



OCS

**EVALUATING & NEGOTIATING  
JOB & INTERNSHIP OFFERS**

***Undergraduate Resource Series***

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## CONGRATULATIONS!

### You received an offer. Now what?

- How do you prioritize the offers you've received, and those you're still working on?
- How do you weigh employment offers against other options such as:
  - **For summer:** study abroad, research, or structured programs
  - **For post-grad:** starting graduate school or accepting a fellowship that will allow you to travel and/or study abroad for a year or two
- When is it appropriate to negotiate, what is negotiable, and how do you negotiate effectively?

### Getting the Offer

- **Once you receive an offer, say thank you.**
  - Many employers will give an initial offer over the phone. Always return a phone call with a phone call, not an email. Show gratitude that you were selected and express your continued and sincere interest in the position.
  - Increasingly, students have received offers for both internships and full-time roles via email. Make sure you check your email regularly during your job or internship search. Acknowledge the offer right away – you don't have to decide, but it is important to say thank you and confirm that you received the offer.
  - **Key point:** *You don't have to make a decision right away!* But whether it is by phone or email, acknowledge the offer in a timely manner and connect with the employer about the decision timeline and next steps.
- **Ask to get your offer in writing** – To thoroughly consider an offer and compare it to others, you need to have the details. Request the offer in writing – any employer should be able to mail or email official documentation to you. The written offer should include details such as start date and salary, but may not include all information.
- **Negotiating for more time** – Once you have all of the offer details, you may feel that you need more time than originally given to make an informed decision. It is important to determine for yourself how much time you need before asking the organization. We recommend having a conversation over the phone (or Zoom) to ask for more time – not asking via email. Reiterate your interest in the role, and explain how much time you think you need to make a decision. Always end the conversation on a positive note by thanking them for their time.
- **Keep in touch** – Regardless of how much time you need to make a decision, it's essential to keep in touch with the employer. Make sure to return phone calls and emails from the employer in a timely manner. If you feel they're contacting you too frequently, you can be proactive and suggest the date and time for your next conversation. Then you can also plan ahead and ask questions that will help you make the right decision.
- **Be an ACTIVE decision-maker** – To make an effective decision, you may need to speak with other people at the organization, negotiate some details of the offer, consult friends and family, and/or do more self- and career-assessment regarding your current and future goals. While you should be given time to make a thoughtful decision, you also have a responsibility to use your time wisely and not wait until the last minute. This is a great time to attend OCS drop-ins or to schedule an appointment with an adviser to talk through your options.

### **Advice from former Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust:**

*"You are at a moment of transition that requires making choices. And selecting one option – a job, a career, a graduate program – means not selecting others. Every decision means loss as well as gain—possibilities foregone as well as possibilities embraced...if you don't try to do what you love—whether it is painting or biology or finance; if you don't pursue what you think will be most meaningful, you will regret it. Life is long. There is always time for Plan B. But don't begin with it."*

## **Review Your Goals**

Making decisions requires knowledge about what direction you want to take. Before making a decision, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I see myself every day this summer or for the next couple of years after graduation?
- What skills do I want to use? What skills do I want to gain?
- What do I think will make me happy?

The goal is to reach a decision that is consistent with who you are and what you value, while also finding a place where you can develop skills and reality-test your interests. This is true whether you're comparing internships, jobs, graduate and study programs, or travel and fellowships. The decision to accept an offer is a personal one, and often involves a combination of weighing the facts, following your instincts, and in some cases, taking a leap of faith.

## **Assess Your Options**

When considering offers, also ask yourself:

- What are the potential career paths that could follow after accepting the position? Are there growth opportunities? What will I learn from this opportunity? Where could those skills and experiences take me in the future?
- Do I like and respect my potential coworkers? Do I feel comfortable with the culture of the organization? Do people seem happy working there? Does the company offer affinity groups?
- Will I have the opportunity to meet new people in the field and expand my network of professional connections?
- Am I happy with the geographic location, in terms of cost of living, climate, proximity to family, and opportunities for social life or cultural activities?
- Does this opportunity align with my other priorities...work/life balance, time off, etc.?

## **Understand the Commitment**

As you are making this immediate career decision, think about where it will lead you. While this may well be your first internship or full-time job, it most certainly will not be your last. OCS often refers to the first job after graduation as "Next Steps" because you will likely change jobs and even careers as you develop new expertise and interests. Note that many people stay in their first job after college for two years. It takes that amount of time to gain both the quantity and quality of experience needed for your next career evolution.

## Offer Etiquette – Accepting and Declining Offers

- **How to Accept an Offer** – We recommend that you accept an offer with an employer over the phone but be sure to follow any instructions that they provide via email or mail. There is often a fair amount of paperwork required to make you an official employee of the organization.
  - **Once you accept, STOP LOOKING!** Never accept an offer and continue looking for additional opportunities. This strategy is considered an **egregious breach of ethics** and can seriously harm your reputation in your chosen field as well as Harvard's reputation with that employer. It's not unheard of for a firm to rescind an offer if they find out that you've already accepted one from another organization. Keep in mind that people within fields usually know one another, and often compare notes. If an opportunity has come along that you would like to pursue after you've accepted an offer, contact an OCS adviser for help in navigating the situation. While some employers may not want to go forward with a potentially unhappy employee, be prepared for them to ask that you honor the commitment you've made. If you are unsure about an offer, and think you might want to keep looking, try to first negotiate for more time.
- **How to Decline an Offer** – When you know you are no longer interested in an offer, withdraw from the applicant pool or decline the offer **as soon as possible**.
  - Interviewing with or holding onto an offer from an employer that doesn't interest you wastes both your time and the employer's, may impact other students who are hoping for that opportunity, and may damage your own professional reputation.
  - You should decline an offer over the phone (not by email or voicemail) but be sure to reiterate your appreciation as you do so. *Do not leave a voicemail message to decline an offer.* If the contact person is not available, leave a message for them to call you back or use email to schedule a phone call at a specific date and time.
  - You should also follow up with any person at the organization who you've come to know during the job search process. Thank them for the opportunity to interview for the position, and reiterate your appreciation for the offer.
  - Please note: If you sign an offer, or even verbally commit to the offer, then you should honor it. If you decide after you have already committed, that this position is not right for you, then you would be reneging the offer, not declining the offer. If you find yourself in this position, please reach out to an OCS adviser to help you navigate the situation.
- **Remember, It's a Small World** – In all your interactions with employers, always be polite, professional, and respectful of people's time. Even if you ultimately decide not to work with a particular organization, you never know when your professional paths may cross again. It is in your best interest to keep the people you meet during the job and internship search processes in your network. A strong network is the best job security you can have and vital to your own professional development. Consider connecting on LinkedIn with those who have helped you through the process.

### **Advice from former Harvard President Lawrence Bacow:**

*"It's important that you live your own life, not the life that others have planned for you. Sometimes figuring out what you don't want to do can be as valuable as figuring out what you do want to do...Be open to serendipity. Perhaps the most valuable piece of advice I can give you as you get ready to leave here tomorrow, is to recognize opportunity when it walks up and hits you in the face, because it will."*

### **Additional Considerations for Internship Offers**

You will typically have three summers over the course of your time at Harvard. As first years and sophomores, many students are considering returning home to previous summer jobs, studying abroad, research, structured programs, volunteering, or internships. While experiences can build upon each other, it can ease the stress of decision-making to remember that no employer ever hires someone for full-time post-grad positions based on their first-year experience. You can use your early summers to explore, knowing you have time to change or hone your interests later in your academic career.

Particularly in the corporate sector, the summer between junior and senior year has become increasingly important. It is seen as a 10-week mutual interview for both the employee and the organization to evaluate one another for post-grad employment. In most cases, the pay rate for these internships is not negotiable, as organizations have a set rate for all interns. The most common request with these internship offers is to negotiate for more time to make a decision. Some offers can come well in advance of the internship start date (in some cases over a year before the internship starts), and employers sometimes want students to make a quick decision. You may not feel like you have enough time or information to make an informed decision. We recommend scheduling time to talk to your internship recruiter or hiring manager (either via phone or Skype/Zoom) to ask for more time.

A few tips for this conversation:

- Be thoughtful about how much time you realistically need, knowing that it is unlikely you will be able to explore every option before making a decision.
- When talking to the employer, reiterate your excitement and interest in the position, and ask if it would be possible to have more time to make an informed decision.
- Be prepared to explain how much time you need, and know that you may need to be flexible with this timeline.
- Regardless of what they say, thank them for considering the request, reiterate your interest in the role, and let them know that you will be in touch soon with a decision.

Remember that internships are an important way to explore your interests and you want to make a thoughtful and informed decision. In addition, there will be many employers hoping to hire you for post-grad opportunities as a senior, so you will have another opportunity to pivot and explore if your junior summer experience was not what you expected, or did not result in a full-time offer. If you need help navigating this conversation, or if an employer or organization is not willing to give you more time, make sure to reach out to an OCS Adviser for guidance during virtual drop-ins or by scheduling an appointment.

## What to Do ...

IF...	THEN...
<p>You receive an offer that you are really excited about...</p>	<p>Don't delay! There's no reason to drag out the process if you've received an offer that meets your needs and expectations. Examine the details of the written offer, clarify or negotiate if necessary, and accept in a timely manner.</p>
<p>You have multiple offers, but none stand out as the best choice...</p>	<p>Even if you're unsure which option is best, don't wait until you have all possible offers in hand to start making decisions. Actively evaluate options against each other and your ideal and don't hold more than two or three offers at a time. Declining offers in a timely manner helps you maintain good relationships with employers, even if you decide not to work for them. It's respectful of their time and allows them to make an offer to someone else.</p>
<p>You have an offer, but you want to hold out for something else...</p>	<p>If the offer is from an employer participating in the Campus Interview Program or other formal recruiting events promoted by OCS, a set timeline applies. However, you still may need to advocate for yourself, since not many institutions have offer policies. Contact the Campus Interview Program with any issues (<a href="mailto:ocsrec@fas.harvard.edu">ocsrec@fas.harvard.edu</a>).</p> <p>Outside of this program, it's acceptable to ask an employer for more time to make a decision on an offer, but don't do so unprepared. Have a realistic sense of how much time you need, and always express appreciation and enthusiasm for the existing offer. If you are granted more time, be sure to call the other employer that interests you and let them know you have another offer. If they really want to hire you, they may be able to speed up the process. Also be prepared for what you'll do if the employer doesn't give you more time.</p>
<p>You accepted an offer, but something better has come along...</p>	<p>Once you've accepted an offer, you've given a good-faith commitment to honor it. Reneging on an offer is a breach of your agreement and can jeopardize your professional reputation. If you're convinced that you would not be happy with the offer you've accepted, attend OCS virtual drop-in hours or make an appointment with an OCS adviser to discuss your options and how best to proceed before contacting the employer.</p>

Remember to consult an OCS adviser for guidance, whether you are in the midst of any of the scenarios above or experiencing a unique situation.

## Salary

While compensation shouldn't be the sole focus of your analysis, it is an essential component of any job or internship decision. Keep in mind that if you're looking at more than one type of opportunity, you may be looking at very different sets of numbers. One cannot compare, for instance, an entry-level position in publishing with one in consulting. The starting salaries are simply too different. Salaries may also vary by location.

Many websites offer a combination of salary data by position title, industry, and/or field, as well as salary calculators to help determine how salaries may be affected by cost of living in different geographic regions. A few examples include: Payscale.com, Salary.com, and Glassdoor.com.

Also remember that compensation includes more than base salary. **Bonuses** and **benefits** may seem like a minor piece of the puzzle, but they can come with a considerable price tag once you begin paying the bills. Benefits to consider for post-grad opportunities include:

- Bonus Structure (Yearly, Performance-Based, etc.)
- Equity, Stock Options or Profit Sharing
- Paid Leave (Vacation Time, Sick Time, and Personal Days)
- Flexible Work Arrangements (Remote Work, Flex Hours)
- 401(k) or other Retirement Savings Plan
- Education Benefits
- Relocation Benefits
- Health, Life, and Disability Insurance

## Fielding Salary Questions

Sometimes employers ask for your "salary requirements" or "expected salary" as part of the application or interview process. Organizations typically do so to avoid spending time on a candidate that they will not be able to afford to hire. For example, if someone applies to a position but indicates a salary \$20,000 above what they have budgeted for the position, the employer may assume that the candidate is overqualified or mismatched for the opportunity. However, this often puts students and candidates in a tricky position because you don't want to undersell the value of your skills or end up underpaid for your work.

When asked for your required salary, the best thing to do is try to avoid giving a discrete answer:

- If asked as part of an online application, try to skip the question.
- If asked in person, try a neutral statement like "I'll consider any reasonable offer."
- If you must give an answer, try to give a salary range rather than a specific salary, and base that range on research you conducted.

Remember, just because you share an expected salary figure, it does not mean you cannot try to negotiate once an offer is made. Your time to negotiate is after you have received a formal offer but before you make a verbal or written commitment.

## Negotiating

Think carefully before negotiating a job offer and actively seek outside benchmarks and guidance from industry research, your personal and professional network, and virtual resources at the Office of Career Services. If you do negotiate the salary offer, be sure to research and prepare to discuss a salary range that would be acceptable to you. Some organizations offer a **set package** that is identical to those offered to all new hires. Unless you offer something significant in terms of additional relevant education or experience over and above the others receiving an offer, it's unlikely that you'll be able to negotiate additional monetary compensation. However, there are several aspects of your offer or decision timeline that you may want to negotiate instead of, or in addition to, salary. If you do decide to

negotiate, plan to have the conversation over the phone. Have notes in front of you, and try practicing beforehand with a friend, parent, alumni or OCS adviser.

### Some negotiation guidelines:

NEVER...	ALWAYS...
Wait until the last minute to negotiate.	Research the industry to best represent yourself during negotiation.
Misrepresent yourself or a competing offer in <i>any</i> way.	Get advice from recent alums, professionals in the field, OCS advisers, and family members.
Negotiate over email (exceptions include negotiating across time zones).	Listen carefully for tone of voice and other cues that will help you navigate the negotiation.
Get confrontational.	Behave professionally. Know what your deal-making and deal-breaking factors are ahead of time.

### Maintain Relationships

When you ultimately come to a conclusion, it's important to remember that it is a small world. The opportunity you don't take today may well be right for you in a few years. Being as gracious when declining an offer as you are when accepting one can go a long way toward building a network of contacts that will stay with you for a lifetime.

### Trust Yourself

In the end, only you can decide whether or not a job is right for you.