Seventy undergraduate and graduate students attended the International Center and the Career Center’s first career conference for international students — the Career, Culture, and Communication Conference: Helping International Students Navigate the Global Workplace — in Cabot Hall last Saturday.

According to International Student and Scholar Advisor Whitney Sullivan, an International Center organizer for the event, students who attended the conference, which ran from 8:30 a.m. to around 4 p.m., were invited to watch and participate in nine panels and workshops. These included an alumni panel, an employer panel, an interview workshop and an internship workshop, among others. The conference was sponsored by the Tufts Career Center, the International Center (I-Center), the Arts, Sciences and Engineering (AS&E) Diversity Fund and the Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Students.

Assistant Director of Career Services and conference organizer Nicole Anderson said that the event was geared toward all international students on campus, from freshman to Ph.Ds.

“[The event had the intent of] going beyond the mechanics of a job search and helping [international students] with networking and transitioning into a new culture,” Anderson, who also oversees career programming for international students at the Career Center, said.

There was a fairly even breakdown between undergraduate and graduate students — including those from Tufts’
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts' Boston campus and the Fletcher School — who attended the event, Anderson said. Approximately 20 of the 120 students who registered for the conference were first-years.

“Whenever a program is done for international students, [first-years] tune in early,” Anderson said. “The freshmen know to start looking and to get accustomed. I would’ve liked to see more students in general, though, because I think the offerings were so great, and will be hard to replicate.”

The event featured two keynote speakers, according to its Student Life event page. The first, Principal at Dreambridge Consultants Judy Shen-Filerman, spoke about social and cultural norms and values relevant to students looking for jobs in the United States and offered tips for interviewing and networking. Arlene Dallalfur, a professor of sociology in international higher education and intercultural relations at Lesley University, also spoke at the conference. Dallafur’s work examines pedagogy, sociology and feminist theory from a cross-cultural perspective.

According to Anderson, Shen-Filerman collaborates with top business schools, working extensively with international students and bringing them to special career sessions.

“With the international population being so large and diverse, I felt that there was not only a need for a job search, but also need for help with cultural nuances,” she said.

Anderson explained that some international students studying in the U.S. plan to return to their home countries for their careers. This poses a challenge for students attempting to contact employers who are very far away.

Sophomore Alizée Weber, who attended the conference, said that Shen-Filerman gave a great presentation on the main cultural challenges international students face during their internship and job search processes.

“She highlighted the importance of storytelling as a vital tool for effective self-marketing, encouraging us to include stories in our elevator pitches and cover letters,” she told the Daily in an email.

According to Anderson, Dallafar, a native of Iran, spoke about international communication in her keynote address.

“Both speakers were excellent and practical,” Anderson said. “They included interactive activities and exercises in their presentations. It was not like a figurehead giving another lecture.”

She said that other guest speakers and attendees of the event included immigration attorney Richard Iandoli, who spoke about the logistics of post-graduation work permissions, and Ingrid Goldblum-Block, a consultant at Mosaic Careers. Tufts Tamasha, the Bollywood-Fusion dance team, also performed at the end of the event.

“I think that, overall, the conference did a great job of covering all aspects of international students’ job search process, addressing the cultural, emotional, and legal challenges,” Weber said. “Knowing that Tufts cares enough about its international student population to organize such events, and that the International and Career Centers are there to support us is really nice.”

Planning for the conference began last winter, when Anderson first learned about Shen-Filerman and contacted her, Anderson said. She had originally wanted to bring Shen-Filerman on campus next spring, but decided that the fall semester would be a more appropriate time.

“It slowly evolved into a larger event where we worked with the I-Center and decided to revolve a large workshop-like setting around [Shen-Filerman’s] speech,” she said.

She explained that the Career Center also sent out a pre-event survey to about 750 students to find out what kind of workshops they wanted to see at the event. Approximately 150 students responded, and planners organized the conference based on those results.
Weber also said that she wished the conference had not been scheduled during midterm season.

“I know some of my friends...were too busy with studying to take a whole day off, yet wish they could have attended,” she told the Daily in an email. “Scheduling the event a little earlier during the year would allow for more students to participate.”

Anderson said that following this year’s conference, the centers are aiming to make the event either annual or biannual.

“Overall, it was a really great experience to be able to put this conference together,” she said. “There were elements from a career perspective that are different from what we offer to the larger population; we are thinking more broadly to cater to more students’ needs.”