



Learning Abroad Center

Define Your Experience for Employers

“A global point of view is a critical skill set that is not easily come by in the US, and it is a skill set that facilitates creativity, diversity of thinking, and better skills for working with a variety of individuals with varied backgrounds, interests and capabilities.”

– Advertising Executive

A potential employer may not have studied abroad and may not understand what the experience means. It's up to you to effectively communicate the skills and proficiencies that will benefit their organization and convince them of the value of your experience.

Career

What makes a successful career professional in an international corporation? (RAND Corporation, 2003)

Top Five Characteristics

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

Lowest Five Characteristics

- Competitiveness and drive
- General educational breadth
- Internet and information technology competency
- Managerial training and experience
- Foreign language fluency

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

Skills

What skills or proficiencies have you acquired or enhanced while you were abroad?

- Skills that professionals with international experiences cite as being particularly useful in their careers include:
- Enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity to customs and cultural differences
- Foreign language proficiency
- Adaptability
- Ability to identify and achieve goals
- General improvement in communications skills
- Increased confidence, initiative, and independence
- Greater flexibility, sense of humor
- Awareness of global economic and political issues and realities
- Ability to maintain an open mind and be tolerant of others
- Clarification of goals and improved self-awareness
- General travel skills
- Resource management
- Organization
- Problem solving
- Crisis management
- Patience
- Listening and observation
- Specific professional skills or knowledge base



Self-Reflection

Be prepared to give insightful comments about your experience at any time. Which stories highlight new skills and knowledge from your education abroad experience?

(Linda Gross, Ph.D., Michigan State University, 2003)

- Share an example of how you set priorities to achieve a desired outcome in your study abroad experience.
- How did your study abroad experience enhance your knowledge, skills, and understanding of your intended career field? What assets might international study yield as opposed to someone who studied domestically?
- Share an example of a travel situation that helped you build your understanding of human motivation. How did this enhance your understanding of leadership or teamwork?
- Share an example of how your international experience has improved your skills in communication with others. How might this make you a better professional in your field?
- How did you adjust/adapt to your new cultural surroundings? Share examples from academic, social, work settings. How did these influence your ability to interact successfully with others?
- Share an international experience in which you had to resolve a conflict or solve a problem. What skills and personal qualities did you tap into? How did the experience help you grow as a person?
- Share an example of a study abroad experience in which you took initiative to achieve a greater result.
- Share an example of a time when you may have been in danger or afraid. What did you learn from it? Why?
- What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself through your study abroad experience? Why?

Résumé

Be sure to locate your international experience in the best place or places on your resume for your intended job.

- If it is study program, consider listing the program in your education section rather than under activities or other experiences.

B.A. University of Minnesota—Art History 2005
Paul Valéry Université, Montpellier, France, 2003
- If the experience included an internship, list the experience as a professional experience rather than as an activity.

Marketing Assistant, Hamley's Toys
London, England, 1/05–5/05
- If you did a work program but the work was not particularly related to your intended profession, list it as work experience but concentrate on the cross-cultural learning.

The Black Dog Pub, Cambridge, England
Served patrons in a local restaurant, worked as the only American in a British business, trained co-workers in American-style customer service.
- If your resume includes a section for skills or proficiencies, include specific skills acquired or improved while abroad.

Cover Letter

It is important to address the specific job you hope to acquire in your cover letter. These questions can help you focus.

- How does your experience relate to your field?
- What are the transferable skills?
- How might your international experience uniquely benefit a professional in that field?

Develop a strategy to specifically address these points in your cover letter or résumé:

My experience living in Ecuador will enhance my ability to communicate and interact effectively with the local Latino population this position has the opportunity to work closely with.

My studies in Japan provided me with a great insight into the cultural differences that influence consumers in different countries and will improve my ability to contribute to international marketing initiatives.

Even if your career goals do not include a specific international dimension at this time, you can promote the general transferable skills, such as independence, confidence, and problem solving.

Networking & Interviews

If your interviewer remarks or asks about your international experience, take it as an opportunity to expand. Don't let the opportunity pass by with a simple "Yes, it was great!"

Develop stories and responses in advance. Be ready to show it was a learning experience and provide examples.

- Utilize the reflection questions to formulate your responses and stories.
- Review the list of skills and develop examples of how you gained these abroad.
- Identify skills in the job description and create examples from your international experience that exemplify those skills.
- Be sure to use some domestic examples also and ensure your example/stories are balanced. It is better to illustrate critical thinking skills than to show-off or demean one culture at the expense of another.
- If you work better with models here is one you could use:
 1. Why you chose the program
 2. Story that illustrates a skill
 3. A few sentences about how that skill is transferable to this specific job

"I usually bring up my international experience when asked, 'tell me something interesting about yourself.'"

– Clinical Research Coordinator

Resources for Sharing Your Stories

Continue developing your stories. It is a great way to reflect on your experience and discover new insights and skills you gained abroad.

- **Learning Abroad Center Student Profiles**
Student profiles exhibit stories from returned students on the Learning Abroad Center's website. Digital stories focus on a specific event or story that is displayed in moving photographs on our website. Contact the Learning Abroad Center at UMabroad@umn.edu.
www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/stories
- **Learning Abroad Center Returned Students**
Your international experience doesn't have to end when you come back to the US. Get involved! Local and international activities can help you adjust to being back as well as help you integrate your time abroad into your academic life and long-term goals. www.UMabroad.umn.edu/students/returnedstudents
- **Glimpse Magazine**
Glimpse provides a forum for students to share their experience abroad. Submit your story for the online publication or the quarterly magazine.
glimpsefoundation.org for more information
- **Transitions Abroad**
Transitions Abroad is a magazine, published six times a year. Students are encouraged to write stories about their international experiences and submit them.
www.transitionsabroad.com
- **Minnesota Daily**
Contact the *Minnesota Daily* to be featured in the campus newspaper.
www.mndaily.com
- **Create Your Own Webpage or Blog**
Create a website all about your experience abroad. The College of Liberal Arts has compiled a blog of past participants in science & health sciences. <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/swans155/scienceabroad/>
- **Your Local News**
Contact your hometown or neighborhood newspaper. They may want to feature your experience.

"My experience in Russia and Ukraine differentiated me from the masses of "standard" college grads hunting for the most desirable jobs. I heard it time and again from employers."

– Advertising Account Planning Manager

University of Minnesota Undergraduate Career Offices

Career professionals can help you perfect your résumé, practice the interview process, and get started looking or planning for a career.

St. Paul Campus Career Center: offers career services for College of Food, Agriculture & Natural Resource Sciences, & College of Design

198 McNeal Hall
Phone: 612.624.2710
Email: spccc@umn.edu

University Counseling & Consulting Services: offers campus-wide career services

109 Eddy Hall
Phone: 612.624.3323

Business Career Center—Carlson

1-110 Carlson School of Management
Phone: 612.624.0011

CEHD Exploratory, Transition, and Career Services (ETS)

127 Appleby Hall
Phone: 612.624.4346
Email: etcs@umn.edu

Health Careers Center: offers campus-wide career services for health related fields

2-565 Moos Tower
Phone: 612.624.6767
Email: Health.Careers.Center@umn.edu

Career & Community Learning Center:—CLA Career & Internship Services

135 Johnston Hall
Phone: 612.624.7577
Email: cclc@class.cla.umn.edu

Career Center for Science and Engineering: offers services for CBS and IT students

50 Lind Hall
Phone: 612.624.4090
Email: ccse@umn.edu

"My international experience is always asked about, whether it is relevant to the position or not."

– Director of Conferences
for a Professional Association

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