When to Raise The Topic of Sponsorship

It’s important to understand what most companies mean when they ask something like “Will you require sponsorship?” as part of their application process. When applying for jobs online, many international students choose to answer “No” to this question, reasoning that they do not need sponsorship to work an internship or during their OPT period.

The problem with this approach is that no matter how they word the question, most companies are asking if you will eventually need sponsorship if they keep you on long term. In surveys of employers, employers make clear that when F1 or J students answer “No” to the sponsorship question, the company believes that that student is being dishonest (NOT a good way to begin a productive relationship with a potential employer!).

Having asked that question and getting an answer that they believe means you will never require sponsorship, many employers never bring the issue up again during the interview process. They are, therefore, surprised when after they make you an employment offer and you fill out the legal offer paperwork, they discover that you do indeed need sponsorship eventually. Over and over again, we have seen companies withdraw offers over this issue!

So how should you disclose your sponsorship status to employers?

1. If a question is asked about sponsorship as part of an online application process for a full-time position or an internship that is clearly part of an internship-to-fulltime process, we recommend that you answer “Yes” that you will need sponsorship. You may disagree, arguing that you can work during your OPT period without sponsorship, but again, that isn’t what companies mean by the question. As you might expect, answering “Yes” may make it less likely that you will be invited for an interview. But, our experience is that while you might get an interview by answering “No,” you will not get the job. If a company is not willing to sponsor, they will still not be willing to sponsor even after an interview and offer, but they will be angry that you wasted their time.

2. If the question of sponsorship is not asked either as part of the online application or by the employer in person, we recommend that you disclose your need for eventual fulltime sponsorship no later than before you accept a second-round interview or before the first interview to be held on the employers’ campus. Many American employers do not understand the sponsorship needs of international students, and they don’t like to be surprised with this information late in the hiring process. When surveyed, employers say that disclosing your status will not necessarily mean that you
will be eliminated from the hiring process, but they also make clear that they prefer to know early in the hiring process!

3. If the question is asked in regard to an internship that is clearly free-standing (i.e., not likely leading to a fulltime position), you may choose to answer “No.” Even in this case, however, we encourage you to disclose the fact that you would require sponsorship for a fulltime position by at least the second interview.

Disclosure language that you can use:

I’m very excited to accept your offer for a second-round interview. I really enjoyed learning more about your company during the first-round interview and I’m very interested in the possibility for working for your company. I want to make sure before we proceed, however, that you understand:

1. That while you would have to do nothing extra to hire me as an intern, if you were to want to keep me on as a fulltime long-term employee, you would need to take steps to sponsor a work visa for me after X months of work.

2. That while I am able to work for you fulltime for X months with you doing anything extra, after that number of months, you would need to sponsor a work visa for me.

If the company asks what is involved in sponsoring a work visa, you could share that it’s a process of filing paperwork with the U.S. government, that generally lawyers are required to prepare the paperwork, and that there is a fee to file the paperwork. In general the process often costs between $2,000 and $6,000

If they have questions beyond that, encourage them to talk to an immigration attorney and/or to look at the US immigration website:
https://www.uscis.gov/eir/visa-guide/h-1b-specialty-occupation/understanding-h-1b-requirements