

PUTTING YOUR STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE TO WORK



STUDY ABROAD INDIANAPOLIS



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July 2024

DEFINE YOUR EXPERIENCE ABROAD FOR EMPLOYERS

Welcome back to campus!

We hope you had a wonderful experience studying abroad. Many students describe their study-abroad experiences as “amazing” and “life-changing.” You still may be trying to figure out how you can incorporate everything you’ve learned abroad into your life back home. It can be a lot to unpack! The Study Abroad office has prepared the following toolkit to help you leverage your study abroad experience as you begin your career. You will find questions to help you reflect on your time abroad that will then generate examples that you can incorporate in to your resume, cover letters and job interviews!

“Numerous studies confirm the value that employers place upon applicants who have international experience.

But what employers are specifically looking for are candidates who have articulated lessons that were learned and the intercultural and interpersonal skills that were strengthened as a result of studying abroad.”

– Martin Tillman, “AIFS Student Guide to Study Abroad and Career Development”

After spending time overseas where you learned about different cultures, adapted to new ideas and cultural expectations, you now need to apply these new skills to finding a job. In addition to sharing your study abroad stories with friends, family, and advisers, you will also need to **reflect** on your experience and be ready to speak intelligently about it to potential employers. It’s your job to articulate your new skills and the value you will contribute.

Self-Reflection

Before you can articulate your experience professionally, you must have an understanding of the key skills you gained. Set aside some quiet time to reflect. The list of skills below are some commonly found in those who have studied abroad. The list is by no means exhaustive or accurate to everyone, but a list for you to think through as you begin to look back on your own personal gains.

Skills

- Job related exposure to global industry
- Overcome language barriers
- Patience and perseverance
- Initiative
- Problem solving and a sense of responsibility
- Independence
- Function within a high level of ambiguity
- Appreciation of diversity
- Creativity
- Self-confidence

What do employers want?

Now that you have spent some time thinking about the skills you gained while abroad, take a look at the chart below to see how your list compares to the top skills sought by employers according to the **National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)**, which is the guiding organization for career advising in America. You may see that a lot of the skills you identify with based on your study abroad experience are also highly valued by potential employers!

Figure 1: Attributes Employers Seek on a Candidate's Resume

ATTRIBUTE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Problem-solving skills	91.2%
Ability to work in a team	86.3%
Strong work ethic	80.4%
Analytical/quantitative skills	79.4%
Communication skills (written)	77.5%
Leadership	72.5%
Communication skills (verbal)	69.6%
Initiative	69.6%
Detail-oriented	67.6%
Technical skills	65.7%
Flexibility/adaptability	62.7%
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	62.7%
Computer skills	54.9%



Get down to business...

Now it is time to begin updating your resume, writing cover letters and preparing for interviews! Since you have started to think about the skills you possess, and examples of how you displayed and enhanced these abroad, move on to the next two pages and spend some time answering the questions and filling in the chart provided. The lists and answers you create should be a combination of both job specific skills as well as personal qualities. Keep in mind that each job application should have a unique cover letter and resume based on the research you have done on that employer. Use the information you learn about each employer to craft your application so that you are highlighting your experience and skills that will best serve that position.

Answer the Following Questions:

- What subject did you study or what skills did you learn or improve?
- How did your learning abroad enhance your existing knowledge, skills, and understanding of your intended career field?
- What was the most challenging situation you faced? How did you deal with it and what did you learn? What skills and personal qualities did you tap into? How did the experience help you grow as a person?
- How did you adapt to your new cultural surroundings? Share examples from academic, social, and work settings about these challenges.
- What surprised you most about your new culture? Why was it a surprise? How did you react to this surprise? What did you learn from this?
- Did your experience abroad change any previously held opinions or perspectives? If so, how and why?
- What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself? How did this experience help you gain an understanding of your work style, clarify your values, or improve your interpersonal skills?



of participants
report a notable
difference in their
career plans



of students who participate
in study abroad programs
actively pursue careers in
other countries



of employers view study
abroad experience as an
advantage in making
hiring decisions



of employers believe that
students who study
abroad possess highly
desireable skills

SOURCES: AMERISPAN . FRONTIERS JOURNAL.



STAND OUT





RESUME AND COVER LETTER

THREE PLACES TO LIST STUDY ABROAD ON YOUR RESUME

COVER LETTER HINTS

Soft skills, also known as interpersonal skills, you may have gained abroad are often easier to explain in your cover letter than on your resume. Think about those that are relevant to the job or employer and use them to explain why they need you on their team!

HERE ARE SOME COMMON 'SOFT' SKILLS YOU MAY HAVE PICKED UP:

- Active listening skills
- Flexible
- Empathetic
- Self-aware
- Resilient
- Patient
- Shows initiative
- Inquisitive
- Assertive
- Open minded

CHECK OUT THE SAMPLE RESUME AND COVER LETTER SUGGESTIONS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES!

1. Education Section

- List your study abroad info in the "Education" section of your resume below your current college or university from where you intend to graduate.
 - The city and country in which you studied.
 - Year of study and length of program.
 - Note classes you completed during study abroad (that are relevant to the job or internship in which you're applying) on their own line in this section and call it "Relevant Coursework."

2. Experience Section

- While you were studying abroad, did you complete service learning work, a professional assignment, volunteer, or have an internship? Yes? Then along with other work experience you've had (if any), put these in chronological order in a "Work Experience" section.

3. Skills Section

- You likely acquired loads of new skills during your time abroad! Good news—there is more than one spot on your resume to list your many new talents:
 - Under "Work Experience"
 - Your skills can be included in bullet points under each of the positions you held and which skills you gained or improved during that experience.
 - Under "Skills"
 - This one might seem obvious but it is a good place to list interpersonal skills (sometimes called 'soft skills') that may not neatly fit in previous sections.

Writing a Cover Letter

A cover letter is meant to act as a complement to your resume, explaining in a narrative style why you are a good fit for the available position. If time spent abroad is relevant to the position, we recommend you include your overseas experience in both the introductory and main body paragraphs.

Introductory Paragraph

The first paragraph is to introduce yourself to the reader, explain how you learned about the position, tell why you are interested in this position, and why you are a good fit for the position. The end of the first paragraph should introduce relevant parts of your background, which you will later explain more in the body of the cover letter. For example, you might say something like, "Through my public health coursework at IUPUI, study-abroad experience in (list location), and leadership experience on (enter campus based or local organization), I have developed the analytical, interpersonal, and project management skills that will allow me to be an asset to (name of organization/position you are applying to)."

Main Body of Cover Letter

The middle one or two paragraphs of a cover letter is where you will share more specific examples of your relevant skills and qualities. In preparing to write this section, you need to begin by learning about the potential employer, identify the skills they are looking for, and demonstrate how you possess those skills. Next, you need to reflect upon your experiences and think of the various ways in which you can demonstrate that you are the right person for the job. Now is when you will want to include more detailed reflections from your time abroad. How might your time abroad have helped you develop communication, teamwork, or problem-solving skills? It is your job to help employers understand the many ways your experience abroad can benefit them. This is a great way to stand out from the competition since a small percentage of graduates study abroad.

Sample sentences:

"My experience studying abroad, and completing an engineering internship in Germany, has provided me with a cross-cultural perspective and hands on experience using (insert relevant technology or system)"

"My study abroad experience is also an asset because I learned to view problems from a different cultural perspective. Additionally, I am able to adapt to new environments and work with people of diverse backgrounds."

New technologies, like ChatGPT, can be a helpful tool in writing. But it is essential to make sure that your cover letter is written in your own words. The sentences written by ChatGPT often are common or generic sentences that employers can detect were written by AI. Ensure that your cover letter is your own work that is tailored towards your experiences and the job you are applying for.

Final Paragraph

Thank the reader for their time. Let them know that you will follow-up with them in the coming days and that you hope you will have the opportunity to discuss your qualifications during an interview. Make sure to provide a phone number and email that you will answer daily. It is a good idea to also let them know what time you are most likely reachable at those contact details.



BEWARE OF "TMI"

While we understand that your time abroad may have been life changing, make sure to keep it relevant during the interview. Don't start every sentence with, "When I was in England..."

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE IN FIVE YEARS?

If traveling gave you the itch to find other adventurous opportunities ASAP, that is awesome! Maybe you are just trying to earn money so you can take off again, or are you looking for a stable career? Be prepared to be clear regarding your commitment to a long-term position. Sometimes employers will be understanding of your future travel plans, but this is more likely in a job with high turnover.

KEEP IT BRIEF

You will have loads of stories to tell when you get back home, but when you head into your interview, make sure you keep these stories brief so that you can focus on telling them how you will apply what you learned when they hire you.

INTERVIEWS

HOW TO INCORPORATE YOUR STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

1. Do Background Research

Look for ways that your study abroad experience could align with their office values and goals. Do they have locations overseas? Do they deal with international clients? How would your time abroad enhance your ability to do the job?

2. Cite Specific Examples

The more specific and relevant, the better. Show them how your international experience has shaped you as a potential employee. Don't be afraid to give an example of a problem or obstacle you encountered. It is a great opportunity to show that you are resilient, capable of problem-solving and overcoming adversity.

3. Focus On Your Achievements

Think about how you prepared to go overseas. Did you dedicate yourself to working or studying to get the funds and grades to do it? What classes did you take? How did it change you as a person? Don't sell yourself short. Now is the time to toot your own horn!

4. Create your Sound Bite

Reflect on your experience abroad and create a short response that you can be prepared to give during an interview that sums up your experience if asked, "I see you studied abroad, how was that"? When crafting this response incorporate, why you chose to study abroad, how it made you feel, and what skills you gained that are most valuable to you personally and professionally.



SOCIAL MEDIA

MAKE OR BREAK

No matter how perfect you think you are for a job, there's one thing that can instantly ruin your chances of getting the job – social media! A flawless interview, stellar references and unique experiences cannot make up for offensive comments, posts, or pictures online. Assume all information you post or are tagged in is visible to future employers. Will this hurt or help your job prospects?

While you are updating your resume and writing your cover letters you should also conduct a social media audit of your accounts:

- Review all open content on all platforms
 - Go back through your photos and tags on Instagram and Facebook, check your Twitter feed. Delete photos where you are visibly intoxicated, making any kind of gestures that could be deemed rude or inappropriate. Delete offensive language
- Google Yourself
 - This may help uncover content you may have forgotten was out there.
- Carefully consider your posting habits
 - You may want to re-evaluate how often you post, the topics of your posts, and the people you follow?
- Make all of your social media accounts more private using the setting feature. Keep in mind this isn't full proof, but will restrict access to most content.

LINKEDIN

- Don't forget to feature your study abroad experience on your LinkedIn profile. Add it to the "Education" section and also in the "Experience" section if you participated in some form of hands-on, experiential learning like an internship abroad.
- Be sure to include the amazing skills and qualities you gained from being abroad.
- Connect with fellow students, professional or academic contacts you made during your program. Ask them to 'endorse' your skills on your profile. This can increase your credibility!
- Use LinkedIn for networking and sharing relevant information about your professional life. Don't treat it as an additional social network with unprofessional posts.



Check out these

RESOURCES

The links below provide additional career related resources to help you leverage your study abroad experience:

- Campus Career Services: <https://career.indianapolis.iu.edu/students-alumni/career-services/index.html>
- Study Abroad: Why Study Abroad: <https://abroad.indianapolis.iu.edu/why-study-abroad/career-benefits.html>
- AIFS Guide to Study Abroad and Career Development: [Tillman_AIFS_Student_Guide_Career.pdf \(aifsabroad.com\)](#)
- Go Abroad.com: How Will Study Abroad Help Your Career: How Study Abroad Will Help Your Career | [GoAbroad.com](#)



WISE WORDS

TO LIVE BY

"Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends." – Maya Angelou

"Travel can be one of the most rewarding forms of introspection." – Lawrence Durrell

**"Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that's OK. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind."
– Anthony Bourdain**

