

YOUR STUDY ABROAD OR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE
CAN PUT YOU AT THE FRONT OF THE LINE

– If You Know How to Use It! By Lynn Sadlowski



Whether you are heading into the world of work or planning further study, your study abroad or international experience can propel your application to the front of the line. However, do you know how to articulate your experience so that you stand out from your competition?

Research and student testimonials consistently cite international and study abroad experiences as having a positive impact on resume development, in job interviews and in graduate school admission applications. Yet, it is not enough to simply just have an international experience. You must be able to speak about your experience in terms the employer and admission representative understand.

It is essential to review what competencies/skills you gained from the experience. Here is a short list of possibilities:

- Coping skills (the ability to deal with stressful situations, comfort with uncertainty)
- Communication skills (active listening, following instructions, overcoming language barriers)
- International awareness
- Appreciation of diversity and sensitivity to cultural differences
- Adaptability to new living and learning environments
- Ability to view situations/problems from a new perspective
- Independence, self-reliance and self confidence
- Self-knowledge, enthusiasm and inquisitiveness
- Resourcefulness (including general travel and navigation skills)
- Acquiring another language

Many of the above are considered transferable skills. Transferable skills are skills that are not limited to any one academic discipline or field, but are transferable to many occupations. These skills are sought after by most employers, but you need to make the connection for the employer – it won't always be obvious. When researching the job or further education program, consider how the skills and knowledge you acquired while abroad can be applied to the position.

The following are suggested steps you can take to help you “unpack” your experience upon returning to campus.

Prepare answers to the following questions:

- Give me an example of something from your study abroad/ international experience that has changed you and why?
- Tell me something that was difficult about your abroad experience and how did you handle it?
- Describe three skills you think you developed or enhanced while studying/working/being abroad. How will they help you in this position?

Recall and record real stories /situations to highlight your newly acquired or enhanced skills.

Be able to demonstrate competency in specific areas like adaptability, initiative, interpersonal communication, and problem-solving.

Visit the Career Services office

to get help with your resume and cover letter to best articulate the new interpersonal skills and intercultural competencies you have gained and strengthened while studying abroad. Remember – an employer will not “automatically” see what may be very obvious to you.

Participate in campus or community events

that provide opportunities for you to practice articulating what you have learned and give you a chance to network with potential employers.

Lynn Sadlowski is a Career Counsellor with Career Services.

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