Young professionals and graduate employers from the Birmingham alumni community share their experiences of living and working in the USA.

WANT TO WORK IN THE USA?
GET TIPS FROM YOUR ALUMNI NETWORK!
With more than 300,000 alumni, there are Birmingham graduates across the globe. The USA is one of the most popular destinations for our alumni, with more than 4,000 based there.

This guide will take you through the process of moving to the USA, with insights from alumni who have already made the move. It will cover what to plan before leaving, how to find and apply for jobs and how to integrate into society.

**THE BASICS**

In case you haven’t started your research yet, let our alumni talk you through the basics of life in the USA.

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“Outside major cities or for travel between cities, transportation often requires driving as the railway network is far less extensive than in the UK. Bus services do connect different towns, but don’t run as frequently as desired.”

*Paul Humphrey (PhD Modern Languages, 2013)*

“International driver’s licenses are only valid for use for one year (depending on the state), after which you will be required to take state practical and theory tests.”

*Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)*

“Many Americans have trouble understanding non-American accents. Imitation often helps.”

*Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)*

“Africa is much more conservative, politically, ideologically, and religiously. The American ‘right’ is much further ‘right’ than in the UK.”

*Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)*
THE LABOUR MARKET

What can you expect from working in the USA?

LABOUR FORCE

159 MILLION (2013)

COST OF LIVING

CAN BE HIGHER THAN UK
(DEPENDING ON STATE)

‘Prices in shops and restaurants are given minus tax so everything you buy is slightly more expensive than you anticipate.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

TAX RATE

RANGES FROM 10%–39.6%
(DEPENDING ON SALARY AND STATE)

‘It would be best to secure work before moving here, as living costs can be expensive. NYC is just as, if not more, expensive than London.’
Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

‘Tipping is customary everywhere, from restaurants and bars to car parks. People usually tip between 15-25% of the total and not leaving a tip is often considered rude, even if the service was not exceptional.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

6%

AVERAGE AGE AT GRADUATION

26 YEARS

HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENT

10 DAYS PUBLIC HOLIDAY
(ANNUAL LEAVE DEPENDS ON JOB AND LENGTH OF SERVICE)

‘In the UK vacation days are given much more generously than in the US. For new hires I would say the average American receives half the number that they would in the UK.’
Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)

‘I would negotiate to get more holiday before you accept a job offer.’
Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

AVERAGE STARTING SALARY

$2,700 PER MONTH AT LEAST

AVERAGE WORKING WEEK

40 HOURS, MONDAY TO FRIDAY
WITH OCCASIONAL HALF DAYS ON SATURDAYS
(BUT MANY WILL WORK 50+ HOURS)

‘Working hours can vary. Some organisations start the working day at 8am. There are few breaks during the day and lunch periods are often short.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

Please note that these figures are averages or estimates that were deemed accurate at the time of print.

For more information about each of these areas, Google ‘TargetJobs Working Abroad’ or ‘University of Birmingham Graduate Careers’.
WHAT TO PLAN

Don’t forget anything! Let our recent graduates talk you through what they planned before they left, as well as what you can leave until you arrive.

“Get a credit card ASAP in your new country; it is important to start building a credit score.”
Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

“Any of the major cities along the east coast would be good for recent graduates, the south tends to be more affordable than the northeast.”
Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

“Try to stay loyal to one airline and set up an account for their rewards scheme to collect air miles.”
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

“Companies in the UK that are present in the US do not work together so it is not possible to transfer an existing contract. Contracts are only available for a minimum of two years.”
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For more detailed information on the legalities of moving abroad, consult the Careers Network’s International Work Experience page or the British Embassy Washington website.
FINDING JOBS

Our alumni have pursued a wide range of careers, but there are some key places that they all advise you look when searching for a job in the USA.

WEBSITES
www.linkedin.com
www.monster.com
www.dice.com
www.indeed.com
www.craiglist.com

“Indeed.com is great for all work, and Highered.com is the best for teaching jobs. There was no newspaper that I managed to find.”
Anneli Hibblet (MA TESOL, 2013)

“Pick 10-12 organisations and target them. Arrange to meet key players away from their office, it is effective to get to know people at social functions and make connections.”
Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

“Most fields have their own specific online search engines but when all else fails use Craigslist and Indeed.”
Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)

“Glassdoor.com is a great website to look at company reviews.”
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

“I used science specific job websites such as nature.com and sciencecareers.org to find my position. However, there are a wide range of websites and recruiters advertising jobs in the US.”
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

“I use local recruitment agency listings to find available jobs. Looking at company listings by area and doing general google searches is also helpful, as well as using LinkedIn.”
Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

For more information on where to look, use the TargetJobs Working Abroad pages.
APPLYING FOR JOBS

Our alumni talk through some of their experiences of applying for jobs in the USA.

WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES IN THE USA COMPARED TO THE UK?

Many companies will expect College transcripts (listing studies, grade averages etc.).
Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

Cover letters are a must and it is worth taking time over these. You should also never ask about the pay as this is a negotiation after the job offer.
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

In the US they expect a ‘resume’, which should be one or two pages. You will most likely have a phone interview with the HR representative, then one with the hiring manager, and a final one with multiple staff.
Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION?

We look for resumes which have more than just strong academics. It is important to highlight experiences/ jobs/ aspirations which will differentiate you from others.
Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)

Those most called for are good communication and problem solving skills. Curiosity is also key, so be prepared to ask questions.
Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

Attributes we find attractive are punctuality, attentiveness and focus during interview, use of initiative, accuracy and attention to detail, and a good disposition.
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DESIRABLE SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

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Mark Bielski (Modern History, 2014)

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

‘Business etiquette is polite and politically correct. No sexual, racial or personal comments are made. Wordage is largely positive, with discussions based on what can be done, not what can’t.’
Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)

‘In general, people who work together tend to go home after work and rarely interact outside of a work capacity.’
Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)

‘When applying for jobs, I would advise spelling words the “American” English way and indenting the first line of each paragraph.’
Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)

Make the most of the Careers Network (CN). They can discuss your career options, give guidance on your CV, conduct mock interviews and much more. Google ‘University of Birmingham Graduate Careers’ for more info.

Remember that CN is also available to you for two years after you graduate.
HOW TO INTEGRATE

So you’ve made your plans, you’ve booked your flights and you’ve found your job…but what should you do when you actually arrive? Our alumni have loads of advice to give you to ensure that you feel a part of American society as quickly as possible.

**USE THE RIGHT ‘HUMOR’**

‘A lot of the Americans I’ve met do not appreciate or understand dark humour (or “humor”).’  
*Paul Rezkalla (MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, 2013)*

‘They will probably wince at the British sense of humour. However, in my experience, they soon get over it.’  
*Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)*

**FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THEIR RULES AND LAWS**

‘Being drunk in public is an offence and swearing is much more seriously frowned upon. Many people also carry weapons with them on a daily basis.’  
*Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)*

‘Laws are different in each state. Be warned!’  
*Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)*

**GET TO KNOW YOUR CO-WORKERS**

‘First getting to know co-workers would be the easiest way to integrate. If working for a large company, there will be many social opportunities involving new hires.’  
*Helen Bates (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1984)*

**GET INVOLVED WITH LOCAL ACTIVITIES**

‘Here in Washington DC (similar to Birmingham) the city throws many community events, like concerts, festivals and farmers markets.’  
*Bethel Hailemichael (MSc International Business, 2013)*

‘I joined a local hockey team. There are many leagues in most areas that involve social activities as well as competition; softball, kickball, bowling to name a few.’  
*(Graham Hulbert (BSc Mechanical Engineering, 2010)*

**USE SOCIAL COMMUNITY WEBSITES**

‘Social community websites are a good way to meet people. The couch-surfing community is great to use to travel the country. There are also websites you can use to meet expats, e.g. internations.org.’  
*Chibuzor Uchea (PhD Toxicology, 2013)*

‘There is a website called meetup.com. Thousands of people use this to make friends.’  
*Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)*

**BE AWARE OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

‘Americans are less direct than British people and far more passive aggressive. It is also extremely politically correct here and very difficult to keep up with the “buzz phrases”.’  
*Anneli Hibbert (MA TESOL, 2013)*

*Enjoy yourself!*
A wide variety of alumni contributed to this guide. Here are just a few examples of what they’re up to at the moment.

**HELEN BATES**

**Degree:** BSc Chemical Engineering  
**Year of graduation:** 1984  
**Role:** Principal Marketing Specialist, Symantec  
**Responsibilities:** Direct marketing activities including data analysis, email campaign management and business development  
**Reason for moving:** I was offered a research position which was a fantastic opportunity to work within a well-networked group and carry out interesting and important work.

**ANNELI HIBBERT**

**Degree:** MA Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
**Year of graduation:** 2013  
**Role:** Teacher, Virginia International University  
**Responsibilities:** Teaching TESOL and English to international students  
**Reason for moving:** I moved to the USA to be with my husband who is an American citizen.

**CHIBUZOR UCHEA**

**Degree:** MSc & PhD Toxicology  
**Year of graduation:** 2008 and 2013  
**Role:** Teacher, Virginia International University  
**Responsibilities:** Conducting research into nanoparticle-based delivery systems to enhance the efficacy of therapeutics  
**Reason for moving:** I was offered a research position which was a fantastic opportunity to work within a well-networked group and carry out interesting and important work.

**GRAHAM HULBERT**

**Degree:** Mechanical Engineering  
**Year of graduation:** 2010  
**Role:** Continuous Improvement Manager, Eaton  
**Responsibilities:** Find ways to manufacture our products more efficiently, with better quality or in less time  
**Reason for moving:** I am a dual national (US and UK) and spent the first few years of my childhood in the US, so I wanted to go back to experience the country I am a citizen of.

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