



Achieving Success at the Boston Career Forum Tips for Success from FCS Interns

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Fall 2016 Cycle Interns Madoka Amari and Kazuki Iino attended the Boston Career Forum in November 2016, both walking away with multiple offers to competitive internships and fulltime positions.

In this column, they will share best practices for the next generation of Boston Career Forum attendees.

Profiles

Madoka Amari is a 3rd year student at Waseda University studying International Relations. She studied abroad for a year at the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in media studies and philosophy.

She hopes to work in an environment where she can constantly interact with people of various backgrounds and from different industries.

Kazuki Iino is a 3rd year student at Waseda University studying Political Economy.

He studied abroad for a year at the University of Michigan –Ann Arbor.

Prior to interning at the Embassy, he worked for a parliamentarian, and a financial technology start-up.

ABOUT THE FORUM

<What is the Boston Career Forum? (BCF)>

The Boston Career Forum is a three day event (generally held Friday through Sunday in November) in Boston that focuses on recruiting and hiring bilingual (English and Japanese) students for positions in Japan. Held at a convention center, with over 200 company booths in a tradeshow format, the Forum is a fair where one can interview and secure a job offer in 3 days. In the past, the forum mainly catered to Japanese students studying outside of Japan, but attendance has evolved to include bilingual candidates in Japan, and from around the world. While the majority of the positions are based in Japan, there are a few that are for positions in the United States. For internationally minded candidates with some level of Japanese and English, the forum is a great opportunity to find a job outside of Japan's traditional job hunt cycle. Furthermore, since jobs in Japan are not as major or industry specific, the range of positions one can apply to is much wider.

Madoka: Although I will graduate from a Japanese university, I went to the forum twice because I wanted to find a position that would allow me to utilize my experience and language skills. This is very common these days as many bilingual students from Japan attend the forum. I was able to receive offers from several firms for both internships and full time positions in several industries. I understand that many may feel discouraged from attending if they are in Japan, but this should not be something to worry about.

Kazuki: The majority of the candidates attending the forum are Japanese nationals who have English skills. However, in recent years, students who are studying Japanese have also increased. Many companies do not require native level Japanese, so I encourage non-Japanese nationals to apply and attend. The companies list their language requirements, so it is easy to determine which companies may be a good fit. For example, U.S. branches of finance companies in Japan may not require native level Japanese, and IT companies may also require minimal Japanese for technical positions. Japanese companies have rigorous training programs, so one does not need to have a major in computer science to be hired as a system engineer.

<Who attends (exhibits)?>

211 companies attended the forum in 2016 held at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. Japanese and multinational companies alike are present, hiring for both internships and fulltime positions. Companies include Japanese giants such as All Nippon Airways (ANA), Fast Retailing (UNIQLO), Fuji Television, Hakuhold Media Partners, Hitachi, Japan Airlines, and Mitsubishi to name a few. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bank of Japan, the Development Bank of Japan, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are also in attendance. From the non-Japanese side, companies including Amazon, Accenture, AIG, Bain and Company, Goldman Sachs, Deloitte, General Electric, and Twitter are regulars. The cost of flying in interviewers and

securing booth space at the forum is not negligible. Therefore, companies are very likely to make offers to compensate costs.

Kazuki: If you are a student in Japan planning to attend the forum, be careful in how you apply. Some companies maintain strict lines between Boston candidates and Japan candidates, and the hiring schedule and criteria may be different. Make sure you check to see which process better fits your schedule and talents. In general, the Boston process is much shorter and a greater emphasis is placed on being international and having language skills. Strategize where you would stand out more and choose the best process in which to apply.

Madoka: As Kazuki notes, it is important to know which process to apply through. You also want to see if some companies allow you to dual track and apply through both the Boston and Japan process. Furthermore, many companies offer summer internships for university seniors. These competitive internships usually have a high chance of becoming fulltime offers.

<Why attend to BCF?>

The traditional process for getting a job in Japan, especially if one goes through the regular Japanese process, can take over 4 months. The average student can submit 60 entry sheets, take 40 online assessment tests, get 30 interviews (some of which are multiple rounds), and walk away with 3 job offers. The Boston process is much more appealing as it is shorter. While you do pre-apply online and may have a phone interview prior to the forum, you can get a job offer (or multiple ones) in 3 days. The cost of participating is not cheap, but the experience of researching, and interviewing is sure to translate into success later on.

Madoka: I went twice and must say that I was much more prepared the second time around. It is a very intimidating environment to be in with over 10,000 students all dressed in suits hunting for jobs. That being said, it really helped with my interview skills, and I felt much more comfortable the second time around.

Kazuki: It was the first time for me to attend this year. Obviously, the amount of experience and knowledge I had on the Boston Career Forum was less compared to repeaters like Madoka. However, I had many Senpai's and friends that had already attended the forum before which enabled me to learn from their experiences and ask them advice. This process contributed to my success for sure. As mentioned before, the forum is truly worth the investment you need to pay. An entire interview process will finish in 3 days, which is unthinkable in the normal job hunting process in Japan. We strongly encourage you to participate at the forum, and would like to share what we have learned throughout our experiences which we hope will be useful for your success at the forum as well.

BEFORE THE FORUM

<How did you apply?>

Forum participant companies will open up application periods roughly 3 months before the forum date. Students can then apply online to companies, submitting a Japanese and English resume they create online. Occasionally, companies will have essay questions that need to be completed in either English or Japanese. Sometimes, companies may conduct online assessments tests that include personality or math tests. After an initial screening, many companies will schedule Skype or telephone interviews. These interviews can start as early as 2 months before the forum. Companies also sort through candidates as the applications come in, so getting your materials in early shows a high level of interest.

Madoka: I applied beforehand, starting 4 months before the forum. I ended up having more than enough interviews before the forum, and had set times and dinner engagements locked in even before my departure. While you can also walk up to company booths at the forum, they may not have any interview slots available. You also usually have to have a very competitive resume to get a walk in appointment. In some cases, companies may request that you arrive early in Boston, or meet them at the Japan office.

Kazuki: Applying beforehand is essential. By the time the forum starts, companies already have laid out the next few days with strict schedules for first round, second round, and final interviews. They can only fit a limited number of students into these slots, so the ones that applied beforehand will always have first priority. Of course, there still are chances for walk-ins, but you usually have to be very prepared, and able to convince the company of your interest. Furthermore, there are some companies that are very limited in who they interview, only interviewing a limited pool from top notch universities. I believe it is easy to say that knowing information plays a great role in any part of the process.

<What is the timeline for planning travel?>

Once you decide to attend, you need to make your travel arrangements as soon as possible. Companies book hotels and flights years in advance for their interviewers, so there will be a very limited number of hotel rooms and flight seats at affordable prices. You should book your flight in advance and see if you can share a hotel room with your friends. Air B&B may also be an option.

Madoka: I booked my flights and hotels in June and it was still expensive. I had my own room and I stayed relatively close to the Hynes Convention Center.

Kazuki: I booked my flights and hotel in September. Obviously it was very late, so the room was comparatively expensive. I wanted to have my own room, but there were not many places

available around the convention center so I ended up staying at a hotel which was 30 minutes away by taxi. I strongly recommend booking a hotel earlier since it will make your life very easy for the 3 days. Also, one company I applied to asked me to come to Boston 2 days before the forum even started in order to hold a group interview. I was not able to make it since I already booked my flight to arrive the day before the Forum. Although they still assigned me to participate in a separate interview process held in Japan, I was very frustrated from the back and forth. You may want to budget extra time before the forum to account for such incidents that may occur and affect your competitive edge. You have the plus of also becoming more acclimated to the time zone as well.

<How did you choose which companies to apply to?>

Most companies do not limit students from applying based on major. Some companies require native level English and/or Japanese, but others do not. Students should make strategic decisions based on their language skills, prior experience, and future goals. They should also consider how competitive each company may be. If one only applies to popular companies, beating the competition to secure an offer may be more difficult. It is advisable that students apply to 5 dream positions, 10 middle range positions, and 5 safety positions.

Madoka: How many and which companies to apply to depends on the person. I applied to 7 companies in 2 industries. I knew what industry I wanted to work in, so I applied to companies in those specific industries. Some of my friends were unsure of what they wanted to do, so they applied to at least 10 companies across different industries. There is no limit to how many companies you can apply to, but your time is limited in Boston. At some point you will need to decide which interview to prioritize when there is a conflict. You should be clear about which companies are higher priorities to you, so that you can quickly make decisions when you are stressed. My days were packed with back to back interviews, even Saturday.

Kazuki: I applied to 9 companies across 3 industries. I applied to 2 dream positions, and all the others were middle range positions. At the site, I walked-in to many companies and do not remember the final number. Walking in is not difficult, provided that one has a Japanese and English resume. Simply printing the CFN resume may not be to your advantage, as it is not formatted in a print friendly manner. If you want to convince an employer to ever interview you as a walk-in, you should have an attractive resume. Furthermore, you need to have some conversation points before walking up to the booth. If you have nothing to say, they will not bother to contact you later for an interview. I prepared points before walking up to booths to show that I knew the industry and to present that I was truly interested in the company and position. I believe this led to my higher success rate. When in doubt, one should walk-in as one chance is better than none and because the traditional Japanese process would never allow for this type of flexibility.

<What are the best practices for entry sheets?>

To apply to companies at the forum, one needs to submit a resume and responses to occasional essay questions. This process is referred to as the entry process, with the documents being submitted referred to as being an entry sheet. In general, the career forum website will indicate what categories you are expected to fill out, and you do so in both languages. Having a native speaker proof read your documents is crucial as you want to prevent mistakes. Your entry documents are the first face you present to companies, and it can determine whether or not you will make it to the next stage. For essay questions, you will be expected to express why you are interested in the industry and company. Including your future goals and what attracts you to the company is important.

Madoka: If the company requires a cover letter, it should be one page in Times New Roman 12. You should ask someone to proofread your documents and give you feedback beforehand. Also, if you are uploading a resume you have created, it should be one page maximum. Some employers will not read 2 pages, especially if one does not have work experience, and is a new grad. Resumes should emphasize highlights that are relevant to the company you are applying for.

Kazuki: I know many students often write “I want to work at an international company” on their cover letters and essays, but I advise against this. What exactly is an international company? Every company that attends the forum is international to some degree. And, one must also be careful. Even at a U.S. company, if the clients are all Japanese, the work environment can be very Japanese as well. Just because the company is a U.S. or foreign company that does not automatically mean that the work culture is American. Instead of saying that you are interested in working for an international company, it would be far more effective to show that you are interested in the company’s products, business, and people.

Madoka: Also, just to clarify, there are two entry sheets for the Boston Career Forum which you need to submit. One is the DISCO (company that holds the Career Forums) entry sheet which is needed in order to submit applications to individual companies from the career forum website. You need to write it in both English and Japanese and there is a considerable amount to write. So, make sure to start early and keep on revising it over and over again. My personal advice is to make it perfect since the questions asked are general ones, and could be reused for different entry sheets as well.

Kazuki: The second step will be the entry sheets you will need to submit to individual companies. These are combined with the basic information you have already submitted to the DISCO website and are sent as a package to individual companies. When looking at the list of companies attending the Forum, there will be buttons that indicate “apply now”. There will also be notes on additional essay questions that need to be submitted for individual companies. Some

questions may require 400 character answers in Japanese. You need to be aware that for some companies, there may be a third step through company specific websites that require additional questions or processes. This is why it is ever more important to start early and be prepared. You may be able to reuse answers to some of your essay questions, so be strategic.

As a tip for writing your entry sheets in Japanese, please refer the following list which shows what words and expressions should not be used.

1. 「私」「僕」は原則避ける。（「私」の使用は一度のみ）
2. 「考える」「思う」は原則避ける。
3. 末尾に「のだ」「だ」「のである」は避ける。
4. 英語は避ける。片仮名も最小限のみ使う。
5. 「全く」「かなり」「少し」「絶対」「余り」などは避ける。
6. 比喩表現は避ける。
7. 「だから」「よって」を使わず、「したがって」と書く。
8. 美辞麗句や抽象的な言葉は避ける。
E.g. 「国際的な視野を広げる」「積極的に活動する」「多角的な観点を身につける」「活かす」「多様性」「痛感した」「衝撃を受けた」等々
9. 「アメリカ」という国は存在しない。「米国」あるいは「アメリカ合衆国」と書く。

<What are best practices for phone/skype interviews?>

Interviews will be conducted in both Japanese and English. It depends on the company what the mix is. For some companies, there may be additional online tests or case study exercises. One should be prepared to interview in both languages. The questions that are asked are very standard, so if you rehearse beforehand and have examples to demonstrate your skills, it should not be that intimidating.

Madoka: I feel that the following were the most common questions I was asked.

What made you apply to this company/position?

What is your goal for the next 5 years? How about the next 10 years?

Tell us about a challenge you overcame in the past?

What role do you play when you work in a group?

What is a recent book you have read that has left an impression?

Tell us about a news article you read that interested you.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

What other firms are you applying to?

Why are we your first choice?

Give us an example that demonstrates your teamwork/leadership/customer service/project management skills.

I would suggest brainstorming and jotting down your ideas. There will always be a question you are not prepared for but if you know what the company is looking for, and have good examples, you will be able to logically organize your thoughts and succeed. Also, do not pretend that you know the answer to something when you do not. The interviewers are professionals and you will look unprofessional if you pretend to know something when you obviously do not. It is completely ok to say that you do not know, and to also be honest about the fact that you are applying to other companies. The key is that you make each company feel that it is your first choice. I recommend looking at Glassdoor for additional interview questions and practice. If you apply to consulting firms, you can practice case studies on the web as well as there are many samples.

Kazuki: I agree with Madoka. Most of the questions asked were some variation of the ones above. I actually had the opportunity to learn about one company through my Embassy internship experience. Therefore, I was able to tailor my answer to catch the interviewer's interest and eventually ended up with an offer. I believe this was because I actually was able to say something different from all other candidates. Knowing what I did also helped me elaborate why I was interested in the company.

<What to wear and bring>

- The style for job hunting in Japan is very conservative. Black or navy suits are the norm with white collared button down shirts. This is not the time to be unique with different colored shirts or suits. Ties should not be that flamboyant, and skirt suits are preferred for females. Shoes should be black and polished, females should wear stockings, and any bag that is carried should be black with no visible design or logo. The bag needs to be large enough to fit a notebook, extra copies of your resume, and some snacks (buying food in the convention center can be expensive and you may not have time to eat lunch. For example, a small clam chowder was \$6 and a water bottle was \$3.)
- If you are ethnically Japanese, the expectation is that your hair is black. Dyed hair is considered unprofessional and all Japanese students in Japan go from having blond hair to having jet black hair during the job hunting season. If you are not ethnically Japanese, your hair should preferably be in one color with no visible roots. Earrings are frowned upon for men, and only minimal studs are acceptable for women. Other jewelry, beyond a watch is not recommended.
- For females, minimal makeup is the norm. Natural colored eye shadow is the safe default and excessive use of artificial colors (blush, highlighter) is not recommended.
- Having extra copies of your resume is the key. The forum website will generate your resume (entry sheet) in a rather ugly- -not so printer friendly mode. It would be better to have clean copies of your resume (possibly listing additional experiences you have had since you originally submitted your entry documents) in both languages. If you have time you can have different versions of your resume based on the industries you are applying to. 20 copies each in both English and Japanese is a safe number. Although there are printers at the site, make sure to take the resumes since there will most definitely be a long line.
- Boston can get really cold in November so have a jacket you can wear over your suit. There is a cloak check at the forum so you can leave your jacket there. It tends to get very crowded so you may want to carefully budget your time.
- Having a working international data plan and portable wi-fi is essential as you will be frequently contacted for changes in interview times. You need to be easily reached by companies so that you can head to interviews and dinners and even receive potential offers. If you do not confirm your data plan before usage, you may end up with a huge fee. Interviewers will actually call you on your phone multiple times at the site.
- Install Uber. I recommend heading to the site using Uber since it is significantly cheaper than a traditional taxi. Public transport can be used as well. Check traffic times and budget extra time. If there is anything you do not want to be late to, it is the Boston Career Forum.
- Do not forget your name badge and entrance ticket. You can print this out at the center as well. But, it is just a waste of time so make sure to already have them ready before you fly to

Boston.

- And always, cash. You never know when you will need it.

<How to handle dinner receptions during BCF>

For candidates that are on a priority list, invitations will be extended to dinners or receptions. Attending these demonstrates your commitment to the company as these receptions/dinners will likely conflict and your attendance is taken as a sign that the company truly is your first choice. These night time activities are not social functions, but are a final interview. You will be watched in how you interact with others, how you converse, and how your manners are. Start by learning all the names of the people around you, including your competition. Bring shy competitors into the conversation and recognize them for the talents they have. Try and have a few questions you can ask your interviewers as they will likely be the people in the specific division you applied to work for. Asking thoughtful questions shows that you did your research beforehand.

Kazuki: Obviously, you should make an effort to eat what is served to you. This does not mean you should eat things you are allergic to, but if you come across as too picky, it will not leave a positive impression. Similarly, if you feel compelled to drink alcohol, and do not wish to do so—then, you can quietly tell the waiter to bring you a non-alcoholic drink that looks like an alcoholic drink. People tend to leave you alone if they think you are drinking but tend to ask many questions if you are not. Do not speak while eating. Show a signal to wait by hand gesture if someone asks you a question while you have food in your mouth. Be the person that starts a conversation when there is about to be an awkward silence. Make sure to wear a suit and think the dinner as an interview as well.

AFTER BCF

<What should you do after BCF?>

Some companies will give you an offer at the forum while others will give you an offer by email after returning to Japan. Usually each offer will have a deadline for commitment. Check to see if the contract is legally binding (it usually is not). Often, you are given a paper contract to sign the Saturday or Sunday following the forum. Sign the contract if you wish to go to the firm. After you come back to Japan, someone in the HR department will most likely contact you to provide additional information on the position. As 2018 job offers can be made as early as Fall 2016, it is expected that things will change. You do not need to feel bad about cancelling your offer and taking another one.

IN CONCLUSION

<Last comments>

Madoka: For me, I went to the forum twice. The first time, I did not receive any offers. However, the second time I received offers from every firm I applied to. The difference was in the time I prepared for the whole process including speaking to many university alumni who worked at the companies I was interested in, conducting lots of research, perfecting my entry documents, and practicing for interviews. I do not think I was necessarily outstandingly smart. I just think that I was well prepared and very lucky. Luck will play an important role in job hunting. Even if you receive no job offers, it does not signal that you are incompetent. It can merely mean that you applied to too few companies, or that you were not prepared. If you assume that everyone is applying to Google and Facebook, and you only apply to Google and Facebook, it is natural that you may not get an offer. This does not mean you are not smart. If you applied to 20 companies, and could not convince them that they were your first choice, this also does not mean that you are not smart. You have to consider your strengths, interests, personality, and ability to handle storytelling as you decide where to apply to and how many companies to apply to.

Kazuki: I was not expecting much from this forum. I decided to attend it during September, and compared to many other students, I believe I was not prepared as much. However, the outcome was something that exceeded the expectations I had. I strongly believe that it is worth the 300,000 (dollar amount?) Yen I paid. I do regret not planning earlier though. Since I was only able to book a hotel 30 minutes away by taxi, transportation costs were expensive and I had to wake up earlier to ensure I was on time. I could have used other transportation means but I did not want to waste my time searching for signs telling me where to go. Also, the fact that I did not plan earlier meant that I had less time to prepare. Even though I wanted to apply to a lot more companies, considering the scarcity of time, I decided to focus more on a few select companies to increase my chances. It is crucial to prepare early, and for those who think of attending, I advise you to start early. I truly benefitted from my internship experience which helped me think of the skills I had that would be applicable in the real world while giving me a look into different industries. I also benefitted from the many alumni I spoke to who shared best practices with me. Please utilize those who have gone to the Forum as your mentors. Their advice will truly help. I am more than willing to provide you with insight.

BCF Planning Schedule

May	Start thinking about which companies to apply to. Although the companies attending the event might not be fully listed on the internet yet, you can have a rough idea of which companies are attending by looking at information from the previous year.
June	Book travel arrangements. If you want to book a hotel close to the site, without exaggeration, you should book it in June (In Kazuki’s case, he tried to book a room in September, and the closest location he could find was 30 minutes away.) Obviously, the faster you book your plane tickets, the cheaper they will be. The same goes for hotel rooms. Make sure to have an active account on the CFN website so that you are ready to apply to companies, with finished English and Japanese resumes, as soon as the companies start accepting applications/entry sheets.
July	In addition to the standard resumes you create through the CFN website, prepare basic templates to use for resumes and cover letters. It is a good idea to have ones that can be used universally in addition to ones that are industry specific. Many companies will either ask you to submit essay responses to questions as well. Make sure to prepare your responses for standard questions. Even if these questions do not come up in the entry sheet process, you can anticipate that they will come up during the interview. Expect questions such as “Tell us about something that you spent a lot of time on during your university experiences?” or “Why are you specifically interested in this industry/company?”
August	Fine tune both your English and Japanese resumes to submit to companies. You may need to modify what you submit based on the industries you are applying to. Make sure your English resume has more detail to fit standard American styles. The Japanese resume does not need to be as detailed. Prepare answers for the essay questions companies ask in the entry sheet process. Always have a native speaker review your documents before you submit them. This is the first interaction you will have with the company and you want your first impression to be a good one.
September	Start applying. Not all companies will be listed at this time, but more than a 100 should be listed on the career forum website. Many companies will also require you to apply from their own website after you apply from the career forum website. Therefore, you need to keep in mind that there may be several steps in order to apply to one company. Do not wait until the last minute to apply. You do not want to be disqualified due to technical issues and you do not do yourself a favor by applying last minute. You indicate your interest to the company by applying as early as possible and they will start interviewing from the first batch of applications that come in. They may give out all their interview slots before you even get your application in if you wait too long.
October	If you applied in September, some companies and firms will start contacting you and ask you to do web examinations. Sometimes, companies will also ask for ask for a

	<p>phone interview, skype interview, video (recorded) interview, or an interview at the company's Japan branch. Companies without a Japan presence tend to be a bit more hands on before the forum to identify candidates. Companies well established in Japan usually steer candidates to interviews at Boston after the web test.</p>
<p>November</p>	<p>If you have successfully proceeded through the interview processes, all that is left are the interviews at Boston. Prepare throughout the month. Do not forget to manage your schedules and ask Professors if you can skip class for the week. If you based in Japan, there will most likely be mid-term exams during the period. Make sure to provide plenty of advance notice to your professors so that they understand the importance and need for your absence. Make sure to have a detailed schedule for your time in Boston. The site will be very large, so you need to plan out your routes to different interviews. If you are lucky, you will a few rounds of interviews at the Forum and secure a tentative offer. Do not worry if you have open time in your schedule as this time will likely be filled by second and third round interviews. Also, see what companies except walk-in's so that you can test your luck at companies that may be of interest.</p>
<p>December</p>	<p>If you apply to companies using the walk-in approach at the forum, then there is a good chance that your interviews will be postponed until after you return to Japan. These interviews will be held in between the latter half of November and December, so make sure to prepare for those as well. You might think you have the advantage of more preparation time for the interview, but do not forget that you are most likely competing with others for the last open position (Those who apply earlier are most likely to be already selected). Note that there are exceptions to "walk-ins" and for some companies it is better to "walk-in". This will be touched on later.</p>