



Guide to Education Abroad & Career Development

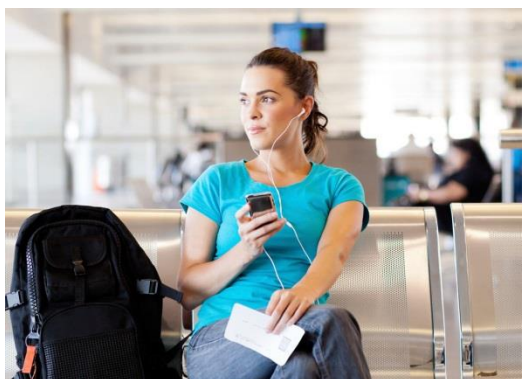
The goal of this guide is to provide students with a framework to understand the impact and added value of study abroad for their career development. Regardless of duration or destination, we believe students will benefit from considering the career implications of their decision to study abroad.



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1] The Career Implications of Study Abroad



Study abroad is one of the most exciting and challenging experiences you will have during your college years. It may have been the first time you lived in another culture, traveled internationally, or learned a foreign language. It has the potential to provide you with a fresh outlook and unique perspective on a career you've been thinking about after graduation. Even if your career goals aren't yet clear, studying abroad has the potential to clarify the direction you may like to take, give you a new perspective on your academics, and strengthen your skills set and overall employability.

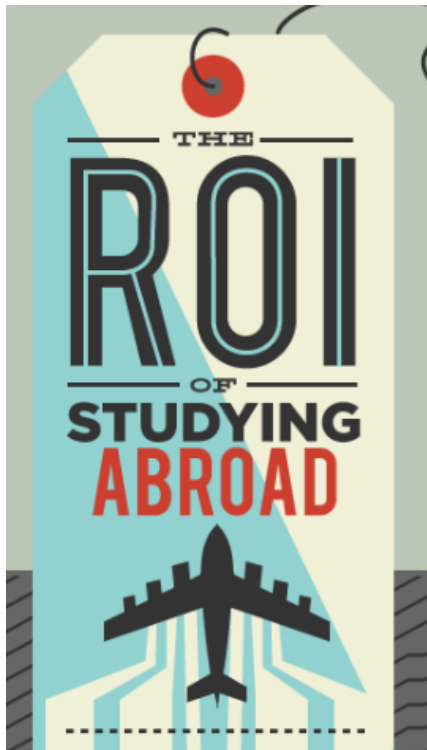


Given the impact of globalization on the U.S. economy and in light of the new skills in demand by businesses, nonprofits, and government, it's to your advantage to consider the career implications of your study abroad experience. Study abroad provides a singular opportunity for you to set yourself apart from other job seekers and to build valuable new intercultural skills and competencies. While you may not have had a clear career direction at the time you decided to study abroad, research shows that the experience is viewed as very important years later in shaping career mobility and influencing the choice of graduate study or work abroad.

So let's get started in helping you think through your study abroad experience and maximize the benefits of your unique decision to study in another part of the world!

2] The Career Connection –Do Employers Value Study Abroad Experience?

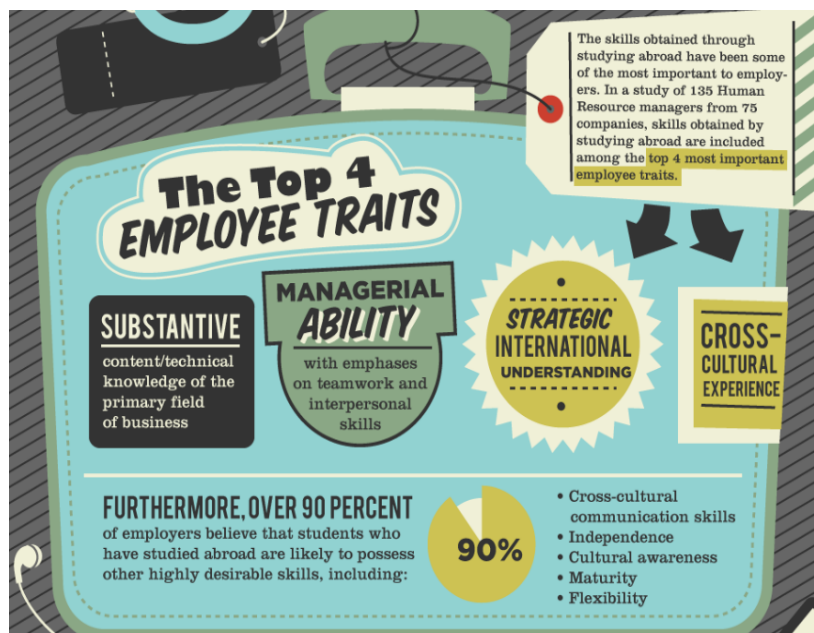
Yes, they do! Of course, if you're planning to work for an international NGO or a multinational corporation, your international experiences may well be part of the job description and overall requirements for employment. But, in most cases, regardless of the sector or field, there are important tangible benefits to your study abroad experience—particularly if you understand how best to market your skills and competencies. Job applicants with international experience will stand out for many reasons, including the following:



- ❖ Today's global marketplace demands increased adaptability, cross-cultural sensitivity, political awareness, and flexibility
- ❖ Globalization's impact on the workplace has leaped across national borders and transcends cultures
- ❖ Employers, especially those doing business internationally, are interested in whether or not a job applicant demonstrates they have developed the requisite skills and sensitivity that make them stand out as the strongest candidate for a particular job

Numerous studies confirm the value that employers place upon applicants who have international experience. But what employers are specifically looking for are *candidates who have articulated the lessons that were learned and the intercultural and interpersonal skills that were strengthened as a result of studying abroad.*

It's easy to see why time spent studying abroad can provide you with the capacity to build and strengthen these skills and competencies. Coupled with other out-of-classroom experiences such as homestays, research, field studies or internships, the entire experience offers you an unparalleled opportunity to create a "toolkit" of competencies that will impress an employer and help you stand apart from other job applicants.



3] Upon Return to Campus: How to Effectively Market Your Study Abroad Experience to Employers



The majority of students study abroad during their sophomore or junior years. This means that you will have at least one, and perhaps two, years to “unpack” your study abroad experience upon returning to campus. This is enough time to clarify how your international experience could influence your career goals and impact your job search strategy. It’s up to you to make the case and demonstrate the link between your study abroad experience and the specific skills valued by the company or organization that you want to work for.

The following are suggested steps you can take upon return to campus:

- ❖ Visit a Career Services Advisor to revise and edit your résumé to incorporate the new interpersonal skills and intercultural competencies that you strengthened while abroad.
- ❖ Discuss ways to strengthen your cover letter to articulate how your study abroad experience is an asset for an employer.
- ❖ Participate in campus or community programs that provide opportunities to practice articulating what you learned and the steps you took to gain or strengthen intercultural and professional skills.
- ❖ Discuss your international experience with international students from the country in which you studied to gain a fresh perspective on the culture and values of that society.

As you prepare to conduct your job search, re-write your résumé, develop a cover letter, and prepare for interviews, keep in mind the qualities and skills that employers expect of a candidate who had studied abroad. These would include:

- ❖ Strong problem solving skills and keen analytic ability
- ❖ Tolerance for ambiguity and ability to adapt in new environments
- ❖ Interpersonal communications skills
- ❖ Cross-cultural competencies (could include language skills and ability to work well in different cultural settings)
- ❖ Personal traits such as character, self-reliance, and dependability



4] Strengthening Your Career Toolkit: How to Internationalize Your Résumé

Crafting an effective résumé

A résumé is a marketing tool and often the first way that you “introduce” yourself to an employer or someone whom you’re asking for an informational interview. It’s important to remember that it needs to change as you gain new skills and experience – or as you change the course of your career after graduation. Before writing your résumé, you need to reflect upon the international skills and competencies you have gained from your study abroad experience.

While there are generally accepted formats for a résumé, it’s best to discuss your document with a career services counselor or advisor who understands your specific academic program and career interests or preferences. Audit your time abroad to highlight professional experiences and new intercultural competencies, and be prepared to describe them using specific language in your resume. You will need to develop a number of unique and individualized bullet points that show specific ways in which you gained skills and competencies during your study abroad experience. An employer will not automatically “see” what may be very obvious to you about a skill or an experience you had while studying abroad!

It’s up to you to showcase and articulate the value of critical incidents, classroom work, community engagement, or international travel – and to be able to discuss why any or all of these activities make you a strong candidate for a particular job assignment in an organization or company.

Tips:

- Keep it simple.
- Make no mistakes in spelling or documentation of dates, places, or roles.
- Write specific as opposed to overly general bullet statements – no longer than two sentences, as illustrated below.
- Make it no longer than one page in length at this stage of your life.
- Use this example for placing your study abroad program on your résumé:

Education

Kent State University

Kent, Ohio

B.A., Art History

Expected May 2016

Kent State University - Florence

Florence, Italy

Coursework in Art History and Italian Language

Sep-Dec, 2014

***If you conducted special research or an independent project, list those items here**

Other types of headers that will showcase your overseas experience and related accomplishments on your home campus include, for example:

- Cross-Cultural Campus Involvement
- Foreign Languages
- Countries Visited
- Volunteer Service

Here are examples of the type of thought-provoking phrases you might use to craft bullet statements about different international experiences on your résumé:

Strengthened Cross-Cultural Skills:

- Adapted to cultural differences and customs through daily interaction with my host family over a period of 4 months
- Overcame societal differences and fostered cultural understanding through a short-term work experience at a local business
- Gained a greater appreciation for diversity and cultural differences through voluntary service experience at a local school

Developed Language Competency/Communication Skills

- Passed proficiency examination in [name of language] or obtained certificate for intensive language study at [name of college or institute]
- Cultivated language and communication skills through sustained dialogue with my host family and others whom I met in my host community
- Learned to use nonverbal and verbal communication to overcome language barriers

Flexibility/Risk-Taking

- Learned how to adapt to unanticipated situations and improvise new plans due to periodic travel mishaps and unexpected events
- Modified my way of life to maximize exposure and opportunities for learning in my local community



5] Strengthening Your Career Toolkit: Crafting a Holistic Cover Letter

Infusing your cover letter with global dimensions

A cover letter complements the experiences outlined on your resume. It should not replicate the same information in a prose style format. It should highlight the attributes that set you apart from other candidates! One such attribute is your international experience while you studied abroad.

Tips:

- Keep it to one page
- Write it in a formal business style
- Even if it's not evident that the job requires international experience, you can highlight appropriate transferable skills gained through your time abroad (e.g., *independence, tolerance, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, ability to adapt in different environments and to work in harmony with people of differing values and backgrounds*)
- If the job is with an international NGO doing business in the part of the world where you studied, then the direct value of all your international and intercultural skills is more obvious

Articulating Skills & Competencies in an Interview

A good interview is about telling a good story. When speaking to employers, address the value of both the general and the specific skills you developed while studying abroad. It's important not to assume that the interviewer will realize how your international experience is relevant to your candidacy.



Examples might include: *You are adept at managing change; you are independent and have self-discipline while being sensitive to the needs of others. Dozens of work-related characteristics are developed abroad, which you can discuss in your interview: resourcefulness, versatility, persistence, diligence, multifaceted skills in communications, broad and strategic thinking, an ability to deal with ambiguities, courage, an ability to take on challenging work, open-mindedness, flexibility, and advanced listening and observing skills.*

Tips:

- Practice – practice – practice
- Work with your career services office to arrange a mock interview with an alumnus ideally someone who studied abroad!
- Craft examples to share in the interview that illustrate how you gained a specific interpersonal or intercultural skill during your study abroad experience

6] Need More Help?

Further Resources for Your Career Development

Utilize these resources to further build your repertoire:

- “Building Connections: Your Study Abroad Experience & Your Career.” *SUNY Binghamton*. www2.binghamton.edu/career-development-center/students/undergraduate/international-opportunities/pdf/Building%20Connections_Study%20Abroad%20and%20Your%20Career.pdf
- “International Opportunities, Industry-Specific Information.” *Duke University Career Center*. www.studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/resources/international-ops
- “Resume Tips for Your International Experience.” *University of Minnesota Learning Abroad Center*. www.umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/returnedStudents/resumeTips.pdf
- Citron, James L., and Vija G. Mendelson. “Coming Home: Relationships, Roots and Unpacking.” *Abroad View*. Essay on the challenges and opportunities of re-adjusting upon returning to campus. www.abroadview.org/return/citron_mendelson.htm
- Cuene, Kelly. “Help Employers See the Value of Your Study Abroad Experience.” *Student Branding Blog*. 28 Oct. 2009. www.studentbranding.com/help-employers-see-the-value-of-your-studyabroad-experience/
- Curran, Sheila. “The Other Side of Education Abroad: Same City, Different Results.” *International Educator* 16.6 (2007). NAFSA: Association of International Educators. An essay depicting different outcomes in a job interview that were a result of two different approaches to the same study abroad experience. www.nafsa.org/publication.sec/periodicals/international_educator_1/ie_nov_dec_2007/web_extra_other_side/
- Gardner, Phil, Linda Gross, and Inge Steglitz. “Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies.” *Collegiate Employment Research Institute, Michigan State University*, CERI Research Brief 1-2008. Excellent model of a seminar for returning students to assist them to make sense of their experience abroad, and to understand how to articulate skills learned. www.studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/people/unpacking_brief.pdf

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