Welcome to the Managing Offers webinar. My name is Deb Carroll and I oversee Employer Relations at the Office of Career Services.

During this webinar, please feel free to type questions at any time, but just note that I plan to address questions at the end of the presentation.

I know the offer process is very personal for most students, so please note that other students will not be able to see any questions you type in, and I will not use any names if I address them aloud.
First of all, Congratulations! If you end up needing to manage job or internship offers, it is a good problem to have. For many students, managing the offer process becomes the most stressful part of the job search. This is a big decision and it can be difficult to make a commitment.

You can come into OCS during daily drop in hours, Monday through Friday, 1 to 4pm to talk through your decision process starting on August 27th, and during September there are special Express Appointments for juniors and seniors, 10am – 12noon.

Although this presentation is applicable to all fields, some of the specific scenarios apply to offers received for a summer internship or full-time job attained through the Campus Interview Program and recruiting events on campus.
One of the reasons students find this process so stressful is that they are accustomed to the decision process they learned while applying to college, when all their acceptances and declines arrived by mail and had roughly the same decision timeline. Deciding on a job or internship offer is very different. Most likely you will not be able to wait until you have all your possible offers to start making decisions, and you will have to communicate extensively by phone. Especially in the scenario that you receive a full-time offer at the end of the summer when you have worked eight to ten weeks along side the people who want to hire you, it becomes much more personal than accepting and declining admissions.
In general, the offer and decision process follows these steps.

• When you get an offer, your primary responsibility is to say thank you. You don’t need to make a decision on the spot, but you do need to express your appreciation, your enthusiasm, and that you are looking forward to reviewing the details.

• Always ask for the offer details in writing so you can review them carefully and, when applicable, compare them to other offers.

• Plan to stay in touch with the organization and take actions that will help you come to a decision. You will not come to a decision simply by allowing time to pass by. You need to talk to people – friends and family, other organizations that interest you, other people at the organization who are already doing the same work, etc.

• Negotiate if appropriate, and accept and decline offers as soon as possible. Declining in a timely fashion is extremely important. Being respectful of someone’s time is one of the best ways to maintain a relationship with an individual or organization, even if you end up saying no to their offer, so plan to decline as soon as you realize you are no longer interested.

• Fill out all your paperwork, and DO NOT continue to search elsewhere once you’ve accepted an offer. Continuing to interview after you have accepted an offer can jeopardize both your existing and future job opportunities.
If you are completely happy with your job or internship offer there may not be much for you to manage. You may simply review your offer, consult with a few family members, friends, and other trusted advisers, perhaps negotiate some details, and then sign and return your offer.

Sometimes students want to negotiate some part of their offer. The most common item undergraduates want to negotiate is for **MORE TIME** to make their decision. If so, they will need to manage their time, relationships, and communications with the offering company while they decide. Employers who hire through the Campus Interview Program or other recruiting events on campus need to give their 2018 summer interns until October 11th to decide on returning full-time offers or until October 25th to decide on internship offers for summer 2019 extended prior to fall interviews, but it is completely reasonable for that employer to want to communicate often. You can do damage to your personal reputation and your relationship with an organization if you stop returning phone calls or emails.

Some students want to pursue other options, and that’s fine too, but the more time a student needs to make their decision the harder it becomes for them to manage all the relationships and communications that go with keeping that offer open. This balancing act, keeping one offer on the “back burner” while pursuing others, is often what becomes very stressful for students. Sometimes you need to remind yourself that it is ok to say no and decline offers. You should not need to keep more than two or three offers open at a given time, and we actually recommend keeping it to only one or two.
Why Do They Keep Calling Me?

They have made a commitment to you.

They want to make sure you have all the information you need to make your decision.

They have other students in line for the position if you say no.

They suspect that they are not your first choice.

We often compare the job or internship search to dating, and that analogy sometimes helps clarify why the employer keeps contacting you after they have given you an offer. Hiring is a process of finding the right match, and when an employer gives you an offer, they are committing to you, they are saying, we really like you and want to stop dating other people. Especially if you have worked at an organization over the summer, there are individual people there that have mentored you and gotten to know you, and you should have real relationships with the people you have worked with. It is human nature that now that they have said that they want you on the team, they are anxious for you to say it back to them. It is much easier for them to wait for your answer if you are reassuring them that the feeling is mutual.

The organization also keeps calling you because they want to help make sure that you have everything you need to make your decision and because they have other students next in line for the position. If you wait too long to make your decision and say no, it is often that student who was next in line who loses out.

Going back to the dating analogy, sometimes the employer can tell that they are not your first choice. The organization does not just want someone who can do the job, they want to hire someone who wants to do the job for that organization, so returning calls and connecting with people is a way to demonstrate your continued interest. This can be time consuming, so remember that you can say NO if you are no longer interested, and the sooner you do that, the easier it is to maintain relationships with people at that organization because you have respected their time.
In “managing” the offer process, your main goal is to maintain good relationships with the various employers and alumni you have met while taking the time to make a thoughtful and thorough decision. It is your job to make sure they know you are still interested so they don’t assume that you are not. Also remember that it is a small world, and you never know when your paths may cross again. People change jobs and the people who wanted to hire you at Company A may work for Company B the next time you are looking for a job, so it is really important to preserve a good relationship with people you worked with. The keys to maintaining relationships are

1) Appreciation – say thank you!
2) Communication – stay in touch!
3) Timeliness – decline and accept offers as soon as possible!
Whenever you communicate with your employer about your offer, remember that you are simply having a conversation. Students often get anxious about how they might be perceived, or about potential confrontation, especially when they have a question or concern about their offer. Remember, all you are doing is asking a question, a negotiation is just asking a question, and if you are doing it in a polite way, you can’t hurt your relationship with an employer by asking a question.

Even if you do wish to negotiate or question something about your offer, think about it as a difficult conversation rather than a negotiation. Negotiation implies that it is a zero-sum game. That means that someone has to lose something in order for the other to gain. Negotiation about your employment is not a zero-sum game; you can get to a win-win scenario. They want to hire you, and they want to help create the conditions that will make that happen.

In the current climate, scales are slightly favoring the employer, but this period of time between when you have been given your offer and when you accept is when you have the most leverage for reasonable requests.
When you have a question or issue with your offer, I always recommend starting with the Human Resources or recruiting contact you have been working with. Part of the HR function is to field awkward or difficult questions so you can more easily maintain your relationships with your manager and the other people who you might work side-by-side with in the job. If you are at all concerned about speaking with HR, you can simply ask them who would be the most appropriate person for you to speak with about your offer.

The other people you may want to speak with include your “hiring manager” (the person who would be your boss), your mentor, or an alum you may have consulted during the process. You are the person who has met all the parties involved, so you need to use your judgment, but sometimes HR helps advocate for you with your hiring manager, and sometimes it is the reverse – your hiring manager helps advocate for you with HR.

I also always suggest that you have these conversations over the phone. You can use email to set up a time to speak by phone, but otherwise you should avoid asking any sensitive questions over email. It is very hard to control for tone in an email. You do not want to be using emoji to emphasize your enthusiasm. Similarly, you want to be able to hear the other person’s tone of voice so you can adjust your approach depending on the cues you get from them. The only exception might be when trying to have a conversation across time zones.
One of the ways to initiate a request as part of a conversation rather than a confrontation is by using what we refer to as “the positive sandwich.” You want to begin and end any request with some sort of appreciative and positive statement, whether that is about your enthusiasm for the company and position or your gratitude for the time someone has put into working with you.

For example:
- Start with “I’m really excited about this opportunity.”
- Then get to the center or meat of what you are asking or proposing, saying something like, “I’m wondering if there is any flexibility with the decision timeline?”
  - “Is there any flexibility?” is one of the magic phrases used to signal that you are going to ask for something but not making a demand. Again, this is not a confrontation, you are not giving an ultimatum or drawing a line in the sand, so make sure your tone is a question.
  - Another magic phrase that helps initiate a conversation is “I’m just looking for some advice.” Everyone likes to give advice, and by asking for advice you are gathering information, not making demands.
- After you have discussed some of the “meat” be sure to end again with a positive statement: “I really appreciate you taking the time to discuss this with me. Thank you for all your help.”
It is important that any request you make or question you ask about your offer should be made in a timely manner. **DO NOT** wait until the last minute. Respecting people’s time is one of the best ways to maintain relationships with them, even if you do not end up accepting their offer.

If an employer gives you three weeks to make a decision, you should ask questions and consider negotiating in that first week. That gives the employer time to respond to your request, and then in turn gives you time to make your decision with the updated information. If you wait until the third week, the employer will have to scramble to consider your request, and that makes them less inclined to go out of their way for you.

If what you hope to negotiate with an employer is more time to make your decision, you also want to think about how much time you realistically need. Rather than ask to extend your deadline one more day, and then on that day ask for one more day, etc, etc, a better strategy is to determine a reasonable decision timeline and then proactively set up a few check-in times. That approach is much more respectful of the employer’s time, and also helps you manage your own time because you won’t get unexpected phone calls from the employer asking where you are in your decision-making process.

Also remember that the longer you drag out the process, the more stressful it is for **YOU**. Sometimes students are afraid to say no to an employer’s offer, but saying no as soon as you can is actually respectful of that employer’s time and gives them time to find someone else. It also takes a huge weight off your shoulders.
Employers that recruit on campus through the Campus Interview Program or other activities such as networking and information sessions tend to have a long waitlist of interested candidates and are eager to hear back from students regarding job and internship offers. Like other offers, the first step is to say thank you and ask for more details in writing. These offers tend to be extended well in advance of potential start dates, and it is reasonable to take time to make an informed decision. Harvard sets an offer decision timeline for employers that recruit on campus. However, in this current climate, we are finding that employers are starting by doing what is easiest for them and giving the same decision deadline to all their candidates. Harvard students have to be prepared to advocate for themselves to get more time to decide. Therefore, the advice we’ve been giving earlier in this presentation also applies to Campus Interview or other recruiting offers.

It’s helpful to put in context that very few schools have offer timelines as generous as Harvard’s, if at all. In future job searches after you have graduated, your decision timeline will likely be much shorter, even just a few days. You should feel comfortable politely asking an employer about the Harvard decision timeline and negotiating for more time based on the other advice in this presentation. Remember that you need to maintain professional relationships with the employer and consult with OCS if you have concerns. OCS does not contact an employer without your permission. We also need lead time to advocate on behalf of a student, so reach out to us as soon as possible at ocsrec@fas.harvard.edu if you are experiencing an issue.
One of the things that happens this time of year is that employers learn that some students do have very tight decision deadlines, so they offer or students ask for “accelerated” interview processes. We CAUTION you against stepping into a process that you may not be fully prepared for, especially if that employer is planning to visit campus. If you go through an employer's accelerated interview process, they are expecting that you are:

- well-versed in the field/industry,
- familiar with the particular firm,
- fully prepared for the interview process, and
- consider the organization YOUR FIRST CHOICE!

And if given an offer as a result of an early process, the employer is hoping that you will accept on an earlier timeline.

If an employer is planning to be on campus, there is a competitive advantage to meeting with them and taking time to practice your interview skills.
Remember that one of the most important parts of managing the offer processes is staying in communication. Recruiters might say they want to hear from you in what feels like a short timeline because of students in the past who have gone radio silent and stopped returning phone calls and emails. You can take some control in this situation by proactively scheduling times to reconnect with your recruiter or employer representative. Schedule times that work for you and you will minimize the likelihood that phone calls come at awkward times, like during class, rehearsal, or practice.
Employers are not always able to keep a group or location specific offer open for as long as a general offer. It just isn't logistically possible based on the constantly changing business needs of each specific group. The best way to ask for more time is to know exactly how much time you need to make a thoughtful decision. Asking for a lengthy amount of time is typically not reasonable in these cases if you want to stay in a particular group, so think carefully about what else interests you and how you might explore your options there in as timely a manner as possible. Be careful if this position is your back up plan and your true hope is to get something else. Asking for accommodations only to say no is a good way to burn bridges. Not to mention, if you are so invested in staying in a particular group, maybe that is a signal that it is a good match for you for the next summer or for the first couple of years after graduation.
### Leveraging Your Offer

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| • Tell other employers you have an offer and the deadline  
• Decline offers and only hold on to 1 or 2 offers at once | • Pretend to have another offer  
• Say an offer is “exploding” if it’s not  
• Accept an offer and continue searching |

If you find yourself with an offer, it is acceptable to approach other organizations. But we recommend you do so only after having done some preparation. Remember that this is not like when you applied to College, and most likely you will not be able to hold on to all your options while you pursue others. You will start having to make decisions as opportunities become available, so that means making decisions as you go and not holding on to more than one or two offers at once. Remember that it is time consuming and stressful for you to juggle multiple offers, and it may take that opportunity away from a fellow Harvard student if you hold on to something you are not interested in for too long.

Also remember that it is important not to misrepresent yourself during this process. For example, you cannot pretend to have another offer in order to try to negotiate some part of your existing one. Although you do not need to reveal every piece of information about your decision-making process to an employer, anything you do share needs to be truthful and in good faith.
**Resources and Questions**

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In closing, remember again that if you have an offer at the end of your summer internship, Congratulations! - this is a GOOD PROBLEM to have. Try to approach your decision-making process from a place of confidence rather than from a place of anxiety, and connect with people who you trust for advice, including mentors, tutors, friends, family, and the advising team at OCS.