

“Alumni Perceptions of Learning Abroad Outcomes in the
Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel in the College of Human Ecology, U of MN”
Katrina A. Ginther, MA, Higher Education Administration, December 2006

In April 2006 the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel (DHA) distributed a survey to DHA alumni who had participated in international experiences while at the University of Minnesota. This survey focused on the perceived personal, academic, and career learning outcomes of the undergraduate international experience. Katrina Ginther, a graduate student in the Dept of Educational Policy and Administration, conducted this research in cooperation with DHA, the College of Human Ecology, and the Learning Abroad Center.

- DHA is composed of five majors – Clothing Design, Graphic Design, Housing Studies, Interior Design, and Retail Merchandising. All majors, but Housing Studies, were represented among the responses.
- Alumni perceptions were obtained through an online survey including both quantitative and qualitative questions.
- International experiences defined by this study included study abroad, internships abroad, and internationally conducted research.

There were 34 alumni who responded, out of a sample of 109 (31% response). The findings varied by major, but general conclusions supported learning abroad experiences in all three categories (i.e., personal, academic, and career developments).

Survey Results

1. Did you complete your undergraduate degree before Dec 2005?
Yes, 76%

Personal Development and Growth Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. My international experience enhanced my critical thinking skills.	23%	74%	3%	0%
3. Living abroad increased my ability to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds.	41%	56%	3%	0%
4. My international experience contributed to my understanding of other cultures.	59%	38%	3%	0%
5. My international experience increased my understanding of my own culture.	59%	38%	3%	0%

Career Development Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
6. My international experience helped me find direction in my professional life.	15%	53%	26%	6%	n/a
7. I believe my resume is enhanced by the inclusion of my undergraduate international experience.	32%	44%	12%	0%	12%
8. My international experience gave me professional connections and/or career opportunities I otherwise would not have had.	6%	29%	56%	9%	n/a
9. When applying for positions interviews have commented positively about my international experience.	21%	50%	15%	0%	15%
10. Overall, my employers have viewed my international experience positively.	26%	47%	3%	0%	24%
11. International experiences, in general, will enhance my lifelong career opportunities.	38%	53%	9%	0%	n/a

14) Please choose the statement that best describes your perspective on the overall value of your international experience to your career.

I value my international experience much more now that I'm in the workforce. 12%

I value my international experience somewhat more now that I'm in the workforce. 23%

I value my international experience about the same. 65%

I value my international experience less now that I'm in the workforce. 0%

15) If you would like to elaborate on your response to question 14 please comment here:

- After graduation, I began my career in sourcing/importing at a major corporation. My travel overseas (Italy, England, and France) made it a lot easier to understand work ethic of my teams overseas.
- I would advise any student to take advantage of a study abroad program. Though I don't feel it directly enhanced or improved my current profession- it certainly made me more confident, aware, and adventurous in my day to day, which in turn makes me a better worker.
- I worked abroad, and still consider it very important in retrospect, but the career I am in changes with the trends. The longer I am away the less relative it is to my current situation.
- International experience seems to overall broaden a person's outlook, making them more interesting to work with, as well as enabling them to bring diverse experiences to the table to share.
- I would see it as a benefit, but not a necessary quality or something that would tip the scales between similarly qualified candidates.

16) How did your undergraduate international experience (study abroad, research abroad, and/or internship experience) impact your life? (See Appendix D for complete list).

Personal Development Comments

- Knowing about different cultures made me think differently about everything, how I act, how I speak, and how others perceive me and my actions. You learn how to think outside of your individual world.
- It definitely gave me more courage to go out into the unknown. Sometimes the most exciting and fun things can happen when you can't even understand the language of the country you are in.
- I had a new perspective on the United States and our belief systems. I am open and accepting of people that are different from myself. I want to travel and learn even more about different places and cultures.

Academic Development Comments

- It gave me a point of reference when discussing time periods (ex. Renaissance), important global structure (Louvre, Duomo, etc.), and the inherent differences in design between world regions.
- It showed me a different theory on interior design, which broadened my thought process.
- Studying abroad allowed me to think more broadly about design concepts, applications, and professions as well as gave me an international perspective on such a global issue. Design is particularly interesting to study, because it is not entirely universal – everything from color, to symbolism, to overall layout is impacted by cultural influences.

Career Development Comments

- It made me realize what direction I wanted to go career-wise in my life.
- It changed the way I approach my work, and changed it for the better, in every way shape and form. My work feels more focused, and much calmer than before.
- Internship experience: This gave me a general idea of what my career path looked like and the daily tasks I could potentially be doing.

Demographics and Background

Please take a moment to answer the following questions about your background.

1) What is your gender?

Female, 94.1 %

Male, 5.9%

2) What type of international experience did you pursue as an undergraduate? (Select all that apply)

Study Abroad, 97.1 %

Internship Experience, 8.8 %

Research Abroad, 5.9 %

Volunteer Experience, 0 %

3) Did you study and/or speak a foreign language while you were abroad?

Yes, quite extensively, 8.8 %

Yes, somewhat, 2.9 %

Yes, but only minimally, 23.5 %

No, I didn't study a foreign language abroad, 41.2 %

No, but I wish I had studied a foreign language abroad, 23.5 %

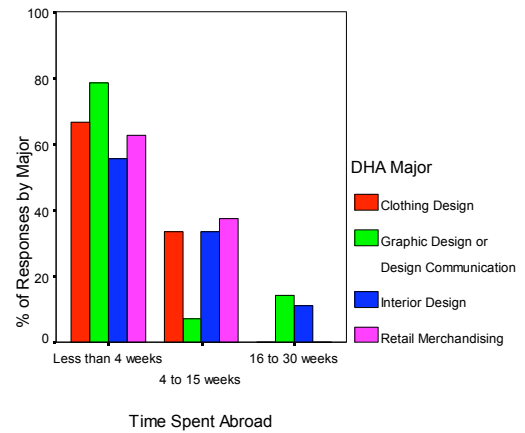
4) What was the duration of your international experience while at the U of M?

Less than 4 weeks, 67.6 %

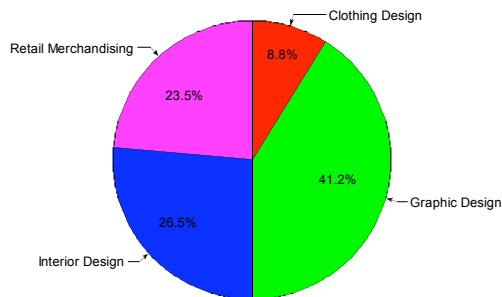
4 to 15 weeks (academic semester), 29.4 %

16 to 30 weeks (academic year), 8.8 %

More than 30 weeks, 0 %



5) What was your undergraduate major?



6) Does your undergraduate major apply to your current job?

Yes, very closely, 58.8 %

Yes, somewhat closely, 17.6 %

Yes, but only minimally, 11.8 %

No, not at all, 11.8 %

- 7) Please indicate the nature of your current employment by listing your job title and primary work responsibilities. (See Appendix E for complete list).

Clothing Design Alumni examples:

- As a graduate student I take classes as well as teach students clothing design skills as part of their undergraduate studies.
- Assistant Technical Designer *responsible for communicating fit/construction/style changes to our vendors who then communicates with the factories, *some pattern work, *mostly responsible for executing desired fit and style chosen by the buyer.
- Assistant Technical Designer - Fitting garments w/ design team and communicating w/ factories in China where the samples and garments are made.

Graphic Design Alumni examples:

- Graphic Designer/Marketing Assistant: 1. Responsible for developing interactive learning materials for online courses; 2. Involved in global marketing efforts to promote courses; 3. Other miscellaneous design work (logos, branding, etc.).
- I am a Volunteer Coordinator at a Ronald McDonald House in Chicago. I recruit, train and manage a team of 200+ volunteers.
- I work 9 months out of the year for Outward Bound in Colorado where I manage logistics for the Rocky Mountain Program. This does not apply to my major. I also freelance graphic art work- such as event marketing material, brochures for my county, logos for local businesses. I hope to become self employed in an invitation/card making business with in the next year. Wish me luck!

Interior Design Alumni examples:

- Interior designer - all stages of the design process, client meetings, etc.
- Ashley Furniture HomeStore Construction Designer. Wall placement planning, finish selection, construction contact, furniture arrangement.
- law student

Retail Merchandising Alumni examples:

- Business Analyst: Allocate inventory to stores. Monitor inventory levels by store. Help in the planning and selection process of assortments. Monitor sales, markdowns, gross margin and turnover. Place orders and set units for all orders. Set retail prices and PMU%.
- Sales Manager - I work as a vendor rep selling various product lines to major retailers such as Target, Menards, Kohls, etc.
- I own an infant/motherhood boutique. I opened the store 4 months after graduating and did it alone-no partners! I do everything from buying to selling!

- 8) What type of employer do you work for? (Select all that apply)

For-Profit Organization, 85.3 %

Non-Profit Organization, 14.7 %

Government Agency, 2.9 %

- 9) What year did you graduate?

14.7% of respondents graduated in 2001.

26.5% of respondents graduated in 2002.

14.7% of respondents graduated in 2003.

17.6% of respondents graduated in 2004.

26.5% of respondents graduated in 2005.

- 10) How many years did it take you to finish your Bachelor's degree?

70.6 % of respondents graduated in 4 to 4.5 years.

20.6 % of respondents graduated in 5 to 5.5 years.

8.8 % of respondents graduated in 6 years.