



- Welcome everyone. My name is Deb Carroll and I am the interim Director at the Mignone Center for Career Success. Welcome to the Managing Offers & Decisions webinar.
- Just some quick housekeeping. I will be turning my camera off for the formal presentation, which I'm hoping to keep under 40 minutes. And then I will be back on camera for the Q&A at the end. Note that your questions can be asked anonymously, and please use the upvote feature so we can minimize duplication.
- My main goal for this presentation is to get you comfortable talking about an offer with an employer. Different organizations hire on different timelines, so some of you may be in the process of searching for jobs and internships that start in a few months, while others of you are applying for opportunities that will start in summer 2025. Some of you may currently have an offer in hand, and some of you may be just starting your search. Hopefully, this information will be helpful to you wherever you are in your process.

Offers in Context



- Inflation and global conflict
- Inconsistent economic and labor market news
- Increased distance between offer dates and start dates

Selected Sources:

- [Economists say the labor market is strong — but job seekers don't share that confidence. Here's why, CNBC 2/2/24](#)
- [Why Is It So Hard For Recent College Graduates To Find A Decent Job? Forbes 2/15/24](#)
- [Hiring Boom Continues, but Signs of a Cooling Labor Market Boost Rate-Cut Hopes, WSJ 3/8/24](#)

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I want to start by saying that job and internship offers should always be considered in the context of current labor market and entry-level hiring. Every year is different, and within every year things can change from month to month.

This influences how many offers you could get, the leverage you have with employers to negotiate, and if you do get multiple offers, the impact you can have on your peers by hanging on to multiple offers for too long.

Right now, there are a lot of conflicting opinions and uncertainty about the economy. There are some indicators that the labor market is strong, including low unemployment rates, but it doesn't necessarily fit with entry-level hiring. Uncertainty usually causes employers to hire more conservatively. In addition, some employers in some sectors, like finance and consulting, have been recruiting earlier and earlier ahead of actual start dates, so they need to hire conservatively to account for economic changes that might take place in the year or more between hiring and onboarding.

Because of this uncertainty, we've seen employers cutting hiring goals and delaying start dates. Overall Harvard students fare well, even in tight job markets, but you will probably have to apply more broadly and may not have as many options as you would hope.

Offer & Negotiation Themes



- Maintain professional relationships
- Stay in communication
- Respect people's time
- "Do your research"

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With that context in mind, a few things you will hear me say throughout this presentation are listed here. At the end of the day, you should always be trying to maintain your professional relationships throughout your job or internship search. Even if you decline an offer, you can keep people you've met in your network. You never know when your paths might cross again, or when someone might be able to help you take your next step.

Some of the key ways to maintain those relationships are by staying in communication, respecting people's time, and doing your research. I will be circling back to those themes throughout this presentation.

College vs Employment



- Offers don't all come at the same time
- Extensive phone communication
- More personal than College admissions

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One of the reasons students find offers stressful is that your main point of reference is applying to college when your acceptances and declines arrived through email around the same time 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.
- It can become much more personal than accepting and declining admissions, especially if you built relationships working side-by-side with people over the summer at the organization that now wants to hire you.



The Offer Process

- Say thank you
- Get it in writing
- Keep in touch
- Be an active decision-maker
- Negotiate if appropriate
- Decline and accept ASAP
- Fill out your paperwork
- Don't continue to search once you've accepted an offer

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In general, the offer and decision process follows these steps.

- When you get an offer, usually by phone but sometimes by email, your primary responsibility is to say thank you.
 - You don't need to decide on the spot, but you need to express appreciation and enthusiasm.
- Ask for the offer details in writing whenever possible – even an email helps.
- Plan to stay in touch with the organization – returning phone calls and emails.
- **You will not come to a decision simply by allowing time to pass by.** You need to be an active decision-maker and talk to people – friends and family, other organizations that interest you, other people at the organization who are already doing the same work, etc. Online forums like Glassdoor.com have employer and internship reviews that might be helpful, as well.
- 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, even if you end up saying no to their offer.
 - Declining offers also allows a spot to open for the next student in line, which could be your friend or classmate.
- Fill out all your paperwork, and don't continue to search elsewhere once you've accepted an offer.

- Continuing to interview after you have accepted can jeopardize both your existing and future job opportunities.

Keep in Touch

Why they keep calling...

- They have made a commitment to you.
- They want to make sure you have all the information you need.
- They have other students in line for the position if you say no.
- They suspect they are not your first choice.



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Specifically looking at that “keep in touch step,” students sometimes complain that they get a lot of phone calls once they receive an offer. One way to think about this is with a dating analogy.

- When an employer gives you an offer, they are saying, we really like you and want to stop seeing other people.
- Especially if you already worked at an organization over the previous summer, you have real relationships with mentors and coworkers.
- It is human nature that now that they have said they want you on the team, they want you to commit.
- It is much easier for them to wait for your answer if you are reassuring them that the feeling is mutual. So, it is important to the relationship that you keep in touch.

They also want you to have everything you need to decide, and they have other students next in line for the position.

- If you wait too long and say no, it is often that student who was next in line who loses out.

And sometimes the employer can tell that they are not your first choice.

- Employers don’t **just** want someone who can do the job, they want someone who wants

to do the job for them, so returning calls and connecting with people is a way to demonstrate your continued interest.

- This can be time consuming, so remember to do everything you can to come to a decision as soon as possible.

Asking for More Decision Time



- Maintain professional relationships
- Stay in communication
- Respect people's time

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The most common thing students want to negotiate is **MORE TIME** to decide, so sometimes you are trying to extend that “keep in touch” phase event longer.

- If you opt to do this, you will need to manage your time, relationships, and communications with the employer.
- It is reasonable for an employer to want to communicate often once they've extended an offer.
- You can do damage to your personal reputation and your relationship with an organization if you stop returning phone calls or emails.

Also remember that the more time you take, the harder it becomes for you to manage all the relationships and communications that go with keeping that offer open.

- It is your job to maintain good relationships and make sure they know you are still interested; otherwise, they assume that you are not.

This balancing act, keeping one offer on the “back burner” while pursuing others, becomes very stressful for students. Sometimes you need to remind yourself that this is just your first job, what MCS refers to as your “next step,” and it will not define your lifelong career.

Remember also that it is ok to turn down an offer you know you are not interested in. Your comfort with this may depend on your own situation, additional prospects, financial

circumstances, visa requirements, and the state of the economy or hiring market, so it is often a good time to connect with an advisor at MCS if you have concerns.

With this in mind, you should not need to keep more than one or two offers open at a given time.

Communication



Who and How

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When you have a question or issue with your offer, I always recommend reaching out to your Human Resources or recruiting contact.

- Part of the HR function is to field awkward or difficult questions so you can more easily maintain your relationships with your manager and other people you might work side-by-side with.
- You can also ask HR who would be the most appropriate person for you to speak with and let them direct you.

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 have gotten to know.

- You are the person who has met all the parties involved, so you need to use your judgment, but sometimes HR helps advocate 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, but otherwise, you should avoid asking any sensitive questions over email, including asking for more decision time.
- It is very hard to control for tone of voice in an email. (You do not want to be using emoji or exclamation points to emphasize your enthusiasm.)
- And you want to listen carefully and note 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.

Communication



Confrontation vs Conversation

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Students often fear that asking questions or negotiating may seem confrontational to the employer.

- Remember that a negotiation is just asking questions, and if you are doing it in a respectful and prepared way, you are just having a conversation and cannot hurt your relationship with an employer by asking a question.
- Even if you are concerned that asking for something like more time to decide will make you appear uninterested, remember again that you are just asking a question, and there is a lot you can communicate to make sure the employer knows that your interest is sincere.

If you decide to negotiate, think about it as a difficult conversation rather than a negotiation. Negotiation implies a zero-sum game, meaning that someone must lose something 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.

However, keep in mind that it is not always an even playing field. For example, in certain sectors or in uncertain economic conditions, the employer has more power than they would in other circumstances. I mentioned in the beginning that we are in an uncertain time as we speak. Still, you have the most power to negotiate or ask questions after the

offer is given but before you accept.

Communication

The Positive Sandwich

Positive statement:

- “I’m really excited about this opportunity.”

Your question/inquiry about the offer:

- “I’m wondering if there is any flexibility with the decision timeline.”

Positive statement:

- “I really appreciate you taking the time to discuss this with me. Thank you for all your help.”



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Once you’ve identified who to speak with, you want to plan the content of your conversation. I always recommend using what is commonly referred to as “the positive sandwich.” You want to begin and end any request with some sort of appreciative and positive statement.

For example:

- Start with “I’m really excited about this opportunity.”
- Then get to the substance 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 are not making a demand.
 - Another magic phrase 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 your questions or requests, 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.”
- Most likely the person you will speak with will have to check in with someone else, so don’t necessarily expect that your questions will be resolved in the one phone call.
- Once that person gets back to you with a response, whether it’s yes or no, you at least

then have more information on which to base your decision.

MAY 2024						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5 <i>Lincoln's Birthday</i>	6	7	8	9 ★	10 ✓	11
12 <i>Mother's Day</i>	13 ✓	14 ✓	15 ✓	16 ✓	17 ✓	18
19	20 ✗	21 ✗	22 ✗	23 ★	24	25
26 <i>Memorial Day</i>	27	28	29	30	31	

Timing

- *Maintain professional relationships*
- *Stay in communication*
- *Respect people's time*
- *"Do your research"*

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The time between when you receive your offer and when you accept is when you have the most leverage for reasonable requests.

- **DO NOT** wait until the last minute. Respecting people's time is one of the best ways to maintain relationships, even if you say no.

As an example, if an employer gives you two or three weeks to decide, you should ask questions and consider negotiating in that first week.

- The employer then has time to respond to your requests and get you the updated information you need. If you wait too long, the employer has to scramble, and that makes them less inclined to go out of their way.

If what you hope to negotiate is more time to make your decision, you also want to consider how much time you need.

- Rather than ask to extend your deadline one more day, and then on that day ask for one more day, 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 it 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.

Remember that the longer you drag out the process, the more stressful it is for **YOU**. Though it is sometimes daunting to decide, it also takes a huge weight off your shoulders and lets you get excited about the opportunity you've chosen.

Recruiting Offer Guidelines

SUMMER 2024 STARTS:

- 2-weeks or longer or a mutually agreed upon decision window

SUMMER 2025 STARTS:

- 2-weeks or longer or a mutually agreed upon decision window

As a guideline, for summer 2025 start dates, we recommend an offer decision deadline of October 10, 2024 or 3 weeks from date of offer, whichever is later.

Email: recruiting@fas.harvard.edu



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The theme of this slide is, “it depends.”

With offers going out so far in advance of start dates, it is difficult to identify what could be considered a reasonable timeline. It is typical for employers to ask candidates to reply to an offer within 2-weeks. However, MCS encourages employers to extend additional flexibility for summer 2025 offers. We are happy to advise on asking for more time and can advocate on students' behalf on a case-by-case basis. Note that offer requests usually take time to resolve, so make sure you reach out to us and/or your employer as soon as possible.

If you receive an offer and would like more time than is initially extended to you to decide, we recommend reaching out to request a phone conversation to ask for more time. Using the communication techniques I've already described, you may ask about any flexibility to extend the deadline, and perhaps suggest a specific timeline that will work for you. This could be an additional week, through the end of your summer experience, or specific dates like September 1st, or September 15th, or October 1st, depending on when the offer is extended and other specifics.

While MCS has a recommended offer guideline suggesting that employers give students until October 10th to decide, this is really a tool for you to advocate for more time for

yourself, but most often you will not get an employer to extend a decision deadline that far. As mentioned in the previous slide, you want to think about what other things you have in process and how much time you might need to see them through. And as mentioned in the beginning, you cannot expect all your offers to line up at the same time, so you need to be thoughtful, prioritize, and plan to make some decisions before you have all your offers in place.

Again, MCS is always willing to advise on offers and potentially advocate on a student's behalf. However, we need lead time in order to do that, so reach out to us as soon as possible at recruiting@fas.harvard.edu if you are experiencing an issue.

What might be negotiable?

- *Decision timeline*
 - *Start date*
 - *Salary*
 - *Bonus*
 - *Stock options*
 - *Equity*
 - *Relocation*



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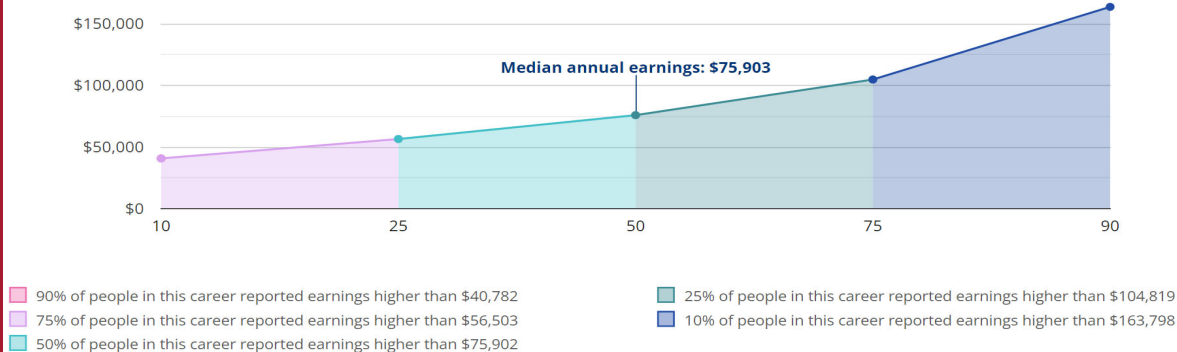
So what else is negotiable?

- Some things are not negotiable, like benefits that are standard across the whole organization.
- And note that some organizations will not negotiate and offer all entry-level hires the same contract to be equitable.
- If you decide to negotiate something other than decision timeline, that employer really should be your first choice.
- Because if they meet your demands, it is poor form to then turn them down.
- Approach the employer with humility and remember the positive sandwich.
- It is always best to prioritize what is important to you, because you may only get one ask if the employer agrees to it.
- If the answer to your first ask is no, it is ok to move toward something else on your list.
- For example, if you want to negotiate on salary but the employer says no, then you can ask about bonus structure, assuming from their tone that it seems ok to ask for something else.
- However, two “asks” is usually it.

Note again that for many entry-level positions for undergraduates, salary is not actually negotiable.

- The organization gives the same starting salary to all new hires; to be fair and for legal reasons.
- Never ask for an increase in salary without doing some research.

“Do your research”



- Salary Tools/Calculators
 - Salary.com
 - Payscale.com
 - Glassdoor.com
- Job Market Insights
 - Comparable positions
 - Alumni

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In an ideal world, you’d have a competing offer, and therefore a specific salary to use in your negotiation. However, that is not always feasible. The alternative and complement is to do salary research. Keep in mind that salary is not about what you need or what you are worth, it is about what the market will pay for your skills and experience, so online salary tools are a great way to start. Salary research is also important if an employer asks for a desired salary on an application or in an interview.

- With online tools, you enter a job title, location, industry, etc., and the results might be a range of salaries that look like a bell curve or the graph on this slide.
- It is important to know what you are looking at before estimating where you belong on the scale.
- For example, if you searched “marketing coordinator,” and the resulting range is just new grads, as a Harvard student, it is reasonable to negotiate for something higher than the mean.
- However, if the data is for all people who hold that position, even if they’ve had it for five years, then you should consider negotiating for a salary in the 25-50% range.
- Regardless, when you negotiate, don’t lead the conversation with a specific number. You ask whether there is any flexibility with the salary and see how the employer responds. If they try to get you to name a number first, always select a range rather than an exact number.

Another way of doing your research is by searching for similar positions, or by speaking with alumni already working in the organization or in the field.

- Don't ask an alum their salary, ask them whether they negotiated and what strategies they may have used.
- And listen to alumni advice knowing that your circumstances could be different than theirs.
 - For example, sometimes alumni advise to negotiate aggressively because they had done so successfully years before, but you should educate yourself about the current economic conditions before taking that approach.
 - Alums might also advise you to get a competing offer because that's what they did, not realizing how that might be more difficult depending on economic conditions or your decision timeline.

Speaking with alumni is also a great way to investigate if the job or internship is the right fit for you. And online forums like Glassdoor.com are helpful to consult before accepting an offer.

Leveraging Your Offer



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If you do find yourself with an offer, it is acceptable to approach other organizations and inform them in hopes that it helps expedite their process.

- 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.
- And 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.

“Accelerated” Interviews



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Some students with an offer from a previous summer internship or as a result of an earlier recruiting process may think about reaching out to other employers to inquire about an “accelerated” interview process.

- This is when an employer has already stated that they plan to conduct interviews at a particular time, but you want to see if you can be considered earlier.
- We only recommend doing this if you consider that organization a top choice and would be prepared to decide on a very short timeline.
- You will most likely need to share details of your existing offer, like the company name and decision timeline, to be considered for an early process.
- If the decision deadline for your current offer is less than two weeks away, you should indicate that you are also working to extend your decision deadline.
- Typically, you would need at least 2 weeks to go through even an accelerated interview process.

Also note that some employers simply will not accommodate a request for an early interview. They are not willing to alter their recruiting plan for students who request earlier interviews.

Common Scenario

When an employer says...

- We would like to hear from you by Friday.

Students hear...

- You must give us your decision by Friday.

The employer might mean to say...

- We would like to speak with you by Friday to touch base and see where you are in your decision process.

One way you might reply...

- I am very excited about this offer, but I am not sure I will be ready to decide by Friday. I would be happy to schedule a time to talk before the end of the week. Can we schedule the next call now while I have got you on the phone?

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Remember that one of the most important parts of managing the offer processes is staying in communication. What you see on this slide is a common scenario.

- 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.

Common Scenario

When an employer says...

- If you don't decide by this date, we cannot guarantee you your specific group, desk, or location.

Students hear...

- If you don't decide by this date, we will punitively take away your group specific offer and locate you in Siberia.

The reality is...

- If you are a former intern, you have worked with that specific group for the last ten weeks, and they would much rather hire you than an unknown and untested candidate. You have room to negotiate as long as you stay in communication.

One way you might reply...

- I am very excited about this offer, and this is the group I really want to work for. It's a really important decision and I want to make sure I accept with full confidence. Is there any flexibility with the group-specific decision timeline? Can we schedule another time to talk while I have got you on the phone?

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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 for a group specific offer is not reasonable, so think carefully about what else interests you and how you might explore your options 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 how you 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, and you should take the offer.

Resources and Questions



- MCS Offers Webpage
 - <https://careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/channels/negotiate-an-offer/>
- Salary Tools
 - [Job Market Insights](#)
 - Payscale.com
 - Salary.com
 - Glassdoor.com
- Industry/Sector Resources
 - Vault Industry Guides (free via MCS website)
 - Candor.co
- MCS Advisors
 - Email recruiting@fas.harvard.edu for time-sensitive offer issues
 - Drop-In Advising Monday – Friday
 - 1-2 pm virtual
 - 2-4 pm in-person
 - Schedule 30-min advising appointments via Crimson Careers

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In closing, note that getting an offer is a **GOOD PROBLEM** to have. Remember to congratulate yourself! 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 MCS.

I will leave these resources up as I answer some of your submitted questions.