

How Studying Abroad Can Help You **FIND A JOB**

Learn how to showcase your study abroad experience to help you find a job.



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1. Introduction

This e-report assumes you have already researched the following areas: Job Hunting Techniques, Creating Resumes, Writing Cover Letters, Interviewing for a Job and Following-Up After an Interview. If you haven't done this yet, there are lots of resources online and www.Dummies.com has books dedicated to each area.

The objective of this e-report is to show how a study abroad experience can help boost your chances of getting a job interview, strengthen your interview and getting that increasingly elusive job offer.

2. What Are Employers Looking For?

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Job Outlook 2009 survey, Employers are looking for competent, well-rounded employees who display:

- Excellent communication skills (verbal and written)
- Strong work ethic
- Teamwork skills (interpersonal relationship skills)
- Initiative
- Analytical skills

While a 2003 RAND study surveyed 135 HR managers and they identified the following: Depth of professional or technical knowledge, Managerial ability (teamwork and interpersonal skills), Strategic international understanding and cross-cultural experience (multi-cultural sensitivity).

Studying abroad is an obvious answer to international understanding and cross-cultural experience, but can also be a way to increase your professional or technical knowledge (professional, medical & educator language programs, internships abroad, and even volunteer work abroad) Studying abroad can also help with your teamwork and interpersonal skills through decision making, problem solving, and learning to communicate in creative ways.

3. Your Resume: Add Sizzle and Substance

Many job seekers make the mistake of glossing over their study abroad experience when compiling their resume. Avoid this by giving your experience a proper description in the "Education" section of your resume. At the very least, it demonstrates initiative, independence and interpersonal skills (ex. an ability to adapt in different environments). All of which are skills sought out by potential employers in the many applicants.

Use your experience to highlight specific skills gained from surviving and learning in a foreign culture. Create a bulleted list to outline where you studied, for how long and highlight subjects studied. Did you complete an internship while abroad? Indicate whether it was language-intensive or gave you practical work experience in your field. What language skills did you gain while abroad? Elaborate on what you can do, not what you can't. Don't say you are fluent, if you are only conversant. Did you live with a family or foreign students while abroad? Did you travel to other countries while studying abroad? Especially if you spent significant time in a variety of countries, make sure to include this on your list. How about special projects, field studies, volunteer work, awards, etc.? Use your experience to help set you apart and make an impression upon potential employers.

4. Make Your Cover Letter Stand Out

At least as important as your resume, the cover letter you send to potential employers can be a make-it or break-it piece of paper when it comes to scoring an interview. Many people know this, yet feel lost when it comes to writing their own. Fortunately, with a little effort, writing a concise, effective cover letter is not as difficult as it sounds. And guess what? Your cover letter can stand out even more by using your study abroad experience to give potential employers an insight into your past accomplishments. The rules are simple:

- Grab their attention at the first sentence. If someone recommended you to a friend, mention that first. Name-dropping works, it gets your letter read. However, if you haven't been recommended by someone, then the opening paragraph may be a good place to try to tie in your experience abroad but don't force it, only if it works. Some examples are "While living in France, I realized just how much I missed using [their product or service]", "During my internship in Argentina, I found myself using [their product or service]" or "Prior [or after] traveling to China to study Chinese, I became acquainted with [their product or service]". Remember, this person is most likely reading ten, twenty, or up to a couple hundred of these letters. Let them know you are different from the get-go.
- Don't be afraid to break from paragraph form. While you should start and end your cover letter with paragraphs, bulleted or numbered lists tend to be easier for the eye to process.
- The Relevant experience area is your place to shine. For almost any position, you should be able to correlate an aspect of studying abroad with the job you are applying for. Whether it be an obvious aspect like language skills or something that is slightly further removed, such as teamwork, initiative, inter personal skills, cross-culture awareness, problem-solving, maturity, or creativity, emphasizing your experience abroad in a positive light is sure to grab a potential employer's attention.
- You want to make sure you demonstrate why they would want to meet or hire you. Don't spend the whole letter on why it is perfect for you, rather write it in a way where they are interested in you. Don't forget to ask for the job or an interview.

5. Demonstrate Maturity & Initiative

Skim over this section if you aren't young or fresh out of school! Things are different these days than they were twenty, ten, heck, even five years ago. You will most likely be interviewing against professionals with much more on-the-job experience than you. The potential employer may like you, but you will need to demonstrate maturity and initiative in your interview in order to score the position. They will probably even ask you, during the course of the interview, something like, "We are considering three other candidates for this position. Why should we hire you?"

Your answer should reflect your maturity, give them confidence that you are not some young kid who wants to go out partying every night, or who just wants the job for the time being. If you studied abroad during college, this is a great way to show your initiative in taking a chance, breaking the trend, and using your time in school to grow and learn as much as possible. A summer abroad, completing an internship in your field in Argentina; or volunteer work in China, or developing your Spanish language skills while studying and living with a host family in Guatemala, will show potential employers that you are dedicated to personal and professional development, rather than hanging out at your parent's house and wasting the summer months.

6. Emphasize Strong Interpersonal Skills

Employers are increasingly looking for workers who have strong interpersonal skills. Your ability to communicate and get along with others in the workplace is key to successful employment. Time spent studying abroad in a foreign country can help develop these skills dramatically. Also, after studying abroad, you can use the experience to help you communicate to your potential employer that you are fully ready to join their team. Two months spent perfecting your French in Bordeaux, while interning at a bank and living with a host family demonstrates your ability to communicate with others, and in a foreign language to boot! Pursuing a career in social work? A volunteer experience in Thailand, working with disadvantaged children, can surely provide an edge while reflecting your ability to communicate.

7. Illustrate a Global Understanding

It's undeniable... the world has become smaller. Industries in all sectors are increasingly doing business overseas, competing against foreign companies or their business can be affected by events overseas. A strong global understanding is important to landing many jobs. This is another reason why studying abroad is an important facet to setting you apart from the pack during a job interview. That semester in London can come in really handy for your career in finance.

If you did not study abroad during college, investing in yourself now with a study abroad stint in a foreign country can be a boon to your job search. What better answer to the popular interview question, "How long have you been looking for a job?" than explaining that after being laid off or your company closing you decided to add greater global understanding to your resume by spending two months in Brazil to increase your knowledge of Portuguese and Brazilian culture, infrastructure and business acumen. Or a month learning Chinese in Beijing while witnessing firsthand the incredible work ethic, forward-thinking attitude and hustle of the Chinese people.

8. Highlight Related Skills or Experience

Studying abroad can have a bad rap with certain employers, due to their lack of knowledge of what you have really accomplished. It is important to illustrate the related skills and/or experience gained from your time abroad. For example, say you are interviewing for a position as an event planner. In addition to all the training and skills that you already have, along with everybody else that is applying, that time you organized a social event for local children while studying Spanish in Guatemala can add some spice to your resume or interview. There are so many experiences abroad that add skills that are easily transferable to the domestic workforce. No matter if you are a teacher, banker, businessperson, architect, social worker, fashion designer, lawyer, or in tourism, a stint studying abroad will add extra skills that will enable you to sell yourself to a prospective employer.

9. Give Real World Examples in Interviews

What better way to nail an interview than to give tangible, real world examples when answering questions? How about a common question, such as, "Describe a major goal you have set for yourself recently." A perfect answer to this question could be, "A major goal I set for myself was to revive my Spanish language skills I learned in college. I recently spent two months studying in Barcelona and Madrid and have added not only a degree of fluency, but added depth to such skills as independence, cultural sensitivity, and problem solving, not to mention coming up with creative solutions to managing a shoestring budget overseas."

10. Get Remembered by Interviewers

Imagine yourself, the interviewee, in the position of the interviewer: Hours, most likely days, spent listening to many, many people with the same answers to their questions. This is another perfect opportunity to highlight your study abroad experience to make the interviewer pay attention to you and remember you. Volunteer experience in Colombia? Internship in Russia? Either experience is sure to perk-up the ears of any potential employer. How about a semester abroad in Ecuador, where you also traveled through Peru, visited indigenous villages, haggled in markets and volunteered to teach English to local children? There are tremendous opportunities to be had once you open the door to study abroad.

11. Some Final Comments

Warning #1: Don't Make Everything About Study Abroad!

Often, people who recently returned from a great study abroad experience will talk about it incessantly. Don't fall into this habit. A way to avoid this is to weave study abroad into your answers, but don't let it dominate your discussion. If the interviewer asks a question about your ability to take initiative in a certain situation, it is best to have three or four examples, of which one can be an experience from your study abroad. Be professional and businesslike when describing your study abroad experience.

Warning #2: Know Your Audience!

Not all potential employers have studied or traveled abroad, so take care to avoid any misconceptions they may have about studying abroad. It is very important not to dwell too much on your study abroad experience, lest your potential employer start to think you will be wanting to travel all the time instead of focusing on your career. The best way to dispel these myths is to highlight the practical skills you learned while abroad, such as thinking on-your-feet, self-confidence and reliance, and the ability to handle uncomfortable situations diplomatically. Save the shocking stories of your mishaps for the water cooler, after you get hired. Another way to put potential employers at ease (we don't want them to think you are a flight risk, after all!) is to mention how much you enjoy being at home. Talk about your favorite local sports team, family, or other ties to home to impress upon them how ready you are to start your career.

In conclusion, studying abroad can be an excellent tool to boost your cover letter, resume, interview, and yes, your on-the-job experience. With a little fine-tuning, you should be able to transfer the skills you learned while living in a foreign country to ensure your worth in the workforce.

Helpful Study Abroad Resources

Documents

Passport: [American Passport Company](#)

Visa: Visa Center

Student Discount Card (ISIC): [STA Travel USA](#)

Airfare

[eXito Travel](#) - Latin America specialists

[CheapOAir](#) - Great site for cheap flights

[Travelocity](#) - Well known site for airfare, no booking fees

Packing

Our favorite bags (carry-on):

Suitcase/Backpack combo: [Patagonia MLC \(Maximum Legal Carry-on\)](#) (Bagsbuy)

Wheelie/Backpack combo: [High Sierra ATQ Wheeled Duffle](#) (Irv's Luggage)

[Noise-Canceling Head Phones](#) (Luggage Guru)

[Money Belt](#)

Keep in Touch

Mobal GSM Worldwide Phones & SIM cards

[Skype](#)

Language Preparation

Bilingual America

Think Spanish

Think French

[Transparent Language](#) - over 100 languages, products range from free BYKI software to more involved language programs

[Visual Link Spanish](#) - Free Spanish lessons plus popular Spanish software

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