How to Market the Benefits of Your International Experience:
Unpack, Translate, & Articulate Your Valued Added to Employers

A Toolkit

Colby College
Career Center & Off-Campus Study
“In an increasingly inter-connected world, the ability to work successfully in a diverse workplace is more crucial than ever before. And the need for cross-cultural skills to negotiate an evolving, global economy has never been greater. To that end, study abroad can contribute vitally by furthering students’ foreign language abilities, enhancing cross-cultural communication skills and also providing a potentially life-changing international experience.”

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, an international careers expert
Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, Allan E. Goodman and Sir Cyril Taylor
— “A Student Guide to Study Abroad”

“education abroad does not inherently endow a career advantage. It’s only perceived as advantageous when a student can articulate how she has used that experience to gain the knowledge, skills and abilities required by an employer...”

Sheila Curran, International Educator
Nov-Dec 2007
How to Market the Benefits of Your International Experience: Unpack, Translate, & Articulate Your Valued Added to Employers

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The benefits of study abroad
Marketing study abroad: How to sell your overseas experience to employers
Applying your international experience
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the following institutions for their contributions to this handbook:

Brandeis University, Hiatt Career Center
University of Denver, Career center
University of Colorado Boulder
NAFSA
Gustavus Adolphus College
University of Minnesota
Michigan State University
CEA
Binghamton University
British Council
Institute of International Education (IIE)
University of Arkansas
Elon University
IES Abroad
University of Tulsa
New England Study Abroad Reentry Conference
Monash University
SKILLS
### Skills employers want

#### Figure 1: Employers rate the importance of candidate skills/qualities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Skill/Quality</th>
<th>Weighted average rating*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work in a team structure</td>
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<td>Ability to make decisions and solve problems</td>
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<td>Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work</td>
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<td>Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization</td>
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<td>Ability to obtain and process information</td>
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<td>Ability to analyze quantitative data</td>
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<td>Technical knowledge related to the job</td>
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<td>Proficiency with computer software programs</td>
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<td>Ability to create and/or edit written reports</td>
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<td>Ability to sell or influence others</td>
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*5-point scale, where 1=Not at all important; 2=Not very important; 3=Somewhat important; 4=Very important; and 5=Extremely important

Source: Job Outlook 2014, National Association of Colleges and Employers

### Top 5 characteristics:

- General cognitive skills (problem solving, analytical ability)
- Interpersonal and relationships skills
- Ambiguity tolerance and adaptability
- Cross-cultural competence (ability to work well in different cultures and with people of different origins)
- Personal traits (character, self-reliance, dependability)

### Lowest 5 characteristics:

- Competitiveness and drive
- General educational breadth
- Internet and information technology competency
- Managerial training and experience
- Foreign language fluency
TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND QUALITIES
COMMONLY ACQUIRED OR ENHANCED THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The first step to learning how to apply your study abroad experience to your job search is to identify some of the skills you may have gained while abroad.

**Communication skills:**
- Foreign language proficiency
- Communication across culture and language barriers
- Asking the right questions
- Ability to work in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment
- Negotiation skills
- Learn through listening and observing
- Sensitivity to non-verbal communication
- Clear written and oral communication skills

**Organizational skills:**
- Time management
- Resource management / Managing a limited budget
- Organizational skills
- Setting priorities
- Ability to Identify, set, and achieve goals
- Achieve goals despite obstacles
- General travel and navigational skills
- Successfully juggle multiple demands

**Interpersonal skills:**
- Cultural awareness & sensitivity
- Establish rapport quickly with wide range of people
- Adaptability without judgment
- Sensitivity to cultural context
- Understanding of global interdependence
- Accept responsibility
- Cope with rejection
- Sense of curiosity
- Influencing others/persuasion skills
- Handle difficult situations diplomatically
- Work as part of a diverse team
- Ability to “fit in” to new groups
- Tolerance and open-mindedness
- Comfort with cultural differences
- Appreciation of diversity
- Sensitivity to Culture and Customs
- Respect for protocol and hierarchy
- Leadership skills

**Intrapersonal skills:**
- Adaptability to new environments
- Flexibility
- Learn quickly and through listening and observing
- Take initiative and risks
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving and crisis-management skills
- Motivation & initiative
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Maturity
- Integrity
- Assertiveness
- Self-confidence and initiative
- Self-reliance and independence
- Understanding of culture’s complexity
- Respect for difference and diversity
- Putting theory into practice
- Initiative & risk taking
- Accept responsibility for actions
- Ability to identify and achieve goals
- Coping skills (ability to handle stressful situations)
- Patience
- Resourcefulness
- Inquisitiveness
- Sense of Humor
- Resilience
- Perseverance
- Awareness of strengths & weaknesses
- Tolerance
- Clarification of personal goals and improved self-awareness
- High energy level / enthusiasm
- Ability to view situations/problems from a unique perspective
- Awareness of global issues

Shape stories from your experience that highlight the skills that you learned abroad. Then develop that story to illustrate how it will benefit the company or organization to which you are applying.
SKILLS SURVEY

Below is an example of a survey that can be given to students during pre-departure and upon re-entry in order to help them become more aware of ways that they may have changed as a result of studying abroad. Ask them to evaluate skill levels before and after studying abroad (1 = lowest and 10 = highest)

ANALYSIS & PROBLEM SOLVING

Capacity to ask for and receive help from others

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Willingness to confront problems and look for alternative solutions

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Ability to listen and observe carefully

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Ability to think critically

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INTEGRATIVE & ADAPTIVE SKILLS

Experience and capability in balancing two or more cultures

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Awareness of values and lifestyles in the United States

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Ability to interact with and relate to many different people

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Aptitude to perceive things from another person’s point of view

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**COMMUNICATION/LANGUAGE SKILLS** *(in foreign language, if applicable)*

**Oral Proficiency**

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**Written Expression**

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**Ability to listen and observe carefully** *Listening and comprehension skills*

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**OPENNESS**

**Ability to compromise and be flexible**

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**Tolerance for differences**

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**Openness to new experiences and activities**

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**Awareness and respect for beliefs of others**

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### RESILIENCE

**Patience and adaptability**

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**Ability to keep a sense of humor in stressful situations**

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**Capacity to deal with failure**

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**Strength in handling unpredictable and unfamiliar situations**

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### CONFIDENCE

**Ease in establishing relationships with people from a different culture**

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**Willingness to take risks**

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**Awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses**

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**Self-sufficiency**

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SELF-ASSESSMENT
Positive Long-Term Outcomes from an International Experience

Students generally find that it takes a while after returning from study abroad to realize the full applicability of their experiences to career planning. An overseas experience can create new interests, skills, and abilities of great potential for future employment.

This self-assessment exercise is designed to help you identify areas of personal growth and new skills and abilities you may have gained from your international experience. These changes and skills can have applications in all areas of your life including great potential for future employment.

As you read the following statements, place a check mark by each change that you believe has occurred in you. Be honest! There are no right or wrong answers, only statements that you agree do, or do not, apply to you.

Intercultural/communication skills

— I have a greater capacity to accept differences in others and to tolerate other people’s actions and ideas that may be vastly different from my own.
— I am more knowledgeable about another culture and lifestyle.
— I have improved my ability to communicate with people in a second language (or understand better the variety and peculiarities of a version of "World English").
— I have a greater ability to empathize (i.e., to sense how an event appears and feels to someone else).
— I understand that there are many ways to accomplish the same task and that those approaches are only "different," not necessarily better or worse.
— I have learned to improve interpersonal communication through increased abilities in listening well, speaking clearly, and paying attention to nonverbal cues.
— I am more flexible and able to adjust to changes in others.
— I am more tolerant of ambiguous situations, that is, of situations that are confusing and open to differing interpretations.
— I have learned how to recognize when I have made a cross-cultural mistake and can use culturally appropriate language and measures to repair any damage.
— I understand and appreciate how much educational systems can differ across cultures.
— I have a greater willingness to take on roles and tasks to which I am unaccustomed.
— I can adapt and cope in vastly different settings.
— I am more able to accept as valid others values and lifestyles.
— I am more balanced in my judgments (i.e., less likely to judge things as “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong”).
— I think more critically: I am more discriminating and skeptical, particularly of stereotypes.
— I have generally improved my observation skills.
— I realize the importance of time to be alone to think.
— I find myself regularly reflecting about the overseas experience and its meaning for me.
— I am confident that I can meet and make friends abroad.
— I have an increased motivation to go abroad again.

World view

— I understand better another country’s role in world affairs.
— I have a better understanding of how and why political policy differs abroad.
— I have the ability to see situations and issues from more than one perspective.
— I understand more clearly how US-Americans and the United States are viewed overseas.
— I see the world as more interconnected than ever before.
— I value human diversity and respect others from a variety of backgrounds different from my own.
— I have greater sympathy for the struggles of international students and immigrants as a result of my experience.
— I have a deeper understanding of the common problems and issues that confront all human beings on this planet.
— I have greater awareness of political, economic, and social events occurring around the world.
— I seek out international news and want to know what is going on in the world more than ever before.
— I am aware that cultural changes can have unexpected consequences.

Personal capabilities

— I understand more fully my own strengths and weaknesses.
— I feel more confident in undertaking new travels or projects.
— I can accept failures and shortcomings in myself more easily.
— I am more confident and assertive when facing new situations.
— I have become a more patient person.
— I am more willing to share my thoughts and feelings with others, and to be open when others wish to share theirs with me.
— I am less afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at than I used to be.
— I can see myself more objectively (i.e., I see my own day-to-day problems in a broader, more realistic context).
— I have increased my perseverance and self-discipline.
— I can "analyze" a social situation more quickly than before (i.e., figure out what is going on and react appropriately).
— I am more deeply committed to an idea, cause, or goal.
— I have the ability to create personal peace and satisfaction in my life.
— I have a greater sense of responsibility for other people.
— I am more able to express deep emotions freely.
— I am more able to ask for and receive help from others.
— I have increased my capacity to experiment and take risks.
— I have a clearer notion of what I wish to do with my life.
— I am more aware of opportunities in life that are open to me.
— I feel greater respect and appreciation for my natural family.
— I am more independent in my relations with family and friends.
— I can accept the shortcomings of my family members in an understanding way.
— I am more aware of the way I use and structure time.
— I am interested in, and capable of, making long-range plans.
— I am more determined to develop fully my skills and talents, especially those recently gained through overseas living.
— I feel a greater need to have diverse experiences and friends.
— I feel that being abroad helped clarify my goals and values.
— I am more likely to do things spontaneously (i.e., to do things without undue concern about possible consequences or any advanced planning).
— I am more capable of solving life's day-to-day problems and accomplishing necessary tasks.
— I can set more realistic priorities, both short-term and long-term, for myself.
— I am more confident about the decisions I make.
— I have a greater appreciation for what I have.
— I have the ability to make clear personal choices and goals for my life rather than complying with what others expect and want from me.
— I have learned to place a lower value on material things.
— I want to be able to use my skills in future work and can articulate what those are to a prospective employer.

Own culture

— I see my own cultural values more clearly and understand how and why they differ from others.
— I can evaluate advantages and disadvantages of my own culture and society more objectively (i.e., from the perspective of an outsider).
— I am sensitive to subtle features of my own culture that I had never seen before.
— I have both a greater appreciation for US-American culture and a clearer critical sense of its limitations and problems.
— I have a deeper understanding of (if not necessarily commitment to) the values and lifestyle of my native community.
— I appreciate US-American efficiency, but miss the different pace of life abroad.

Go back now and place an extra check mark by those two or three changes that seem the strongest or most significant. Reflect on what effects you think these two or three biggest changes will have on you and your relations with others within the next three to five years. How will they increase your chances for success in a career?

Through this Experience...

1. By having studied abroad, one of the most important things I discovered about myself is

2. One of the most important things I discovered about how to get along with people from other backgrounds is

3. A personal attitude or characteristic that has changed as a result of studying abroad is

4. One thing about people in my host community that I came to accept with some difficulty is

5. For me, the single most difficult aspect of living in another culture has been

Adapted from “Cross-cultural Orientation, a guide for leaders and educators” by A.E. Fantini et. Al.
## Employability Skills

### Exchange & Study Abroad

### Developing and Describing Your Employability Skills

The 'soft' skills you gained through the completion of an Exchange or Study Abroad are relevant to graduate positions. To increase your opportunity of success when applying for graduate jobs it is important to effectively incorporate relevant examples into your job applications and interviews. When deciding which examples to use, take into account the job responsibilities and the industry you are applying to. Use appropriate language to demonstrate how you developed the soft skills relevant for the workplace environment.

The examples in the table show how Exchange or Study Abroad experiences can develop employability skills. Do not copy the examples, but use the format to identify and describe the employability skills you have developed through your Exchange or Study Abroad experience.

### Your Employability Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/responsibility (alphabetical list)</th>
<th>Appropriate Terminology</th>
<th>Employability Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adapted to life in a different country</td>
<td>Gained a greater cultural awareness and developed further sensitivity to cultural differences whilst living and studying in France</td>
<td>• Self management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found out information about the university at which I was going to study</td>
<td>Researched specific courses at York University in order to make informed subject selection decisions which would enhance my studies</td>
<td>• Initiative and Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got involved on campus at host university</td>
<td>Embraced campus life through active involvement in the University of Beijing campus basketball team and the University of Beijing Foreign Student Association</td>
<td>• Initiative and Enterprise • Communication • Team work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found a place to live</td>
<td>Demonstrated independence and overcame language barriers whilst sourcing appropriate living arrangements while studying abroad in Mexico</td>
<td>• Self management • Problem solving • Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independently travelled to other countries during holidays</td>
<td>Organised accommodation and travel arrangements to a number of European countries including, Sweden, Estonia, France, Italy, Switzerland and Croatia.</td>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept in contact with people from the host country upon return</td>
<td>Continued to maintain relationships with staff from host university, in addition to maintaining friendships made whilst abroad</td>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt basic foreign language skills to communicate</td>
<td>Developed a moderate proficiency in Spanish in order to effectively communicate whilst on exchange in Argentina</td>
<td>• Communication • Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whilst studying at Stuttgart University in Germany, I undertook additional studies in German to enhance my ability to communicate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lived in a foreign country</td>
<td>Developed an increased understanding of global, economic, political issues and realities of foreign countries and living abroad.</td>
<td>• Self management • Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made lots of new friends</td>
<td>Studied and developed friendships with a diverse group of multinational students from countries including Bolivia, Venezuela, Japan, Canada, Ireland, Greenland and Denmark.</td>
<td>• Communication • Initiative and Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed personal budget</td>
<td>Applied my budgeting and financial management skills to design and maintain a record of expenses to keep track of my expenditure</td>
<td>• Self management • Planning and Organising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised Visa for country</td>
<td>Undertook independent research and gained advice relating to the Visa requirements for studying and living in Italy, and applied successfully for my Visa.</td>
<td>• Self management • Planning and Organising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Represented Monash at the host university | Acted as an ambassador for Monash University, and received positive feedback from academic staff from New York University after contributing an article about my study abroad experience to the NYU Weekly Herald | Communication  
Self management |
| Spoke to and emailed Monash staff to organise exchange | Liaised with appropriate academic and professional staff to facilitate subject selection for my time abroad at Oxford University | Communication  
Self management  
Planning and Organising |
| Stepped outside comfort zone | Developed an ability to adapt to unanticipated situations and determine suitable solutions to unexpected travel problems caused by pilot strikes in Botswana | Self management  
Initiative and Enterprise |
| Submitted assignments/other assessments | Maintained a high academic standards (distinction average) in coursework including “The Impact of e-Commerce and Globalisation in Asia” and “Financial Management in European Business” | Communication  
Learning  
Self management |
| Talked to lecturers/tutors and other staff at host university | Engaged and interacted with lecturers/tutors/other university staff and professionals, resulting in improved communication skills in French | Communication |
| Used technology (eg Skype) | Utilised various Social Media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other technology, such as Viber and Skype, to remain in contact with family and friends while away | Technology  
Communication |
| Was ill and communicated with academics about missing class | Negotiated with academics to receive an extension for an assessment item when ill | Communication  
Self management |
| Worked part time in host country | Whilst on study exchange in Norway, I balanced my full time study load with working part time (15 hours per week) in the coffee shop on campus | Communication  
Self management  
Planning and Organising |
| My experience at Norway University Coffee Shop enhanced my knowledge of Norwegian workplace legislation | | |

**Your Personal Attributes**

In addition to the development of employability skills, working in hospitality can help you gain evidence of how you have demonstrated your personal attributes. While thinking of the examples showing your skills don't forget personal attributes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Common sense</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Positive self esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
<td>Professional Presentation</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty and Integrity</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Ability to deal with pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Hard-working</td>
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**Further reading**

See our resources on Global Employability Skills, the Employability Skills Table and resources about employability skills gained through working in retail, study abroad, clubs and societies and research work.

**General enquiries**
T: 9905 4170  
E: careers.info@monash.edu  
W: careers.monash.edu

**Disclaimer:** Information was current at the time of writing and is intended as a guide only. Adapted by Monash University Employment and Career Development, 2012

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USING THE STAR METHOD
The STAR Method

S – Situation: Describe the Situation

T – Task: What was the Task that had to be done?


R – Results: What were the Results? Describe what happened, what you did or learned.

Develop a stock of “stories” to illustrate a variety of skills and have them ready whenever you go into an interview. At least a few should relate to your study abroad, but not all. You should be showing a balance of all of your experiences.

Use the STAR method in response to behavioral interview questions.

Example:

S: While studying abroad I found myself struggling with my philosophy class. The system was different. I was used to getting more direction about what I should be doing and what the assignments were.

T: After I got my first paper back, I realized I was falling below the standards I set for myself and what I wanted to get out of each class. I needed to improve my grades.

A: I formed a small study group with a couple friends and we met twice a week. I also budgeted one hour each night specifically to study for that class.

R: I was doing better by mid-term and did well on my second paper; I also did well on the final. I ended the course with an 87%.

From: Framing Your experience for employment- Gustavus Adolphus College
## S.T.A.R Approach for Job Interviewing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency or Skill</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>R</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What skill you want to present?</td>
<td>Create story from past experience.</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Task/Goal</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Result/Outcome</td>
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### Example:

**Leadership & Motivating Others**

- **Situation**: While I was studying in Spain for the Summer, I was on a project team with students from Spain.
- **Task/Goal**: On our team, I quickly learned that some Spanish students tend to wait until the last day to complete their part of the assignment. We didn’t have enough time to review each other’s work.
- **Action**: So, my goal was to get them to complete their work 2 days before it was due.
- **Result/Outcome**: I decided to have 2 short coffee breaks with them per week to discuss some of their personal & cultural interests to break the ice. I always highlighted their strengths of looking at things from a different point of view than Americans. It was amazing how things changed. The week after the first two coffee breaks. They finished their work 3 or 4 days before the due date. They felt respected because I took an interest in them as people and show them how cool it was to combine our views in the projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill 1</th>
<th>Story 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Skill 2</td>
<td>Story 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill 3</td>
<td>Story 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Benefits of the S.T.A.R Approach

1. You can present competency in specific areas such as Flexibility, Motivation, Problem-solving, etc.
2. You can express yourself in a clear and articulate manner.
3. It helps you keep your response brief and concise within a structured flow.
Focused Interviewing

When answering interview questions, recruiters are looking for concise, but descriptive responses. Focused interviewing techniques are often used by interviewers to draw out information from the candidate. If you are able to respond with a “STAR,” your responses will be concise and descriptive and the interview session will proceed more effectively.

What is a STAR?

S – Describe the situation.

While studying abroad, I found myself struggling with my Philosophy class. The system was different. I was used to getting more direction about what I should be doing and what the assignments were.

T – What was the task that had to be done?

After I got my first paper back, I was headed toward a “C” at best, which would have hurt my G.P.A. Also, I’d be falling below the standards I’d set for myself and what I wanted to get out of each class. I needed to get on track quickly.

A – What action did you take?

I formed a small study group with a couple of friends, and we’d meet over coffee once a week. Plus, I budgeted one hour each night, just to study for the class.

R – What were the results?

I was doing better by midterm, did well on second required paper, and did quite well on the final. In the end I earned what translated into a B- in the class, and actually felt I’d learned something valuable.

This is a typical STAR answer. It could be the answer to, “Give me an example of an accomplishment you are proud of.” If someone asked, “What’s your greatest skill?” you might answer, “I believe I can set goals and meet them,” and then give a story like the one above. Or, if the interviewer says, “Why should we hire you?” you can respond, “I am a good problem solver, for instance...” and give an example like the one above.

Can you see how having an example like this gives you more credibility than if you merely state “I can set goals and meet them,” or “I am a problem solver?”

The interview is your chance to speak to your qualities and qualifications; knowing what you want to say before you even enter the interviewer’s office can be a helpful tool in assuring that you’ll be able to do that. Having some STAR stories prepared in advance can help you be sure you don’t believe until the employer knows all you want him or her to about how you are and what you have to offer his or her organization.
Sample Story #1
I learned how to take initiative and problem-solve in a class I took abroad in England. The format was very different from what I was used to in the States. There was no syllabus and we received a very long reading list instead. There were mostly lectures given and not much discussion or interaction.

At first I was really worried because it’s not how I was used to learning. But instead of panicking, I tried to examine the differences from a more ‘outside’ perspective. I realized that if the British students managed in this system, I likely could as well.

I figured out that by asking my classmates a few questions about what was expected of us, by identifying and focusing on several of the key texts the instructor referenced and by committing to study time each week even though I wasn’t required to submit any work, I could keep up and succeed in the course. The final exam was a bit daunting, but I ended up doing quite well in the course. I realize now that I not only learned a lot about the subject area, but about my own learning styles and my ability to take initiative and succeed when challenged as well.

Note: Showing cultural respect is important. Note how this story doesn’t log any complaints about the system abroad. It speaks respectfully, in rather neutral terms about the differences.

Sample Story #2
I lived in a homestay during my semester in Spain. From this situation, I learned how to consider and respect different viewpoints and that it is possible to become very close to people with very different opinions than my own.

At first, it was a bit of a strain to communicate fully with just about anyone in the household. The host mother was sweet and used a lot of sign language with me. My host sister did speak a bit of English, but it was my host father who wanted to talk the most with me, and at first I was very challenged by my developing language skills.

Even more challenging was that he wanted to engage me in discussions on world politics, especially about U.S. foreign policy. He wasn’t happy about the U.S. influence in the world and asked me questions that honestly, I wasn’t prepared to answer.

I felt so ignorant with my limited language skill and by not knowing the specifics about the foreign policies of my own country. I faced this challenge head-on: I made a point to read the Spanish newspaper each day so that I could acquire both the knowledge and the vocabulary. Over time, I got pretty good at being able to engage in discussion with him. We had quite different viewpoints on a number of things, but his approach was not to insult but to challenge me respectfully.

I respect him for this, and I am grateful for the opportunity to see political discourse as an exercise in learning and not demeaning anyone. I am very close with everyone in my homestay and am still in touch with them.

Note: Carefully consider whether you think it’s a good idea to reveal your political party preferences in a job interview. This story does not ‘call’ either point of view by a name. While perhaps the listener could speculate on the political orientation of the storyteller, it still leaves room for ambiguity.
Unpacked Student Experiences: Examples

Alex (business management student, Italy & France):
Students are notorious for compartmentalizing experiences; keeping academics in one box, co-curricular experiences in separate boxes, and social life in yet another. Our conversation with Alex (alias) began with a vibrant description of the social life in Rome, but we soon found a more compelling story. Alex was a junior general business management major who opted to study abroad in Italy and Cannes for the summer with an MSU led program in advertising and public relations to fill out his electives needed to graduate. The program started in Rome studying European advertising and ended at an international advertising festival in Cannes. He was the only male in the group of 25 and the only one without an advertising background. The class was structured into small groups; each group was to do a advertising project that would develop an effective ad campaign for an Italian audience. His initial response about the quality of his program was rather negative: he felt he got very little out of it that would help him in his career.

Alex had a lot to say about the group project. The trouble started immediately. His group project partners argued and bickered about whose idea was better. He thought he was at a little disadvantage because he really didn’t have a background in advertising. As the bickering continued and time was becoming precious, Alex took it upon himself to take control of the group and instill some order and planning. He began mediating some of the conflicts, drawing attention back to the specifications in the assignment outline. Through his leadership, an idea and project plan were decided upon and tasks assigned to each member. He monitored the project’s progress making sure each member stayed on their assignment. The group did well in producing a quality final product. Alex expressed regret that it wasn’t a business project that would count. That statement needed to be challenged. We turned the tables a bit on Alex and asked “if you saw someone from a different discipline work with a team of experts, earn their trust, guide them through a process of creative decision making, manage deadlines and specifications for a project that was completed in a quality way on time, what would you call that person?” Alex looked at us kind of blankly. It just took two words to prompt his realization “A manager.”

Clearly, Alex developed skills that could easily be reflected and valued by employers on his resume:

- **Lead a project team of advertising students in developing an ad campaign**
- **Mediated creative differences between team members**
- **Managed project objectives and work assignments to successfully meet deadlines.**

As good as those bullets are, Alex and his team missed out on some critical opportunities for cultural learning to enhance the quality of their project. When Alex was asked how the group went about gauging the effectiveness of their product for the Italian market, they simply relied on their professor’s assessment and the advertising they saw in class. Although the group went out every night to a local bar where 20 and 30 year old Europeans hung out, they did not once solicit the opinions of any their European counterparts. Nor did they really pay attention to advertising on Italian television or other media. They totally separated their academic exercises from the social and cultural aspects of their trip.

Marissa (Education student, South Africa):
Although some students quickly adapt to their cultural surroundings and grasp the cultural differences in their learning; too often they find it harder to identify and clarify the professional skill sets they have developed while abroad. Marissa studied educational systems in South Africa with an intended career in secondary education. During the course of her study abroad program she had the opportunity to do a practicum at a recently integrated Zulu-Afrikaner school.

At the outset of the unpacking interview, Marissa was skeptical about the process because “things were so different there.” Through the debriefing, Marissa noted the wide cultural gaps between the two groups. She noted that many Zulu students were having difficulty transitioning to the teaching methods at the predominantly Afrikaner school. Her assignment was to work with Zulu students in a supplementary program to assist them in catching up. Marissa had some remarkable challenges. She couldn’t rely on what she had planned to do because resources she had expected were not there. She had to quickly adapt and restructure her plans. Some of the first things she tried didn’t work that well culturally with her students, so she had to readjust her teaching methods. She explained that she came up with different tutorials and games to assist Zulu students in their classroom learning. The most significant thing Marissa said she learned through her experience was a greater understanding of the teaching issues in post-
Apartheid South Africa. When we tried to extract the transferable teaching skills she used in South Africa, she flatly responded, "I told you, nothing there is relevant to teaching here (U.S.)." We were astonished, as was most of the audience who could see the skill connections clearly. Marissa had given examples of skills in understanding cultural differences, needs assessment, critical thinking, problem-solving, motivating others and innovating in the face of scarce resources.

We challenged her by asking, "So, if you were working in a mixed classroom of students in the U.S. with students from different national or ethnic backgrounds and income levels, might you not also use some the skills you used in South Africa?" And suddenly, Marissa had that ah ha moment of new realization. We crafted her responses in to resume bullet points:

- **Assessed differences student learning needs in diverse cultural contexts**
- **Developed adaptive strategies to maximize learning with limited resources**
- **Designed tutorials, skill building exercises and learning games to increase student performance.**

Behind each bullet point was a story Marissa had shared during her unpacking interview. Ideally resume bullets are designed to provoke a question from an employer to give the student a stage for an example of that skill in action. As Marissa left you could see her rethinking her study abroad experience in new ways as she prepared for her teaching interviews.

**Jordan (chemistry student, graduate school application):**

Students enrolled in liberal arts programs and planning graduate study pose a little different scenario in debriefing. Take the case of Jordan, a senior planning on graduate school in chemistry. Like many students, she chose her study abroad program as a means of completing her general education requirements. A self-professed science geek, Jordan thought studying humanities in London was a far more palatable way of completing the courses she saw as a distraction from her scientific passions. She took a cadre of history courses taught by faculty at a British university.

We approached the debriefing by discussing her experiences as examples of her role as a scholar in preparation for graduate study. She was skeptical that we would find anything worth going into her personal statement because “well, it's not science." What we had was a failure to recognize the process of scholarly inquiry across disciplines, and this gave us a focus. When probed about her studies, Jordan talked animatedly about how meaningful it was to see the locations featured in the history she was studying around London. It gave it realness beyond the books and lectures. She shared one of the biggest surprises about her experience was learning about the American Revolutionary War from the British perspective: "What was major to us was like ‘whatever’ to them." This became the key to unlocking Jordan’s evidence-based scientific mind. We probed her on how she would resolve the differences between different cultural perspectives on history. How might she test her hypotheses? She talked about critically examining different sources for evidence. We then drew the conversation around to research projects she had accomplished in her undergraduate chemistry program, her observation of multidisciplinary approaches to scientific research, and the importance of hands on testing. How had she done that in London? Could that be why she found seeing historical locations so powerful in her learning? Through the rest of the debriefing we looked for ways to translate examples from her approach to studying humanities to her development as a scientific scholar.

Jordan began to make connections about the ways she acquires new knowledge (hands on, observable fact), her ability to explore different perspectives on a topic (triangulation), and her skill in evaluating evidence before making a decision (expressed through curricular and adaptive skills learned in country). As she considered her personal statement for graduate school, Jordan felt she had a wider array of examples to draw upon to discuss her learning process more effectively.

From: **CERI Research Brief 1-2008. Collegiate Employment Research Institute, Volume 1, Issue 1**

**Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies**
INTERVIEWS

More resources in Colby CareerLink
Sample Interview Questions

Sample Behavior Based Questions

The following are examples of Behavior Based Interview questions that focus on a wide range of performance attributes that employers frequently try to assess during an interview.

In every response you should answer the following questions even if it is not asked directly by the employer:

What was the Situation or setting?
What specific Task or problem had to be addressed?
What specific Actions did you take? *
What was the Result or outcome? **

* Action is where most of your time should be spent in your answer because it is the area where you are able to showcase your skills and differentiate yourself from others. Use skill words in your answer.
** Applicants often forget to conclude with the results. This is your opportunity to tie your story together and shine on a light on your accomplishment. Don’t forget to share your results.

• Tell me about a time you used creativity to solve a problem.
• Explain the most difficult decision you have made in the last six months and your process for deciding.
• Describe your best example of taking the initiative to do something that needed to be done, even though it wasn’t your responsibility.
• Describe a situation in which you believe you were effective in achieving an aggressive goal.
• Tell me about the most significant project you have worked on in which it was crucial to keep track of details while still managing the “big picture.”
• Describe a time when you had success communicating your thoughts clearly to another person or group.
• Tell me a time when you voiced a concern or disagreement to a co-worker, supervisor, or professor.
• Tell me about a situation in which you had to lead several other people to achieve a goal.
• Describe one of your most stressful experiences and how you coped with the situation.
• Tell me about a time that you were effective in putting your technical expertise to use to solve a problem.
• Describe a recent group project you experienced when you peers were not pulling their weight.
• Tell me about a time when someone was critical of your work and how you dealt with the criticism.
• Give me a time when you were responsible for a project that didn’t go they way you expected. How did you handle it?
• Tell me about a time when you built strong relationships where none existed before.
• Describe a time when you were working with a team that needed to make a group decision, yet there was not agreement in the group.
• Tell me about a time when you faced an unexpected emergency at work.
• Describe a time when you used persuasion convince someone to see things your way.
• Tell me about your best example of customer service.
• Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.
• Tell me about a time when you successfully worked with someone you didn’t particularly like.

Practice! Practice! Practice! Practice! Practice! Practice! Practice!
Tips on telling your stories in a job interview:

- Have 10-12 stories ready when you go into any job interview. They should be your real life experience stories from which you learned or accomplished something, or from which you acquired a new or reinforced an existing skill or positive quality.

- Include at least a few stories from your semester or travels abroad. The profound learning and the unique experiences abroad typically make for some great examples.

- Your time abroad has a certain 'shelf life' for greatest relevance, and you should use it to your advantage. If you study abroad as an undergraduate, your stories from that experience are highly relevant upon your return and for at least awhile after graduating.

- Don’t have all of your stories be from your time abroad! You need to show balance of all the kinds of experiences you have had in your life so far – for example as a student, an athlete, an employee (even in a part-time job), as the leader of a student organization, etc.

- A good way to build your collection of stories is to think about times when you have been especially challenged or taken a risk. Your story might be about something that happened on a given day (for example, you took the wrong bus in Beijing and got lost), or a situation that happened over time (you were challenged by the differences in the education system abroad). Either way, give it a beginning and an end while making a relevant point and specifically identifying the skill or quality it demonstrates.

- Be sure to show respect for cultural differences. No matter how challenging the situation was, you don’t want to use denigrating terms. Instead of telling how ‘ridiculously small’ your room was in your homestay, you need to explain that the room was ‘much smaller than you were used too.’

- Stories need to be appropriate. When in doubt, err on the side of caution. Be aware that even though you now understand that having a drink with friends in a pub is a common no-big-deal occurrence in Ireland, you may want to eliminate any reference to pubs, bars or alcohol in your stories since that may not be the frame of reference for your interviewer.
DESCRIBE YOUR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE
IN COVER LETTERS AND INTERVIEWS

Develop a stock of “stories” to illustrate a variety of skills and have them ready whenever you go into an interview. At least a few should relate to your study abroad, but not all. You should be showing a balance of all of your experiences.

➢ Prepare your career stories ahead of time.
➢ Practice telling your story to different audiences.

To do this, it is useful to think like an employer. Don’t assume an employer will understand the value of your study abroad experience just from seeing it listed on your resume. The employer wants to know, How does it help me? Your job is to sell its value, and yourself as a potential employee. Make sure to mention how your experience will benefit the employer.

As you present your experience to employers, consider:
➢ The responsibilities of the position you are seeking
➢ The context of the company or industry area you are entering.

• What key competencies is the employer seeking for this position?
• Aside from technical skills, what are other interpersonal qualities the employer desires?
• Articulate the experience in terms of a direct benefit to the company/organization
• Focus on transferable and general skills that are learned through or enhanced by your international experience
• What am I trying to communicate to a potential employer about my international experience? About its relationship to my academic major?
• What skills did I learn abroad? What cross-cultural competencies did I develop? How are the skills I gained used in problem solving?
• Use stories to illustrate specific and tangible experiences you participated in while abroad that are value-added in the eyes of an employer?
• Did you volunteer, do an internship, or complete/start a research project?

Think about specific situations and experiences in which you demonstrated the skills the employer is seeking for the position for which you are applying. This can be a story from your personal life, not necessarily a classroom or workplace scenario. Focus on specific interactions, moments, people, and events instead of talking generically about how valuable the experience was.

If you are targeting a position emphasizing communication skills, how could you emphasize the skills you developed through the relationships you developed abroad? Did you adjust your communication style with different students, and if so, how? Were there communication barriers to overcome? Did you develop your listening skills too?

If you are targeting a position emphasizing your business experience, how will the political and economic knowledge you developed through these conversations influence your business practices, decisions or future learning? Did these conversations support or challenge your classroom learning, and if so, how? How will your international understanding benefit the employer(s) you are targeting?

Employers value the skills students develop through studying abroad as long as they are communicated in a way that pertains to the work setting. By studying abroad, you have already taken a great first step in developing your skills and enriching your college experiences. Remember to think strategically about how you connect your experiences to the work roles, industries or organizations you are targeting to sell these experiences most effectively.

Example:
Interviewer: Tell me about yourself”.

Don’t just say: “My study abroad experience made me a better problem solver.
Say: “I’ve become a better problem solver because I use creativity and persistence to come up with workable solutions to problems.” Then give specific examples of where you displayed these skills.

Here is an example from a student who was applying for a job as an assistant development director. Before going abroad, this student had taken a year of French, but found that in Paris people spoke rapidly and this, coupled with her limited vocabulary, made communication difficult. During the job interview, she went on to explain,

“It was stressful but I learned to be very creative in coming up with other words to express my ideas. Answering a simple question could take much time and effort but I persisted until people understood me. It got easier as my language skills improved, but they would not have improved if I hadn’t made that effort. I’m now much more confident about my ability to solve problems under stress and successfully tackle new challenges, from researching new funding sources and writing persuasive grant applications to effectively communicating my ideas in a team.”

Here’s an example from a student who spent a semester in France studying at a French university. She is now applying for editorial internships, because she wants to find a job as a copy editor for a glossy magazine after she graduates. She might say this in her cover letter:

“During my semester in Montpellier, France, I studied translation for the first time. We translated literary texts and newspaper articles from French to English and from English to French. This not only greatly improved my French language skills, but also helped me to better understand the nuances of my native language. I learned how word choice, sentence structure, and grammar can influence meaning, which will help me with the detail-oriented job of copy editing.”

Choose language to:
1. Highlight your skills and experience
2. Give concrete examples
3. Address the specific work opportunity
4. Lead with the positive

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE:
OK: Studying abroad gave me a chance to get away for a semester, become more proficient in Spanish, and take classes about Mexican cultural and history.

BETTER: Studying abroad was an opportunity to progress in Spanish language fluency, develop personal skills for living and traveling independently, and, perhaps most importantly, understand the world from a more global perspective.

USE CONCRETE EXAMPLES:
OK: My experience abroad made me more independent and self-reliant.

BETTER: In order to live and study (or work) in Japan successfully, I actively sought appropriate advice and information, stretched my language “comfort zone,” appreciated humor in challenging situations, and learned from others inside and outside of the classroom.

ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITY:
OK: This position calls for independence, problem-solving skills, and Norwegian language, all of which I gained through my study abroad experience in Oslo.

BETTER: While studying in Oslo, I was immersed in a new environment that was both exciting and new. I developed strategies and sought out resources to solve problems and relied on my initiative to meet challenges. In the process, my Norwegian language skills grew; I am pleased to say that I have near native fluency, which was one goal for my time abroad.

LEAD WITH THE POSITIVE
OK: I do not have much experience in this field but I was able to secure an internship in Italy that is relevant to the fashion researcher position.

BETTER: In Italy, I secured an internship with a policy organization, Oggf, that allowed me to expand my knowledge of European markets in general. As part of my work I gained an overview of the fashion industry in the context of world trade activity.

Interviewer: “In your cover letter, you describe yourself as adaptable. Can you give me an example?”

Interviewee: “At Oxford University, courses were taught very differently from the way they are at the UW. Rather than listening to lectures three times a week and taking notes, we met with individual tutors once a week to discuss our assignments. At first, this way of learning was very intimidating. I had to be prepared every week, completing all of the reading and jotting down discussion notes and questions in advance. I felt a lot of pressure to perform and unsure of what was expected of me. But, soon I came to enjoy the more active engagement with the readings that this approach required. I think I got a lot out of my studies and it has influenced the way that I approach my studies now that I’m back at the UW. I am more apt to approach professors during office hours and ask them questions about the material. I find that I prioritize my study time better, and I get more out of my classes than before I studied in England.”

Interviewer: “You mentioned that you gained good communication and problem solving skills during your time in Ecuador. Tell me more about those skills.”

Interviewee: “I had taken a year of Spanish before going to Ecuador, and my Spanish teacher at the UW spoke Spanish to us in class, but once I arrived in Quito, it became clear to me that she was talking more slowly (even though it didn’t seem that way at the time!) and without using any slang. In Quito, people spoke quickly and used a lot of slang. Also, I did not have the vocabulary to always say exactly what I meant. I had to be creative sometimes, using other words to describe the thing that I didn’t know the word for. It was challenging, to have to spend so much time and effort to ask what felt like a simple question, but I got my point across, and it became easier and easier as my language skills improved. But they would not have improved if I hadn’t made that effort.”

From:
Connecting International Experience to your job search, Brandeis University, Hiatt Career Center
Incorporating your study abroad experience in your job search, University of Denver, Career center

Practice, Practice, Practice!
COVER LETTERS

More resources in Colby CareerLink
Template of Standard Business Format (Cover Letter)
(The format is the same for Thank You Letters)

Your street or box number
City, State, Zip

Date

Contact’s Name
Contact’s Title
Organization Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr. Or Ms. (person’s last name only):

**Paragraph 1**: State immediately the position you are pursuing and how you came to know of the opening. If you have an alumnus, family or other contact at the organization, you can mention that here as well. Tell the employer briefly (one or two sentences) why you are interested in this position.

**Paragraph 2**: Explain the skills and experiences you have that will make you successful in the position. Talk about classes you have taken, activities you have been involved in, summer experiences you have had. You do not have to have directly related experience but think about the skills you have gained from what you have done and how those could relate to the duties of the position you are applying for. You do not want to repeat your resume to the employer in this paragraph but this is the place to highlight related accomplishments that will make the reader want to learn more, which will lead them to your resume. The goal is to show the employer that you have confidence in your ability to succeed in the position.

**Paragraph 3**: Demonstrate that you have done some research about this organization. Go to their web site, look in industry periodicals (Ad Week, Wall Street Journal, Chronicle of Higher Education) and talk to alumni or other contacts that may currently work for the organization. This research does not have to be extensive but it shows that you have taken some time to think about this position and put some effort into this letter. This makes a very good impression on employers. It shows that this is not a form letter where only the address and contact name is changed for each position.

**Paragraph 4**: State that you would welcome a personal interview to further discuss this opportunity. If you need to explain anything out of the ordinary on your resume, this is the place to do it. You might mention that if you do not hear anything from the potential employer in two to three weeks time that you will call to follow up this letter to see where they are in their process. Finish by thanking them for their attention and express a desire to meet them sometime in the near future.

Sincerely,

Your signature (leave 4 blank spaces for this)

Your name in print
March 28, 2008

General Mills, Inc.
P.O. Box 9452
Minneapolis, MN 55440

Dear Human Resources Representative,

I was excited to find your internship posting for Retail Food Sales Representative Intern on the University of Minnesota's job postings' web site, GoldPASS. The combination of my food and business management education, sales experience and international studies have prepared me for the internship at General Mills.

In December I will be graduating with my Bachelor of Science in Agricultural, Food and Business Management degree. My class work included courses in food marketing and retailing, finance and food science. Additionally, we did group project analysis with General Mills products as the topic.

During my sales internship with Simon Delivers, I was able to expand my knowledge of food retailing and enhance my sales skills. I assisted the sales staff by organizing and prioritizing 2,000 local area prospects increasing the impact of the sales team. While at Simon Delivers I was able to attend weekly meetings and improve my understanding of the decisions companies make and the reasons why they make those decisions in a growing domestic market.

Additionally, while studying abroad in England at the London School of Economics, I gained a global perspective on business topics related to marketing and finance. The experiences both in and outside of the class help illustrate the importance of cultural competency and knowledge when working with diverse populations. Since General Mills is represented world-wide, my increased awareness and ability to analyze cultures and adapt to new situations will benefit me in this internship position.

I believe my interest and experiences qualify me for Retail Food Sales Representative Interna position. I will be contacting you in the next week to ensure that you have received my materials. Please call me at 952-333-2345 or email at ksmith@yahoo.com if you have any questions. I am available throughout most of the day and evenings.

Sincerely,

Karen Smith

Enclosures: Résumé
Study Abroad Cover Letter Example

5970 Oak Street
Fort Collins, CO 80524

February 20, 2009

Mrs. Nancy Opperman
Sturman Industries
Sturman Corporate Park
One Innovation Way
Woodland Park, CO 80863

Dear Mrs. Opperman:

I am forwarding you my resume because one of your recently hired employees, Some Person, informed me of possible job openings in mechanical engineering. I am very interested and would appreciate your consideration as a candidate for the position of development engineer.

I first learned of Sturman in a machine dynamics class taught by Dr. Bryan Wilson. The technology involved was very interesting. I have much experience with automobiles and would like to work in the field while remaining in Colorado. Automobile engines have been an area of great appeal and I have built and worked on a number of them. During the last two years of FSAE, I performed a considerable amount of work on our fuel injection system.

You will note from the enclosed resume that I have many of the attributes that you are seeking for this position. Please consider the following:

1. B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Colorado State University
2. Internship with manufacturing experience with PCC Composites
3. Internship with integration experience with CTI
4. Team leadership experience with Formula SAE
5. Cross-cultural experience from studying in Ghana for one semester

During my three years of working at PCC Composites I gained a broad understanding of manufacturing. I saw how parts were taken from engineering prints through prototyping and finally to a full production run. I also performed multiple research projects that eventually were instituted in production. My study abroad experience is also an asset because I learned to view problems from a culturally different perspective. Additionally, I am able to adapt to changing environments with ease and to work with people of diverse backgrounds.

I would be pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this position with you during a personal interview. I can be reached at (970) 555-9389. I will contact your office in the next ten days to see if there is any further information that is needed. Thank you for you time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Quinten Vieth

Enclosure
Study Abroad Cover Letter Example

611 Stover Street
Fort Collins, CO 80521

February 28th, 2009

Mr. Lennox Vieth
630 W. Colorado Boulevard Suite 461
Denver, CO 80224

Dear Mr. Vieth:

Dr. Margarita Becker, professor in the College of Business at Colorado State University encouraged me to contact you concerning an internship with one of your companies for the summer of 2007. One such company, Systoflex, interests me in particular. Upon researching it, I was especially impressed with the variety of markets this company served, while maintaining an increasing stock value over the past five months.

In May, I will be completing my junior year at Colorado State University in the Computer Information Systems program. I currently hold a broad understanding of business and the computer applications needed to support business activities. My specific field of interest lies in business communication tools such as internal networking and database tracking systems. My experience studying abroad in Germany for a semester has provided me with a cross-cultural perspective of information systems. My subject knowledge plus my ability to adapt to changing environments will make for a smooth transition from the classroom to the business environment.

In the past I have taken part in many group projects. Some projects entailed designing a tracking system for a university tool crib and designing a database tracking system for a local land trust company. Throughout these tasks, I have increased skills such as the ability to work as part of a team, leadership and communication. Additionally, I am a self-motivated and autonomous worker. I am confident that I will be able to adapt to any situation that might occur, and be a valuable member to your company. I hope to acquire this internship in order to gain experience in my field while serving my employer to the best of my ability.

I appreciate you taking the time to review my resume, and I look forward to hearing from you regarding this internship request. I am available any day of the week and can be reached at (970) 555-8945 or ojaeger@hooly.colostate.edu.

Sincerely,

Owen Jaeger

Enclosure
RESUMES

More resources in Colby CareerLink
Resume "Rough Draft"

Skill Phrases

Identification

Objective

Education

Experience

Activities
(Honors/Volunteer/Clubs)
Government/Non-Profit – (Font: Arial)
(Resume submitted for an entry-level position at an international NGO in Washington, DC)

ANDREW BOULET
4689 Mayflower Hill • Waterville, Me 04901 • (207) 569-4692 • aboulet@colby.edu

EDUCATION
Colby College, Waterville, ME
Major: Anthropology
Minor: Environmental Studies
Bachelors of Arts, May 2008
Major GPA 3.67
Overall GPA 3.28
Honors: Dean’s List, Distinction in Major
University of Salamanca, Spain
Completed courses in Spanish history, culture and language with all classes taught in Spanish
Spring Semester 2007

LANGUAGES
Fluent in French, conversational Spanish

EXPERIENCE
Research Assistant, Asst. Professor Leon Arredondo, Waterville, ME
September 2007 – May 2008
• Researched 15 case studies of mental illness among Latino immigrants in the US
• Worked closely with Professor Leon Arredondo to create a syllabus for a new course – Mental Health and Cultural Experience
• Researched and prepared supporting materials for two cultural anthropology courses

Language Instructor, Anglo Americano Language Institute, Mexico City, Mexico
June – August 2007
• Designed tailored course-curricula in Business-English for two business institutions
• Tutored English language classes for 16 adult business executives at the executive offices of the House of Fuller and Dolex in Mexico City
• Planned and prepared all necessary course materials for tri-weekly classes
• Communicated with individual students about their progress, evaluated their English-language proficiency levels, and collected feedback from students to improve their learning experience

Intern, Instituto de la Naturaleza la Sociedad de Oaxaca, Oaxaca City, Mexico
January 2007
• Conducted research on conservation programs for mountain-side water irrigation project
• Participated in the planning and construction of a mountain-side irrigation system and energy efficient ovens
• Participated in the planning, design, and construction of a functional community greenhouse that would contribute to community’s goals of sustainability and economic stability

Research Assistant, Colby’s Mellon Fellow, Christopher Tomas, Waterville ME
October 2006 – January 2007
• Researched case studies related to international environmental justice issues and compiled a bibliography of books and academic articles to be used in the Colby Environmental Studies’ Environmental Justice curriculum
• Provided research and French translation services for Mr. Tomas – to assist his research on environmental justice issues in former French colonies

English Teacher, Banister Academy, Mexico City, Mexico
June – August 2006
• Provided English tutoring for young underprivileged adults in a village outside Mexico City
• Designed course materials to prepare students for Cambridge Certificate Level Examinations, TOEFL, and SAT tests to improve their chances of acceptance into American universities
• Participated in parent/teacher meetings, received feedback, and provided student evaluations

ACTIVITIES
Organizer/Performer, Free Burma Resolution Program, Colby College
Participant, Workshops: Human Rights Abuses in Columbia and Free Tibet Movement, Colby College

SKILLS
Computer: Proficient with PC and Macintosh computers using Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Adobe Photoshop CS2, and Outlook Express applications; experience with Microsoft Excel
Photography: Proficient at using analog and digital photography techniques, equipment, and dark-room functions
Consulting/Finance

MARThA HERNANDEZ
5687 Mayflower Hill • Waterville, Maine 04901 • cell: (207) 859-4569 • email: mherandez@colby.edu

EDUCATION
Colby College, Waterville, ME
Bachelor of Arts, May 2008
Double Major: Economics and Latin American Studies
GPA 3.53

Honors: Awarded Posse Foundation Full-Tuition Leadership Scholarship (2004-2008), The Walker Language and Culture Fellowship Grant for study in Brazil (2006), Colby College Dean’s List

Pontificia Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile
January 2007 – June 2007

Centro de Estudos de Língua e Cultura, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
January 2006
• Fluent in Spanish; Intermediate in Portuguese reading and writing skills

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Senior Thesis, Economics Department, Colby College, Waterville, ME
October 2007 – May 2008
• Completed research for and presented econometrics paper concerning the “Analysis of Determinants of First Year Grade Point Averages”

Research Assistant, The Oak Institute for Human Rights, Waterville, ME
October 2006 – March 2007
• Researched and communicated with human rights organizations in Latin America and the United States
• Assisted in the search for and recruitment of a Colby College Oak Fellow for the 2007 Fall Semester
• Translated fellowship applications and reference letters submitted in Spanish

INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE
Fiduciary Trust Company, Boston, MA
July 2007 – August 2007
• Wrote daily reports on company fiscal status and changes in operations using Thomson Baseline
• Prepared data for, and met with, high net worth individuals about asset allocation and wealth management
• Assisted in stock trade utilizing Private View, a modified version of Global Plus
• Conducted analytics for the Cash Management Dept researching the impact of fee increases on current clients
• Attended and contributed to weekly investment officer meetings and luncheons at investment banks

The Office of the Mayor of the City of New York, New York, NY
June 2006 – August 2006
• Contacted families of the victims of Flight 587 to ensure collaboration in development of proposed memorial
• Selected to introduce the Mayor at the annual internship event attended by over 1,000 guests
• Volunteered at receptions and charity events with over 1,400 guests

Wealth Strategies for Life, Bronx, NY
July 2005 – August 2005
• Increased client base by 15% by conducting targeted marketing outreach in non-profit sector
• Coordinated meetings between clients and CEO, ensuring all needed materials were present
• Mailed introductory letters on behalf of the CEO welcoming new clients to the organization

ACTIVITIES
Co-Vice Chairperson, Colby’s All-College Admission and Financial Aid Committee 2007 – Present
Vice President, Students Organized Against Racism 2006 – Present
Member, Students Organized for Black and Hispanic Unity 2004 – Present
Executive Board Member, Sophomore Class Council 2005 – 2006

COMPUTER SKILLS
Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint; experience with STATA, Sungard Global Plus, Thomson Baseline
EXEMPLARY OF WAYS TO INCORPORATE
YOUR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN YOUR RESUME

Consider:
• Where should I include this experience on my resume so that it will have the most impact and support what I am trying to communicate?
• How much detail do I need to provide on my resume/in job interview to ensure that this experience has meaning to a potential employer?

Describe your:
• Academic Experience Abroad
• International Volunteer, Internship, or Work Experience

IN ACADEMIC SECTION:

Direct Enrollment:
University College London, Fall Term, 2007 – Butler University Study Abroad Program
• Courses include: Victorian Fiction, 20th Century British Politics

Science-based Experiential Program with special focus and research paper:
School for Field Studies – Turks and Caicos: Marine Resources Management Program, Spring Term, 2007
• Major research project: “Environmental Impact of Tourism on Coral Reefs”

Stand-alone Program:
American University Center of Provence, Marseille, France
Study Abroad, Full Academic Year 2006-07
• Relevant courses: French and North African Cultural Patterns, Advanced French Language, Beginning Arabic

Summer:
Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea
• Summer Term, 2005 – Intensive Intermediate Korean Language Program

Social Science Experiential Program with special focus and research paper:
School for International Training – Fiji: Multi-culturalism and Social Change
Fall Term Study Abroad, 2006
Independent Study Project: “Does Culture Matter in Elections”

Combination Academic/Internship Program:
Sydney Management Internship Program, Boston University, Spring, 2006
• National Bank of Sydney – Mergers Intern
• Coursework in global markets, currency trading

IN EXPERIENCE SECTION:

Volunteer Experience:
Adelante, Santiago, Chile
Volunteer
• Assisted public NGO to create anti-violence presentations
• Lobbied local government for resources, such as street lights and schools
• Researched crime statistics for policy report, including interviews in Spanish

Business Internship:
IGS Office Systems, Dublin, Ireland
Publicity Intern
• Polled consumers by phone to gather data on product satisfaction
• Based on findings, recommended new marketing and technology strategies for European markets

Teaching Experience:
Ecole Monet, Paris, France
Art Teacher
- Selected for summer position at prestigious art school for children
- Coordinated arts and crafts program consistent with French primary school curriculum; taught basic drawing

Multinational internship:
McMillan Company, Taipei, Taiwan
Business Intern
- Participated in mentored rotations through departments of multi-national corporation with focus on Pacific rim partnerships
- Researched possible local firms for acquisition; contributed to strategic planning report for Asia headquarters

Research Experience:
Tropical Research Laboratory, Georgetown, Guyana
Researcher
- Collaborated with international team of scientists from ten Caribbean states
- Surveyed water supplies for data on pollutants
- Analyzed chemical composition of petroleum-based compounds

From: Connecting International Experience to your job search, Brandeis University, Hiatt Career Center

Study Abroad as Education
Colby College, Waterville ME
BA in Government, cum laude
- Thesis: Evolution of Women’s Rights in Argentina
- GPA 3.7

Study Abroad, Institute for the International Education of Students, La Plata, Argentina (2006)
- Successfully completed course work in Latin American culture and society
- Demonstrated willingness to take risk by enrolling in Spanish-speaking curriculum
- Lived with an Argentinean family participating in the social and ritual life of the community
- Gained Spanish fluency
- Examined the Argentinian economy as an independent study project

Study Abroad as Experience
Volunteer Mentor, Colby Cares About Kids, Waterville, ME (2004-2007)
- Mentored 2nd-5th grade child to boost his self esteem
- Helped with homework to help him succeed in school

Intern, Local NGO, La Plata, Argentina (2006)
- Established rapport quickly with individuals in an unfamiliar environment.
- Developed culturally appropriate questionnaire and interviewed 25 rural Argentinean women, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers.
- Analyzed data using Argentinean software and wrote final report in Spanish

Study Abroad as International Experience
Study Abroad, Institute for the International Education of Students, La Plata, Argentina (2006)
- Successfully completed course work in Latin American culture and society
- Demonstrated willingness to take risk by enrolling in Spanish-speaking curriculum
- Lived with an Argentinean family participating in the social and ritual life of the community
- Gained Spanish fluency
- Examined the Argentinian economy as an independent study project

Intern, Local NGO, La Plata, Argentina (2006)
- Established rapport quickly with individuals in an unfamiliar environment.
- Developed culturally appropriate questionnaire and interviewed 25 rural Argentinean women, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers.
- Analyzed data using Argentinean software and wrote final report in Spanish
EXAMPLE INTERNATIONAL RESUME SECTIONS

EXPERIENCE WITH SPANISH-SPEAKING POPULATIONS AND CULTURE

Spanish language skills: Bi-lingual - Advanced conversational proficiency acquired through both classroom and experiential learning

Costa Rica: (Elon University in Costa Rica) Fall 2007
Semester-long academic experience which included home-stay with non-English speaking family

Peru: The Living Heritage of the Andes January 2007
Winter term study abroad focusing on language, history, culture and environment of Peru

Dominican Republic: Habitat for Humanity Spring 2007
Spring break service trip; assisted in the construction of new homes for impoverished families

Mexico: Border Links Spring 2006
Spring break service trip; provided exposure to the daily hardships and difficulties of families residing within close proximity of the US-Mexico border

Hillcrest Elementary School, Burlington, NC Fall 2006 - Spring 2007
Volunteered with fellow Elon students to provide Spanish language instruction to elementary school students following cancelation of school’s foreign language program

STUDIES ABROAD

An exploration of religion and culture in London and Wales

European Union: The State of Europe January 2006
A study of the EU member states and transition from communism to EU membership; included travel to and study of Scotland, England, Belgium, Lithuania and Hungary

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Cambiando Vidas Intern, Dominican Republic Summer 2009
- Taught English to 70 students ranging in age from 8 to 40
- Designed and planned a preschool program for local community
- Led groups of volunteers in construction of affordable houses

Habitat for Humanity, Dominican Republic Spring 2008
Alternative Spring Break Trip
- Worked effectively and productively alongside non-English-speaking workers in construction of new homes
- Lived as a guest of a local community member; served as interpreter between residents and visiting students

Dental Clinic Interpreter/Coordinator • Burlington, North Carolina Fall 2007
- Initiated contact with local dentist to serve as interpreter during free dental clinic for Latino population
- Recruited 20 additional volunteers; created schedule, coordinated transportation for volunteers and oversaw operations
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Study Abroad:
- **Spain: Lessons from the Past**: A study of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in the Andalucia region of Spain  January 2008
- **Belize: Field Biology**: An upper-level study of rainforest and coral reef ecosystems in Belize, Central America  January 2009

Service Abroad:
- **Haiti**: Volunteer Mission Trip, Les Cayes, Haiti  March 2003
  - Participated in construction of new church for local villagers
  - Helped lead worship services in rural villages
  - Provided health services, food and clothing to villagers
  - Assisted in child care and children activities

Additional international travel:
- Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Jamaica, Panama, India, Great Britain, Switzerland, Italy, France, Germany

INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Study Abroad

Undergraduate Research
- Columbia, South America
  - Conducted a faculty-supervised study on drug trafficking, urban socio-cultural issues and dairy farming in the Andes Mountains  Summer 2007

Service Abroad
- Tamil Nadu, India: *Shoes for Hope*  Summer 2006
  - Provided relief assistance and self-sufficiency training to leper colonies with a non-profit organization as a mission volunteer

Additional International Travel: Brazil, Jamaica, Bolivia, Mexico, Peru

Language Skills: Advanced conversational Spanish

GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

University of Europea de Madrid, Madrid, Spain  Fall 2009
- Courses: Dirección de Marketing, Economía de la Empresa, Dirección de Producción, Cultura Hispanica

- Studied the immigrant communities of East London through photography, oral histories and journals

IFRE Volunteers Abroad Program, Accra, Ghana  July 2008
- Taught English to elementary school students and participated in a one-week Language & Culture Program

Languages: Native German, Proficient in Spanish

Independent Travel: Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, England, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Mexico, Australia, Ghana
### Action Verbs

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### Accomplishment Statements

**Start with an action verb**
- Adapted to a foreign living environment

**Add qualifiers**
- Adapted to overseas living in Zemmer, Germany

**Add quantifiers**
- Adapted to overseas living in Zeller, Germany during a 12 month cultural exchange program

**Speak to outcomes**
- Adapted to overseas living in Zemmer, Germany during a 12 month cultural exchange program, while successfully completing a business degree
Articulating International Experiences on Your Resume

Some Key Phrases to Keep in Mind

Below are some thought-provoking phrases to help you articulate international experiences on your resume. Combine these ideas with your personal experiences to develop unique, individualized points for your own resume.

- **Learned about other cultures:**
  - Adapted to foreign cultures and ways of life
  - Incorporated local customs into my daily routines
  - Overcame societal differences to promote cultural understanding
  - Gained a greater appreciation for diversity and culture

- **Learned through Interaction with Others**
  - Developed negotiation skills though daily contact with vendors in local markets
  - Developed a better understanding of foreign cultures within their own unique contexts

- **Developed Language/ Communication Skills**
  - Cultivated language and communication skills through contact with people from around the world.
  - Encouraged open communication between locals and foreigners
  - Learned to use non verbal and verbal communication to overcome communication and 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 among foreign cultures

- **Responsibility/ Planning/ Budgeting**
  - Developed creative solutions to maximize travel experience on a limited budget
  - Budgeted ___ months of world travel on $___
Some additional phrases:

- Solid record of using all available resources to accomplish tasks.
- Effectively utilizes a variety of resources in solving problems. Learned new ways of solving problems.
- Active learner (consider how this is different from “learning”).
- Seeks out academic and personal challenges. Moves beyond personal and intellectual comfort zone. There are other ways to think about things than my way alone.
- Tolerance of many perspectives and ways of doing things.
- Eager to examine the relationship between individuals and countries. New perspective. Seeing the world through the eyes of another person or culture.
- Able to balance a demanding schedule, including work, school/course load and outside activities.
- Demonstrates a wide variety of interests and experiences. Breadth of knowledge. Broad understanding of today’s cultural and political issues.
- Intellectual curiosity.
- Appropriate, thoughtful risk-taking.
- Resourceful in seeking out answers and applying new approaches.
- Actively pursues opportunities to gain meaningful knowledge.
- Proven ability to positively influence or persuade others.
- Strong desire to succeed.
- Demonstrated initiative in setting goals, creating a plan of action and achieving results.
- Sound judgment and common sense.
- Quickly and effectively settle into new environments. Mental flexibility.
- Excited by opportunities to become acquainted with or fit into new cultures, including (in the future) the corporate culture.
- Proven success in coping with substantial change or transition. Adaptability. For example, the leave-taking from the familiar U.S. culture before your departure, the adjustment to the new culture, the leave-taking of that culture and then your adjustment back into the once-familiar U.S. culture (which may not be as easy as you anticipated).
- Maturation process or “growing up” that occurs from study abroad experiences. A major step toward independence in your life. Enhanced self-confidence. “I can do it!”
ADDITIONAL READING
How Buying Two Left Shoes Helped My Career

Whether you are in Rome staring up awe struck at the Colosseum, or enjoying tapas in Spain, you’re probably not thinking about how your study abroad experience is going to benefit you in your career. Without even realizing it, the sightseeing, conversing with locals, and dining in quaint restaurants will help you develop skills and teach you lessons that will have a positive impact on your career.

Two years ago, I was a student studying abroad in China. I walked along the Great Wall of China and reveled in the beauty of the local temples; I enjoyed my time in China and thought very little about my future career. Fast forward a couple of years and I realize that many of skills I learned in China, I utilize every day in my current job as the Program Coordinator at the Eller College of Management, University of Arizona. Here is a short list of some of my favorite experiences in China and the lessons they taught me.

Explain to a shoe vendor that they sold you two left shoes is a great way to learn patience.

During our trip to Beijing, I purchased a pair of shoes at the Silk Market. When I got back to the hotel and pulled the shoes out to wear that night, I realized that they had sold me two left shoes! The next day I took them back to the vendor and struggled to explain to the saleswoman my dilemma. After an hour of using crazy hand gestures to explain my story, I finally got one left shoe and one right shoe. The patience I learned, I use every day at my job. Whether I am planning an event where the keynote speaker is late or I’m helping a student map out their career path, the ability to stay calm in the face of an obstacle isn’t just essential – it’s valuable.

When it rains, it pours self-confidence.

In between classes, my roommate and I took a cab to grab a quick lunch. We were just heading down the street and we thought we knew where we were going; so, we made the tragic mistake of leaving our backpack with our cell phone in the classroom. We handed the restaurant’s business card to the cab driver and (whoosh!) we were on our way - or so we thought.

Instead, we ended up at a random hotel. It turns out the cab driver took us to the hotel that was advertised on the back of business card. We tried to explain to the clearly confused cab driver the misunderstanding. Unfortunately, we were left to navigate through the city, in the pouring rain, on our own. With a little bit of intuition and the help of some English-speaking locals, we eventually made it back!

The lesson: Navigating a foreign city in the rain gave me the self-confidence I needed to tackle more challenging obstacles at work.

Living eight weeks in a hotel room with no closet or drawers teaches you the importance of adaptability and flexibility.

Our hotel in China had absolutely no storage for clothes, toiletries, or study materials. We could not spend the next eight weeks with clothes and textbooks strewn all over the floor, so my roommate and I solved the problem the American way, taking a trip to Wal-Mart to buy storage bins. We got some pretty strange looks as we juggled all of these bins on our mile-long trek back to the hotel. After some creative redecorating, we made our room
livable. It wasn’t perfect, but we managed. My current job requires me to plan a lot of events and there are always times when things do not go as expected. After living in China a short time, I learned just how a little clever ingenuity can make any situation work.

**Taking five classes and touring three cities in eight weeks is a crash course in time management.**

Balancing studying for tests, completing projects, and writing papers with exploring Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing quickly taught me how to manage my time. Every day the thought of discovering local restaurants, markets, and shops motivated me to get my homework done in a timely fashion. Much like my experience in China, my job is fast-paced and requires me to complete multiple tasks. After conquering my heavy workload in China, managing day-to-day tasks and long-term goals is a breeze.

![Image of dried scorpions and seahorses.](image)

**Watching the locals (and your friends) eat scorpions and seahorses makes you realize just how diverse the world is.**

One weekend, all of the students went out to browse the local street vendors. We found a row of food stands selling all kinds of strange foods, everything from seahorses on a stick to a variety of bugs and animal parts. This is just one of the many things I witnessed in China that made me realize I wasn’t in “Kansas” anymore. My experience in China opened my eyes to just how diverse the world is. I feel I’m better prepared to collaborate with people from different backgrounds and experiences.

My advice to you: During your study abroad experience, go ahead, shop, dine, and enjoy the sites of the city! Some of your best study abroad memories will teach you the best skills and lessons for your future.

*Shannon Timms interned for CEA Global Education last summer. She has since graduated from the University of Arizona and now works as a marketing coordinator at the university’s Eller College of Management.*
The Benefits of Study Abroad

By Mary M. Dwyer, Ph.D. Courtney K. Peters, www.TransitionsAbroad.com

Published on IES Abroad | Study Abroad (http://www.iesabroad.org)

"It will change your life. You'll come back a new person." For years, the benefits of study abroad have been described in these words. Everyone in the study abroad field believed it could greatly impact a student's life, but the exact long-term benefits were unknown - until now.

The first large-scale survey to explore the long-term impact of study abroad on a student's personal, professional, and academic life shows that study abroad positively and unequivocally influences the career path, world-view, and self-confidence of students.

The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) surveyed alumni from all IES study abroad programs from 1950 to 1999. Regardless of where students studied and for how long, the data from the more than 3,400 respondents (a 23 percent response rate) shows that studying abroad is usually a defining moment in a young person's life and continues to impact the participant's life for years after the experience.

Personal Growth

"Overall, I learned a lot more about myself in that one semester than I did in the three and a half years in my home school because of the unique space in which I learned, experienced, and spent exploring another culture," says Carolyn Valtos (IES Adelaide, 1992).

An overwhelming majority of respondents echoed Valtos' feeling. When asked about personal growth, 97 percent said studying abroad served as a catalyst for increased maturity, 96 percent reported increased self-confidence, 89 percent said that it enabled them to tolerate ambiguity, and 95 percent stated that it has had a lasting impact on their world view.

Findings also show that study abroad leads to long-lasting friendships with other U.S. students and still impacts current relationships. More than half the respondents are still in contact with U.S. friends met while studying abroad, and 73 percent said the experience continues to influence the decisions they make in their family life.

Alexa Sand (IES Milan, 1989), who is still very close to U.S. friends she met abroad ten years ago, explains, "I think the shared experience of living fully immersed in another culture made these friendships particularly poignant and enduring."

Intercultural Development

Study abroad educators often assert that one of the goals of study abroad is to train future global leaders to be more effective, respectful of other cultures and political and economic systems, and willing to take a stand for the world's welfare, not just what benefits a specific country. The survey findings indicate that study abroad is succeeding in its mission.

When questioned about intercultural development, 98 percent of respondents said that study abroad helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases, and 82 percent replied that study abroad contributed to their developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world.
"The experience of living and studying in another country was so eye-opening ... [it] tested preconceptions and habits I wasn't even aware were so ingrained in me," says Cynthia Perris (IES Paris, 1981).

It is significant to note that these intercultural benefits are not fleeting but continue to impact participants' lives long after their time abroad. Almost all of the respondents (94 percent) reported that the experience continues to influence interactions with people from different cultures, and 23 percent still maintain contact with host-country friends. Ninety percent said that the experience influenced them to seek out a greater diversity of friends, and 64 percent said that it also influenced them to explore other cultures.

"It has been nearly ten years since I was a student in Vienna, but not a single day goes by where its impact is not felt in my life," says Jason Thornberg (IES Vienna, 1994). "My time there fundamentally changed how I view the world and has given me the ability to view the world, and its issues, from several perspectives."

**Education and Career Attainment**

"My semester [abroad] launched me into a personal and professional involvement with Spain that has already lasted 25 years. A political science lecture in Madrid about U.S. and Spanish involvement in an obscure war in Sahara ... led to a graduate fellowship to Spain and North Africa, which led to work as a foreign correspondent based in Spain," says Gary Abramson (IES Madrid, 1978).

It is noteworthy that the majority of respondents gave academic and professional accounts similar to Abramson’s. When questioned about academic pursuits, 87 percent of respondents said that study abroad influenced subsequent educational experiences, 63 percent said that it influenced their decision to expand or change academic majors, and 64 percent reported that it influenced their decision to attend graduate school. Nearly half of all respondents have engaged in international work or volunteerism since studying abroad.

"An entire range of professional opportunities have opened up to me in recent years, partly due to the skills and internship experiences I gained," adds Joydeep Sengupta (IES Madrid, 1998).

Similar to Sengupta’s experience, three-quarters of respondents asserted that they acquired skill sets abroad that influenced their career path, and 62 percent said that studying abroad ignited an interest in a career direction pursued after the experience.

**Longer Stays Mean Greater Benefits**

Consistent with national study abroad statistics, the survey found that students are generally studying abroad for a shorter duration, with the number of full-year students declining dramatically. In the 1950s and 1960s, 72 percent of respondents studied for a full year, but only 20 percent of respondents did so in the 1990s. The number of students studying for less than 10 weeks tripled from the 1950s and 1960s to the 1990s.

For many years, conventional wisdom in the study abroad field has been that "more is better" – the longer students study abroad, the more significant the academic and cultural development and personal growth benefits. According to survey results, the "more is better" idea holds true. However, results of the study also suggest that programs of at least six weeks in duration can also be enormously successful in producing important academic, inter- and intrapersonal, career, and intercultural development outcomes. These findings are significant considering the current national increase in students attending shorter programs. Students attending full-year, semester, and summer programs all report the following benefits: (Please visit [www.TransitionsAbroad.com](http://www.TransitionsAbroad.com) for all statistical charts.)

Although all students benefit from the study abroad experience, there are a few choices that students can make that have the potential to increase their long-term language and career benefits.
Continued language usage was greatest among respondents who lived in a homestay, with 42 percent saying they now use a language other than English on a regular basis. Students who lived in an apartment or a residence hall with local students reported results slightly lower than homestay participants (38 and 32 percent respectively). However, the results of those who lived in an apartment with other U.S. students lagged far behind the rest, with only 18 percent reporting that they use a foreign language on a regular basis.

Importance of Internships
For students who hope to gain the most career impact from study abroad, results indicate that they should choose an internship as part of their curriculum. Remarkably, 70 percent of intern respondents reported that study abroad ignited interest in a career direction pursued after the experience, compared to 60 percent of non-intern respondents. In addition, 83 percent said that it allowed them to acquire skill sets that influenced their career path, compared to 75 percent who did not intern.

Although there is not always a significant statistical difference between students who attended local university classes and those who did not, it is important to mention that students who attended courses at the local university did experience greater long-term language benefits and were more likely to work or volunteer abroad than their counterparts. The biggest difference between the two groups is in the area of relationships. Of those who attended local university classes, 31 percent still maintain contact with host-country friends, compared to 16 percent of respondents who did not study at the local university.

A Lifetime of Benefits
Few other experiences in life have proven to net such a positive and sustainable impact. With study abroad offering so many life-changing and enduring academic, career, intercultural, personal, and social benefits, students should carefully consider studying abroad when searching for a college and during their collegiate career. Students should question potential colleges about the study abroad programs they offer and find out how competitive the application process is and if grades and financial aid transfer. In addition, colleges, parents, and employers should encourage and enable students to study abroad.

As Michael Preziosi (IES Madrid, 1978) says, "My wife and I feel so strongly about the value of this experience that we have told our two daughters that a semester abroad while at college is an absolute requirement for each of them. It is not an experience to be missed."

Please visit www.TransitionsAbroad.com for a complete copy of this article with the accompanying statistical charts.

MARY M. DWYER, Ph.D. is the president of IES, a national academic consortium with over 155 member colleges that has provided students with high-quality study abroad experiences for more than 53 years.

Published on IES Abroad | Study Abroad (http://www.iesabroad.org)
Marketing Study Abroad: *How to Sell Your Overseas Experience to Employers*  
by Jean-Marc Hachey of [workingoverseas.com](http://workingoverseas.com) - International Careers Advisor for Transitions Abroad

Imagine the day when you will be graduating from university and searching for professional work. Because you studied abroad, and you built up related international credentials, you may have aspirations to find a professional job overseas. Alternatively, you may have decided to look for domestic employment and you want to know how to market your international expertise to employers who have no international experience whatsoever. In both of these cases, this article is here to help you get the best punch from your study abroad experience.

**Take Inventory of Your Experience**

If you have studied abroad, you are well on your way to developing a solid International I.Q. This is a unique package of skills possessed by people who have lived abroad and these are the skills sought out by international employers. Before writing a resume, you need to review what international skills you have gained from your study abroad experience. The following will help you assess what new skills you acquired.

- **Study Abroad Courses:** If you studied for less than one full semester abroad, the subject of your studies is less important than the broader international experience you have had. Nonetheless, take note of your courses and be prepared to situate the general environment of the school you attended while abroad. Was it a highly accredited academic program, or was it a study and travel session? Was the student body international or predominantly students from your own country?

- **Professional Experience Abroad:** Hopefully you supercharged the international value of your time abroad by doing a few extra things that will look good on your resume. Employers want to know that you successfully accomplished tasks in a new environment. Did you lead a student team? Did you complete projects within a multicultural student environment? Did you meet professionals in your field while abroad? Did you organize a social event? Did you work: part-time, with a professor, or as a language coach? Did you volunteer in your field? Did you overcome a bureaucratic hurdle by making use of professional skills? Audit your time abroad for professional experiences and be prepared to describe them in your resume and when meeting employers.

- **Country-Specific Skills:** Can you speak about the specific cultural traits of your study abroad host country nationals? If not, you can easily read up on this now by consulting the numerous books written on country-specific cultural traits and published for example by Intercultural Press ([www.interculturalpress.com](http://www.interculturalpress.com)). Imagine the impact on potential employers when you are able to contrast the work habits of your German hosts with U.S. citizens. You also gain points with employers if you traveled independently or lived with host nationals. In all these cases, prepare descriptions that support your professional and intercultural skills.

- **Universal Cross-Cultural Skills:** While abroad, you developed a unique set of cross-cultural skills that are portable. You can take these and apply them to any new country. You are familiar with culture shock and can professionally describe it. You understand the cycle of stress and exhilaration of moving to a new place. You are more adaptable, open minded, and observant. You can spot cultural differences and change your behavior to accommodate local norms. You have a better understanding of yourself and you can use this self-knowledge when making decisions in a culture other than your own. You are curious, brave, and have a sense of adventure. At the same time you are streetwise and can function in unfamiliar environments.

- **Language Skills:** You already know that language skills are important for international and domestic employers. Even obscure language or basic language skills indicate a propensity for language learning and
learning in general. When communicating with employers, indicate the level of reading, writing, and speaking skills you acquired. Always describe what you can do as opposed to what you can’t.

- **General Work Skills:** When speaking to employers, recognize the value of the general skills you developed while abroad. You are adept at managing change; you are independent and have self-discipline while being sensitive to the needs of others. There are dozens of work characteristics developed abroad: resourcefulness, versatility, persistence, observant and calm demeanor, diligence, multifaceted skills in communications, broad and strategic thinking, ability to deal with ambiguities, courage, ability to take on challenging work, open-mindedness, flexibility, resourcefulness, tact, listening and observing skills, ability to deal with stress, sense of humor, awareness of interpersonal politics, respect for protocol and hierarchy, loyalty, and tenacity. All of these skills are valuable to you when contacting domestic as well as international employers.

**How to Explain Your International Experience**
You are already aware that, with the exception of others who have lived abroad, very few people are interested in or able to understand your study abroad experience. Be cautious when discussing your international experience when meeting prospective employers. Here are a few tips to help you down this delicate path:

- **Be professional in describing your study abroad experience.** You are probably fairly animated about the challenges you faced when overseas. Practice rewording your description of job responsibilities in a more businesslike manner. Be formal. Be articulate.

- **Use the language of your future work.** You may have to give up the expatriate jargon that has become second nature to you. Avoid using too many names and titles that will be foreign to your prospective employer. Avoid detailed geographical descriptions. Speak in terms familiar to your audience. For example, use "adjustment" instead of "culture shock"; use "able to deal with change" instead of "cross-cultural adaptability"; use "interpersonal skills" instead of "cultural sensitivity"; use "effective listening skills" instead of "cross-cultural communications"; use "political astuteness" instead of "diplomacy."

- **Speak of your successes, your accomplishments.** Do not discuss insurmountable challenges or why you did not succeed at something. Employers, especially those with no international experience, will not be able to judge the context and could form erroneous conclusions about your capabilities.

- **Avoid shocking stories.** Do not go into bizarre tales or misadventures. The harder your overseas experience, the more cautious you should be in talking about the difficulties you encountered.

- **Network with other returnees.** Actively seek out others who have recently returned from abroad and can provide mutual support during your job search. Find these people on the Internet and through the organization that sent you overseas.

**How to Boast About Your Skills**
It can feel awkward to boast about your own skills. Non-North Americans in particular have a cultural aversion to selling themselves to employers. Here are a few tips to make the act more palatable when networking with employers:

- **Say what others say about you.** "My previous supervisor relied on me mainly to..." "My student-colleagues appreciate working with me because..."
  Say why you were successful. I can attribute my successes to being able to "In my previous position, I was commended for..." This project was successfully managed because I..."

- **Say how you do things.** When managing a project, I always pay close attention to "I am well known for my skills in..." "My general approach in these circumstances is to..."
**Write and Elevator Pitch**

There are multiple situations where you need to answer the question: "Tell me about yourself." Imagine that you have one short elevator ride to explain to a potential employer who you are. A 2-paragraph professional description of yourself, written before you write your resume, will help you figure out the high-level attributes of the professional you. These are your “main” selling points; focus on highlights only. Decide on a theme to bring it all together. Your first paragraph should be your hard skills (work, study, volunteer experience). Build a theme around international experience if looking for international work. The second should be about your skills (what makes you succeed in your work environment). This second paragraph is the most challenging. Ensure that it ties in all together supporting your major theme.

**Develop a Stock of Career Stories**

Everyone who has studied abroad has their own list of "wild and shocking" stories to share with friends. These edgy cross-cultural experiences are fun to share, but not with potential employers. You need to modify them or devise a new set of cross-cultural career related stories about your study abroad experience. Craft these stories ahead of time, and build them to reinforce professional skill sets. Here are a few examples:

- Describe your role when working with student teams while abroad.
- Describe your encounters when meeting professionals working in your field.
- Speak about personal encounters that gave you insight into the local culture.
- Speak about the link between your country and the host country, especially in terms of the work place.

Describe your professional skills through a story about a cross-cultural encounter that went wrong. You only need three or four of these pre-scripted career stories when job searching. One story alone is often enough to demonstrate a whole grouping of your professional skills, maturity, insightfulness, sound judgment, cross-cultural knowledge, etc.

**Education Credentials in Resumes**

Younger professionals should write about their education more extensively than mid-career professionals. Write about your educational career as if it were a job. You are not doing justice to yourself if you devote only two lines to your study abroad experience. Start with the normal header information, but follow it up with bullets outlining the experience you had while abroad and the skills you developed. Refer to this article’s "Inventory of Your Experience" section for examples of what to write.

Other bullets to consider when describing your study abroad or other study experiences are: Significant Projects, Field Studies, Cross-Cultural Mentoring, Team Leadership, Awards. If you studied at a world-renowned school or with a famous professor, reference this. Indicate how you overcame financial challenges by perhaps working while abroad. If you traveled while studying abroad, or if you had close cross-cultural contact, write a bullet about this.

Do not list courses taken, but always list "Areas of Interest." This tells employers much about your professional personality and these most likely point to your top skills since we tend to be good at what we enjoy. If you are applying for international work, consider grouping all your international experience (work, volunteer, study abroad, international courses, travel and languages) under one heading for greater impact.

**Dealing with International Employers**

Don’t mix personal goals with career goals. Never announce to potential international employers that your career goal is to live in Paris or to travel extensively in Asia. Employers want to hear about goals that match their
skill requirements. Tell employers that you want to apply the unique set of international skills you developed while studying for two years in Spain. Tell employers that you want to work in an environment that requires you to make use of the insights and knowledge acquired while accomplishing work within a multicultural team environment. Tell employers that you want to apply the experience and skills you developed as an effective communicator while studying economics for two years in London. The focus is on skills, not on your personal goals.

**Dealing with Employers with No International Experience**

Employers with little or no international experience may have misconceptions about job seekers who have international credentials such as study abroad and international travel. While not all employers believe the following myths about returnees, you may want to keep them in mind.

**Employer Assumptions**

- **Returnees have emotional re-adjustment problems.**
- **Returnees are too exotic.** They have adopted alternative lifestyles and can't be team players. They are excessively individualistic and independent. Their differences are threatening.
- **Returnees are flighty.** They don't really want permanent jobs or long-term responsibilities. They will soon be off traveling again.
- **Returnees have health problems.** They may have strange tropical diseases.

**Your Solutions**

- **Do not overstate or dwell on your re-entry adjustment problems.** Stress positive aspects of your overseas and re-entry experience.
- **Do not say that you plan to return overseas.**
- **State that you are happy to be back.** This is your home. You are anxious to join your peers in the world of work.
- **Demonstrate your business acumen.** Draw attention to your effective work habits, adaptability to new technologies, willingness to be a team player, understanding of Western leadership style.
- **Avoid wearing souvenir clothing or jewelry.** Dress in smart, businesslike clothing. Focus on fitting in.
- **Show your attachment to home.** Mention your enthusiasm for things like home cooking, a particular university, or a sports team. Talk about the pleasures of finally reading home country newspapers again.
- **Mention the clean bill of health you received for your recent physical.**

**A Last Word**

If you have studied abroad, you know the broad value that this type of education brings you. It is undisputable. You have now returned home, a stronger you. You have insights into the world that others who have not traveled do not have. You are conscious of a wider set of ideas about humanity. Your planet is smaller, your insights are larger. Whether you are speaking to domestic or international employers, your study abroad experience will always provide you with strengths and vision that are almost unattainable under circumstances other than living abroad. Your intellect is stimulated and your mind has been freed when you live in close proximity to people who have a culture different from your own. Good luck and best wishes in you long career of continued learning.
Applying Your International Experience

Effective Marketing of International Experiences to Employers:

This article by Dr. Cheryl Matherly originally appeared in the book, Impact of Education Abroad on Career Development, published by the American Institute of Foreign Study. The complete book can be downloaded as a PDF from their website.

The key to understanding how employers view a student’s international experience—and in turn, how best to market that experience when job searching—is understanding what the term “global workplace” really means. Despite their romantic visions of jetting from country to country, the fact is that most new graduates will join the ranks of the so-called “domestic internationals,” employees whose international careers are based in their home countries. In a global workplace, most employees will continue to live and work at home, but will use technology to customize products and services for clients worldwide, communicate with suppliers, and collaborate on projects with overseas offices. New graduates will be immersed in many foreign cultures as part of their jobs—without ever setting foot overseas.

More than a decade ago, the Rand Corporation and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (then the College Placement Council) conducted one of the first studies to consider the implications of the global economy for new college graduates. According to the report, hiring managers sought out new graduates, who demonstrated “domain knowledge” or expertise in a specific field; who possessed interpersonal skills, including problem solving, decision-making, and communications skills; and previous work experience. Of course, these are the same attributes companies have required of their employees since the dawn of the human resources department. The managers, however, cited a critical new requirement: cross-cultural competency, defined as an ability to work in a multicultural environment that may or may not be located in the U.S. Interestingly, hiring managers did not place value on the particular international experience of the student, as much as they valued the skills that the student had developed in order to adapt to a new culture. In other words, employers were interested in the personal as well as professional skills that a student employed to successfully adapt to living, studying or working in France, because they could be applied, for example, to working with a multinational team based in Latin America.

So why, in a global economy, then, do many campus recruiters rank studying abroad so low in the list of experiences that they seek among new graduates?

Very few companies specifically set out to hire students with international study, work, or volunteer experience, for example, although it seems they should be the group best prepared for the demands of a multinational and multiethnic work force. The attitudes of hiring managers regarding foreign language skills, expressed in the 2003 Rand Corporation study, “What Makes a Successful Career Professional in an International Organization,” helps explain this seeming contradiction. The Rand researchers asked hiring managers to rank nineteen different qualifications in terms of their importance for their organization. The managers ranked language fluency last (nineteenth), while cross-cultural competence, defined as an ability to work well in different cultures and with people of different origins, placed fifth. Related competencies such as “interpersonal and relationship skills” and “ambiguity tolerance and adaptability” ranked second and third, respectively. This study did not conclude that foreign language skills were not important—fluency in a foreign language was considered a predictor of cross-cultural competency. Rather, the respondents made clear that a foreign language acquired in an academic setting, which usually emphasizes literary rather than applied uses of a language, was by itself not sufficient to produce cross-cultural competency. Further, the managers leveled criticisms at study abroad programs in which students lived with other Americans, took courses from U.S. professors and socialized mostly among themselves. What the managers in this study did value, were programs in which students had substantial and meaningful “real world experience” with another culture.

The implication for the college job seeker is clear. It is simply not enough to seek an international experience—the experience itself has little value for an employer. The savvy job seeker must be able to speak about this experience in terms of the transferable skills that he or she developed while abroad and how they can be applied to the workplace. For many students, this can be an enormous challenge. The 2003 Rand report concluded that, to effectively exercise leadership in the global workplace, employees must demonstrate the following: a “multidimensional and well-integrated” repertoire of skills that includes substantial professional or technical knowledge related to the organization’s core business; managerial ability that includes effective interpersonal and
teamwork skills; a strategic understanding of their organization and industry in a global context; and, once again, cross-cultural experience.

Advisors can help prepare students to articulate how their time spent studying, working, or volunteering abroad prepared them with these skills by asking them to identify specific examples that they might use to illustrate to an employer what they learned. The following is a check list of specific competencies that may be developed by international experiences, and is a good starting place for students to identify their transferable skills. Advisors can ask students to identify an experience that would demonstrate that they can:

- Creatively solve problems by applying familiar concepts to unfamiliar situations
- Contribute to an ethnically diverse team
- Be self-confident, yet able to listen and learn from people whose value systems are different
- Take personal risks and act independently
- Be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations
- Have a basic command of the local language, and be able use it in practical situations or
- Imagine, forecast, analyze or address business situations from a different cultural frame of reference.

This simple exercise is a critical first step for helping students to make their international experience relevant to employers.

The students’ next task is to determine how to present their transferable skills via the traditional job search marketing tools: the resume and the job interview. A well-designed resume is not simply a laundry list of experiences but a thoughtfully designed document that markets a student’s best experiences. The nature of the international experience will determine how a student presents it on his or her resume. Most students will include time spent studying abroad in the “Education” block on their resume, listing it just after their primary institution. An international internship or job will be included in the “Work Experience” block. Yet students, especially those who held jobs that are not related to their academic major, should be encouraged to think in terms of transferable skills, rather than simply listing their job duties. An adviser, for example, can ask a student, “What is it about your experience as a bartender in London that a future employer will find valuable?” This question can help students shift from writing about serving beer to describing their role in negotiating cultural differences, training new employees, and trouble shooting customer complaints. Students who are pursuing an international career may also choose to create a separate block on their resume called “International Experience,” and include within it all relevant information about their work abroad, study abroad and foreign language experiences.

To effectively present an international experience on his or her resume, students should ask themselves the following questions:

- What am I trying to communicate to a potential employer about my international experience? About its relationship to my academic major?
- What skills did I learn abroad? What cross-cultural competencies did I develop?
- How much detail do I need to provide on my resume to ensure that this experience has meaning to a potential employer?
- Where should I include this experience on my resume so that it will have the most impact and support what I am trying to communicate?

The second place that students will present their international experience to employers is during the job interview. Most college recruiters use behavioral interview questions, which assume that how a student handled a situation in the past predicts how he or she will handle a similar situation in the future. For example, a very common behavioral interview question is, “Tell me about your most challenging situation while in college and how you handled it.” Employers using behavior interview questions attempt to get students to tell a story about themselves and relate it to the job for which they are applying. The behavioral interview presents a very good venue in which a student can make his or her international experience relevant for the employer. A student who is able to discuss what he or she learned from a particular challenge associated with studying or working abroad will, in this example, demonstrate to the employer how the experience helped develop his or her problem solving skills.
Most career centers have materials that include typical job interview questions, and it is a useful exercise for students to prepare answers using experiences from their time abroad as examples. As a starting place, students who are preparing for interviews should ask themselves the following questions:

- What key competencies is the employer seeking for this position?
- Aside from technical skills, what are the other interpersonal qualities the company desires? An ability to work in teams? Flexibility? Creative problem solving?
- What are the two or three best stories from my time abroad that will illustrate that I have these qualities? Can I tell this story in a compelling manner? How will I relate this experience to the job for which I am applying?

Students who have spent time abroad should have an advantage when looking for jobs in the global job market. Their ability to capitalize on that advantage depends on how well they make their international experience meaningful to the manager who makes the final hiring decision.

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