

Study Abroad to Career:

Using your experience abroad for future professional benefit

In this guide you'll find:

- Ways to reflect on your study abroad experience as it relates to your future professional goals
- Why international experience matters to employers
- How to incorporate your study abroad experience into your resume
- How to communicate the importance of your study abroad experience to employers in an interview, at a career fair, during informational interviews, and on LinkedIn

“Study abroad doesn’t count to an employer unless the job candidate can say how it has made them a better person, scholar, citizen, and professional...”

Linda S. Gross, Associate Director of Career Services, Michigan State University, as quoted in The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 22, 2010

Why Reflection Matters

Reflecting on your experience as a study abroad student is a critical first step:

- You may discover things you learned that you didn’t realize
- You will be better able to articulate why your experience was meaningful
- You can take advantage of opportunities to bring up your experience in conversations with others

First, reflect generally...

- What was your favorite experience when you were abroad?
- Which experience had the most impact on you personally?
- What was the biggest difference in culture that you experienced while abroad?
- What surprised you the most about your time abroad?
- How has this experience changed you?

Adapted from: Creating Reflection on International Experience through Appreciative Advising, Megan Larsen, University of South Carolina

Now, get more specific

- How do you think your international experience will aid you in the future?
- What courses did you take that are most relevant to your future career and why?
- What did you learn about interacting with people from a different culture?
- What is an example of a time you made a cultural misstep and how did you respond?

Tip: Write down your responses to these reflection questions!

Why Study Abroad Matters

A 2008 study found that the top 4 skills that employers value from someone who has studied abroad are:

- Interacting with people who hold different interests, values, and perspectives
- Understanding cultural differences in the workplace
- Adapting to situations of change
- Gaining new knowledge from experiences

Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz (2008) Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies. CERl Research Brief 1-2008. Collegiate Employment Research Institute. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University

Ask yourself: How will I prove that I have these skills?

Keep In Mind

- Just knowing employers value international experience is not enough...
- ...Now you need to show them how your experience will benefit them:
 - On your resume
 - In an interview
 - Throughout the job search

The Resume

2 basis rules of resume writing:

1. Visually Appealing

- No templates
- Formatted consistently
- Glance-able (easy to read quickly)

2. My Experience = Your Needs

- Showcase education, skills & experiences that match the employer's needs
- Use strong action verbs and accomplishment statements to effectively communicate what you know and what you've done

Sample Action Verbs

Keep an active tone in your resume by using strong verbs:

- Cooperated
- Fostered
- Immersed
- Overcame
- Translated
- Traveled
- Exchanged
- Visited
- Enhanced
- Practiced
- Lived
- Realized
- Recognized
- Navigated
- Adapted
- Shared
- Learned

What Did You Gain from the Experience?

- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Communication skills to overcome language barriers
- Independence, self-reliance
- Problem-solving, crisis management
- Ability to deal with ambiguity
- Resourcefulness

Placement On Your Resume

There are multiple places you can showcase your study abroad on your resume....

EDUCATION

Institute for the International Education of Students, La Plata, Argentina Summer 2012

- Completed coursework in Latin American culture and society
- Demonstrated willingness to take risks through enrollment in Spanish-speaking curriculum

- Gained fluency in Spanish by living with a host family
- Examined the effect of birth control on population growth in Argentina as an independent research project

-and/or-

EXPERIENCE

English Tutor, Zemmer Primary School, Zemmer, Germany *Fall 2011*

- Developed and implemented lesson plans for 12 primary students, ages 6 to 8
- Communicated with parents regarding daily lessons, proficiency progress, and enrichment activities
- Gained fluency in German through daily communication with students and parents
- Integrated cross-cultural learning into daily lesson plans and enrichment activities through use of Skype, traditional pen pals, and guest speakers

-and/or-

CULTURAL AND TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

- Lakeshore Summit on Racism, Hope College, *May 2012*
- Institute for Healing Racism, GVSU, *December 2011*
- Lived and studied in Mumbai, India
 - Traveled extensively throughout Southeast Asia from *July to December 2011*

-and/or-

INTERNATIONAL AND CULTURAL SKILLS

- Visited three international companies in Europe: Johnson Controls, Caterpillar, and MasterCard Corporation
- Adjusted to living with a family in Ecuador, participated in local cultural events
- Completed six week field study of French language and culture in Lille, France
- Traveled throughout Spain, observed culture and enhanced language skills
- Interviewed German nationals on taxation and public health care which was incorporated into comparative analysis based research project for public policy course

Tailor Your Resume

- Always have the information displayed on your resume match what the employer is looking for. Ask yourself:
 - Would they care more about the classes I took or the cultural experiences I had?
 - Are language skills the most important aspect of my experience to emphasize?
 - Was my community involvement something worth noting?
 - Would this organization value the independent research I did while abroad?
- Take advantage of the job description –showcase how your skills and experiences align with what they're looking for
- Create a new resume for each job to which you apply
- Use a master resume to keep track of everything you've written; this makes it easier the next time to add and change aspects of your resume to match the job/organization you're applying to

Accomplishment Statements

When describing your study abroad experience on your resume, it is best to follow this 4-step process:

1. Start with an Action Verb

- Adapted to foreign living environment

2. Add Qualifiers

- Adapted to overseas living in Zemmer, Germany

3. Add Quantifiers

- Adapted to overseas living in Zemmer, Germany during a 12-month cultural exchange program

4. Speak to Outcomes

- Adapted to overseas living in Zemmer, Germany during a 12-month exchange program, while successfully completing a business degree

The Interview

Tips:

- Gather a group of SPECIFIC examples of cross-cultural experiences that will showcase the talents and skills you gained during your experience
- Practice the CAR technique when describing experiences:
 - Circumstance or Challenge
 - Action
 - Results
- This is where your reflection comes in handy – write down your best stories and examples from your time abroad!

Potential interview questions where a study abroad example would fit well:

- Describe your experience with people who are different from you.
- Tell me about how you have reacted to a stressful situation.
- Describe instances when you worked collaboratively with a diverse group of people.
- Give an example of when you had to think on your feet.
- Can you tell me about a time when you took a risk?
- What is one accomplishment that you are proud of?

Other Employer Interactions

Career Fairs

- Be prepared to describe your study abroad experience briefly to employers at a career fair
- Clearly articulate 1-2 points about why your experience was meaningful
- Example: “I am very interested in working for your company because you work with clients around the world. I studied abroad in Chile for 5 months where I took courses with Chilean students and lived with a host family. My cross-cultural communication skills and style developed a lot during my time there, and I feel comfortable working with people from other countries.”

Informational Interviews

- Don't sit back and wait for a future employer to cross your path, get out there and meet people!
- Set up meetings with individuals who have positions you'd enjoy or work at organizations where you'd like to work
- During these networking opportunities, it may be a great time to discuss your international experiences. Perhaps the person you're meeting with has spent time abroad, thereby fostering a connection

LinkedIn

Include your study abroad experience on your [LinkedIn](#) profile

Sample:

Education

Ecole supérieure de Management, du Commerce et d'Informatique

Journalism

2007 – 2008

completed coursework in written press and broadcast journalism

Recommend Julie's work at Ecole supérieure de Management, du Commerce et d'Informatique

Northwestern University

BS, Communication Studies, Psychology, French

2002 – 2006

Activities and Societies: Rotaract Club, Kappa Alpha Theta, Club Ultimate Frisbee

Recommend Julie's work at Northwestern University

List relevant skills and expertise in your profile:

- i.e. – intercultural communication, cross-cultural research
- Your connections can then endorse the skills you list, which adds credibility

Get Out There!

Remember to:

- Know why your study abroad experience matters (both personally and professionally)
- Share information about your experience on your resume and during interactions with future employers
- Be proactive in reaching out to others throughout the job search – set yourself up for success!

Looking for additional help with any of these elements?

The Career Center on campus can help:

www.gvsu.edu/careers

206 Student Services and 116B DeVos

To make an appointment call: 616-331-3311