

# Study Abroad to Career:

## *Using your experience abroad for future professional benefit*

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*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. CERI 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

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#### **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

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#### **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](http://www.gvsu.edu/careers)

206 Student Services and 116B DeVos

To make an appointment call: 616-331-3311