year to year depending on the lottery system. What happens is every year the lottery usually starts around April 1st when people can file that petition. But sometimes the date might change like if April 1st is on a Saturday, what will USCIS count as the first day? But we'll just assume that for this sake of the example that April 1st is a working day. So as long as your EAD is valid when your petitioning employer submits your application, so let's say you have an EAD that's expiring. It could be April 5th, it could be July 5th, it could be September 5th, right? If your EAD is valid at the time that they submit the application, as long as your H-1B is pending or approved, you are eligible for this automatic extension called cap gap. And the nice thing about cap gap is unlike post-completion in STEM, it does not require an additional application for the student to the government.

It is automatically applied to the student's record once that H-1B is picked up in the lottery. So even if you had an EAD that ends May 12th, for example, by May 12th, you would know if your petition was selected for the lottery. So then you could continue working with the cap gap. If you want proof of that, you can work with ISS to get an updated I-20. But the cap gap in some cases really can start from sometime in April. And I have a student that I've worked with last week who has a cap gap that's literally three days long because their OPT ends in late September. So it can really vary in length, but in order to have that work authorization extended, your EAD has to still be valid and active at the time that your H-1B petition is basically put in. For students whose EAD has ended before that, but maybe they're in their grace period, if their H-1B is picked up, they have a capped gap extension of status, so they can stay in the US.

But they wouldn't be able to keep working because their EAD had already expired. That's much less common. And if someone were to be in that situation where you're curious about it, come and talk to us. But usually it's between a couple of months to several months for cap gap.

Patrick Lageraen:

Thank you. All right, great. Jenna, thanks for clarifying that. At this point I'd like to open it up to Katie. What questions do you have based on your experiences?

Katie:

Yeah, Dipin, you mentioned the networking piece and how networking starts the day you arrive on campus. So often I get questions from international students that maybe just don't know how to approach networking. Maybe they're uncomfortable, they don't know where to start. So can you maybe offer a little bit more insight on what worked for you and just general advice that you have for students who are apprehensive about networking?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah, I mean, I would definitely acknowledge the fact that it is difficult, but you have to try. Only because it's difficult doesn't mean that you don't give it a shot. So the approach that I would recommend students follow is you should approach networking as an opportunity to learn. Learn outside of your MBA program. So when you meet individuals, like I said before, the best tip I can give you is if you are one of the first folks to show up, I think you'll get an opportunity to go talk to the individual who has coming there for the networking event prior, or a recruiter, that better amount of time you won't get as the crowd starts building up.

So that is your advantage. So show up a bit early, go say hi to them. That's all you need to start a conversation. And then your approach should be to learn more about them, the company that they belong to, how does a day in their life looks like at work. Start with those simple questions and your goal should be having that intent to actively listen and learn what they have to say, right? That's my advice to students. And if you approach it that way, networking becomes far easy.

Katie:

That's fantastic advice. I love that. And my other question relates to I guess interview prep. I know often international students worry about that process, I mean any student really. But was there any tactic that

you took when you were preparing for your first interviews, if you can look back on that and reflect on what worked well for you, especially from the perspective of being an international student?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Absolutely. So basically I worked as a practice interviewer with CRC, where CRC would offer this service to their undergraduate students. Whereas an MBA student, I could be the interviewer.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Interesting.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

And in order for me to be an interviewer, I had to learn how to answer or look for a good answer from the undergraduate students. So I definitely enrolled for that. I was one of the volunteers, and that was a great learning opportunity for me because I got to see how undergraduate students would approach my questions and I already knew what I should be looking for in a good answer. That really helped me prepare for my interviews because one of the things that I was self-aware, or I should say that I became self-aware after being a practice interviewer.

Is that I realized that I did not follow something called the STAR approach when I answered a question, which is when interviewers ask you a behavioral question. For example like, give me a time when you really displayed leadership skill. And then you follow a STAR approach where you pick up a specific situation and you talk about the task that you performed, what actions you took and what results you achieved. That way you make your answer very tight and time bound, which I was not aware until I became a practice interviewer. So that's the number one advice I would give students. If you have an opportunity for that, go and do that.

Katie:

That's great advice, and I love that you brought up the STAR technique. We definitely love when our students utilize that, talking about especially the end result of what they did. So I appreciate that advice.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

There are two more things that I would give as advice. The other thing is if you are going to interview for a particular company, spend enough time to research about that company. There are two opportunities

that you might get in the interview where you can really show your research. One is almost all interviewers ask you or give you opportunity to ask them questions. That is an opportunity for you to really show what kind of research that you have done on that particular company. For example, there is a particular way in which they do their volunteering activity. For example, in Deloitte, they used to do what they call a day of impact. So you could ask them a question where not only you show them that you are aware and that you know they have a volunteering event call impact, but also ask them some related question to that so that way they know that you have done your due research. Right?

And the other way is when you answer questions, try to plug in the research that you have done. For example, you could mention that these are the values of the company and that why you want to apply to this company because it aligns with whatever values that you have as an individual. So do your due research as part of applying for that company. And the third tip I will give you is the moment you step out of the interview, if you have gotten the contact of the interviewer, send them a thank you email. That goes a long, long way in landing a job, right? I cannot tell you the number of times within Microsoft, we have chosen a candidate over another one only because they were thoughtful of sending thank you emails. Because when it comes to neck and neck things like those mean a lot to interviewers and companies and organizations and hiring managers.

Katie:

I love to hear that advice because even recently I've met with students who are wondering, and that's a common question that we get, when do I follow up? And you'd be amazed how many haven't even sent that initial thank you note. So I love hearing that and reiterating that, how important that is. So thank you so much. That's great advice.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah. In some cases, of course you won't get the email ID of the interviewers themselves, but you are always most often be in touch with the recruiter. And that way you can send those thank you emails to the recruiter and you can ask them to pass it along, and most recruiters do that.

Patrick Lageraen:

Great. So Dipin, I'd just like to open it up to you. Do you have any final advice, any parting advice that you think would be valuable, especially for international students that are going through this process right now?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah, I mean, like I said before, job hunting starts on day one. You should be actively looking for jobs right when you join. So make use of resources such as CRC, where in the first few weeks itself, you should work with them to build out your resume. And start planning on how to further build it out, and start planning on how you can get that first internship. The other advice that I have is you have to be super flexible, right? While in school, while you're looking for a job. So while in school for example, you should always look to find an internship opportunity and you should show that level of flexibility to even go and do an unpaid internship because the experience that you get from that particular job or from that internship is so valuable to help not only build your career, but also reflect and put in your resume. So don't reject an internship opportunity only because it was unpaid. And while looking for jobs also, I know international students spend a lot of effort, money, resources to come to the US, to come to UB and do their MBA program in a particular specialization. In my case, I did it in marketing as well as consulting. And although I would've loved to land a marketing job when I got a consulting job, I did the flexibility of taking that particular opportunity, right? Because for us as international students, we have to worry about visas and employment authorizations. So if you do land a job that is of course tied to the MBA program but is not directly related to your primary specialization, if your employer is sponsoring for a H-1B, I would say go and take the job. Because it's always easy to find another job while you have a job, right?

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, Good point.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

So you can always look for the dream job once you've landed that first job. So I would say show that flexibility. The third piece of advice I will say is think long term. As you're moving jobs don't go and look for that second job only because it offers a higher salary, because immigration within the US having valid work authorization within the US is a long-term process. So one of the considerations that you should give when you look for the second job, for example, or even your first job is also think about how good the immigration support of the employer is going to be.

And this is one of the questions that you could ask when you're networking with international students who landed a job in a different company like how do you find the immigration support in your company? Those are kind of questions that you would ask them. So I would say... And the last thing I

would say is what Jenna had mentioned is plan ahead. Plan ahead on how you can effectively work with ISS, how you can effectively work with CRC and make that the last thing you need to worry about.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Dipin, I just had two quick questions if you can respond to that from your experience. And I'm so grateful for your time because a lot of things that you were sharing directly applies to me and my classmates who are currently looking out for jobs. So my first question is, for example, if somebody did not get an internship, would that from your experience, put that candidate in a position of disadvantage when they're out there looking for a full-time role after the MBA program?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Not at all. Not at all. Of course, you should try hard to get an internship, but if you don't land an internship, think about other ways of effectively utilizing your time, your summer break, like can you skill up? Is there another skill that you can learn or require that would help you land that particular job? Because if you do that, you can put in a resume. Are there any volunteering opportunities that you can contribute to during that period of time? Because hey, that's also experience that you can put in your resume. Are there activities that Shashwat, you can do as a GME president where you give opportunities to other fellow students to participate in some club activity or any social event, which are also things that you can put in your resume. So I would say that that is definitely not a disadvantage because you can effectively utilize your time for other activities that you can put in your resume, which your CRC advisor will also help you to decide. So I would say not a disadvantage at all.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Okay. That's great. And my second question is how do some employers view your student employment? So in terms of my case, I'm currently working as a data analyst for school's Office of Strategic Marketing and Enrollment Management. And I'm doing a lot of data analysis, data visualization to give recommendations for better marketing strategies. So how do you think for somebody who's in my role, or for someone else who is probably working in different area, but what they're doing could potentially be tied to what they want to do in the long run. Do you think that would be a disadvantage or would a recruiters not take student employment into consideration in that overall decision making?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

No, not at all. Right? In my mind, any experience is good experience, because even though it is a student job, there are other skills that you are developing as part of that particular job. Of course, you are not only learning or displaying or exhibiting skills that you have on a technical site, for example, data analysis, but also exhibiting other skills such as working in a team or taking leadership on something. Because one thing is recruiters... I want to say that employers and recruiters do give importance to that, right? If you have an internship, if you have a student job, they do value that, and you have to be very smart about how you represent that in your resume. That's one thing. And the other thing that I wanted to call out is that employees want to know that how do students go about utilizing their time while it's cold, by just not limiting to acquiring that MBA degree. How have you otherwise utilized your skills? And those things value a lot to employers, actually.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

Perfect Dipin, thank you so much. That was very, very helpful.

Katie:

I just want to jump in and reiterate, you mentioned the transferable skills and how important that is. So yeah, that's something we in the Career Resource Center can help students leverage, whether it's a student job on campus, whether it's academic projects in their program, to show different skill sets, other leadership experiences. So you're right, there's so many other ways to leverage those transferable skills that will still be valuable looking forward into their career.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yes. One more thing I just remembered was it'll also give you opportunities to come up with very good answers for some of the behavioral questions, right? Whatever experience you got there would help you easily answer a question that asks you for your leadership skill. That is the situation that you can talk about. You can talk about whatever action you took as part of the student job to display that you have that skill in you. So you should look at it that way as well.

Patrick Lageraen:

Dipin, can I just come back to something that you said. You suggested that students do research on companies about their attitudes towards sponsoring international students. Just as an example, would it

be outrageous for a student to reach out to you and ask you your opinion on say, Microsoft's hiring policies when it comes to international students?

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Absolutely not. I can tell you right away that Microsoft believes so much in diversity and inclusion. And one of the reasons why I chose Microsoft is because of the fact that they have a very strong immigration team. Immigration is one of the last things I worry about in Microsoft because I have friends for who worrying about their job status is a difficult part of their life. And luckily for me, I feel fortunate to be part of a company where I don't have to worry about it.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, that's awesome. That's great.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Microsoft sponsors H-1B students, they go above and beyond in supporting them because at the end of the day, Microsoft values the experience that you have, the background that you have, the culture that you have, the diverse set of skills that you have and that you could bring to the company, to really help us think differently.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, absolutely.

Jenna Lenz:

And if I could just jump in and Katie might actually have more to say to this than I do, but reaching out to a fellow alumni of the School of Management is pretty much always not a bad idea as long as you know that they're open to it. Anecdotally, just from working with other students, this is something that I've seen students do and found good resources, good insight. Even doesn't land you that job like he's been talking about. It's the flexibility of learning more. My partner is a School of Management alumni and he is certainly open to hearing from current students and I think a lot of alumni have that attitude. So not underestimating the power of that connection that you be, that Buffalo connection that is sometimes I think forgotten, even if it starts out as a semi informal outreach just to gather information or to make that initial connection that can lead to really powerful things.

Katie:

Absolutely. I agree with that 100%. And we always tell students, reaching out to someone that you share a common ground with, even if you don't know that person, whether like you said it's an alum of the School of Management or of UB, reaching out, having that connection makes them more likely to respond, I believe, because they've had that similar experience. And also this past year, I've noticed a lot of our international students that maybe worked at international companies back where they were from have offices in the US and so they were able to leverage contacts through their company for locations here in the US where they were able to find internships and other opportunities. So never underestimate your international power when it comes to networking as well because the people that you worked with back in your home country might have individuals to connect you with. So taking stock of your individual personal network is also so important.

Patrick Lageraen:

Great point.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah. I would say, like I mentioned before, your approach to networking should be to learn. It should not be for the sole purpose of getting a job. Because I have come across students who would keep in touch with me and once they land a job then crickets. But I would say that if you start building a connection, make it a lifelong connection and it is mutually beneficial for both parties. Only because you got what you need it doesn't mean that the connection is of no use to you. You continue to learn from each other, share information with each other. So I would say that if you are reaching out to an alum or to an individual, my advice to you is are you willing to invest the time that you expect them to invest in you? Right? If the answer is yes, then I would say go ahead for it.

Katie:

That's such a good point. And we tell our students as well, it can be as surface level as a transactional engagement with someone that you never hear from again, that's definitely not what we want. We want someone to be to the point where they can consider you an ally, where they would vouch for you, they would know your skillset, be able to talk about what you're capable of. And at that point, yes, advocate for you, but it takes a long time to do that. So to your point, I think students just need to

realize that it starts early and the follow-up and continual follow-up is so important and often overlooked. So I think that's a great reminder.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Yeah. One last thing that I want to say from my side is have fun at your MBA program. I mean for me, those are definitely my great two years of working with awesome classmates and team members. I'm still in touch with my semester one team members. Shout out to Team Fox Pack. And I think the whole learning experience working with such diverse team members and classmates is just life-changing. So I would say amidst all of this, take time and have fun at UMBA program along with your classmates and team members. There is a lot to learn, not just different cultures, not just different subjects, but just beyond that.

Shashwat Raj Singh:

And I would like to just quickly add on that since you talked about class. So in my own experience, I feel I'm really, really blessed to have an amazing group of people in my class, including Patrick. We guys are so invested in each other and I remember before coming to the US for the MBA program, your visa officers ask you questions, why UB, why US? So I always think to myself, if I have an opportunity to go back to the CMV's office and say that what I learned in UB was not just my degree, but also friends and classmates who became just as important to me as my family members are. So I think that's one point for our international students to know that you'll meet some amazing group of people while you are here in any MBA program or any other program at UB.

Patrick Lageraen:

Thanks for saying that Shash.

Dipin Vidyadharan:

Absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

I think the point should be made that not just the MBA program, this goes for any program. Whether it's the MS program or another graduate program at UB, just have fun with it. All right. My name is Patrick Lageraen, I'm your host and this is the UB School of Management's Manage-A-Bull Podcast. I hope you got some value out of it and we'll see you on the next one. Take care folks.