



Maximizing Your Experience Abroad

Using your international
experience in your
job search

Cal Poly, Building 124
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Career Services
Division of Student Affairs

While You Are Abroad: Career Tips to Consider

Study abroad challenges you on a personal and professional level. You will find that your experience abroad benefits you throughout your life, including in your future job search. Although this may not be the first thing on your mind as you anticipate living overseas, there are several things you should consider doing in addition to your academics that will maximize your experience.

Seek Opportunities for Cultural Immersion

Try to interact extensively with natives of your host country, and take time to learn about their culture and customs. This will help you develop cross-cultural communication skills and enhance your understanding of the world around you; both are skills employers seek. Consider joining a student organization at your host university, participate in a local home stay, and/or travel regionally. Remember, employers look for signs of adaptability and cultural sensitivity.

Learn Another Language

Enroll in a class taught in the native language while abroad, take language classes or hire a tutor (these are often inexpensive). Ask those around you to speak in the country's native language so that you can practice daily.

Establish Contacts Abroad

Networking is key. Think ahead about how to develop your network while you are studying abroad and plan to keep in touch with the people you meet after you return to the U.S. The contacts you develop could be faculty or staff at your host university, professionals that you meet by conducting informational interviews, or people affiliated with a professional organization you are involved with, just to name a few.

Participate in an Internship

Some study abroad programs assist students in finding internships, which will help with your cultural immersion. You may also consult your study abroad advisor or career counselor.

Volunteer

Get in touch with non-profit organizations near the city you will stay in and inquire after opportunities to volunteer. You might try orphanages, nursing homes, hospitals, or language schools.

Research Jobs

Research foreign and U.S.-based companies located in your host country, and arrange to meet with representatives to learn more. Maintain these contacts when you return to the U.S.

Specialized Study/Academic Exploration

Think about taking courses that either relate to your career goals or that will help you explore the possibilities that exist. For example, a Wine and Viticulture major might take a class that teaches about the local viticulture practices or regional wines. An Art major could take an art history class that focuses on the historic artists from that region, and includes frequent field trips to nearby museums to see their works.

Incorporating Your Experience Into Your Job Search

On Your Resume

List your study abroad experience under Education. You may also include relevant coursework taken abroad. If you participated in class projects, an internship, or other activities, you may include those as well.

In Your Cover Letter

Use your cover letter to tell the employer more about you. You can refer to your experiences abroad to highlight specific traits or skills. For example, if an employer is seeking a candidate who is flexible and able to work with all types of people, use your experience abroad to illustrate these qualities. For example:

My experience living in Ecuador with a Ecuadorian family will enhance my ability to communicate and interact effectively with the local Latino population that this position works with closely.

Call upon your experience to provide descriptive, yet brief examples to illustrate your point. There is more power behind statements supported by an example. It's one thing to say that you are flexible, but it has much greater validity if you explain why or how.

During the Interview

Reflect on how your experience abroad has shaped you. Brainstorm a list of notable experiences from abroad prior to the interview so you can easily recall them. Be prepared to use specific examples to answer questions in the interview. For example, think about a time you overcame conflict or when you demonstrated flexibility and problem solving skills. Anticipating questions and conducting a mock interview at Career Services will also help you recall relevant examples to incorporate into the interview.

Your Marketable Skills

Before and during your job search, develop a list of skills you've gained through studying abroad and think of examples that will demonstrate them.

Here are some examples:

- Cultural awareness
- Cross-cultural communication skills
- Independence
- Adaptability
- Self-confidence and maturity
- Exposure to the global economy
- Awareness of diverse business practices and customs
- Connection to international clients
- Foreign language
- Good judgment
- Motivation
- Problem solving skills

Resume Samples

Education

Education

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
Bachelor of Science in **Social Science**, Concentration in **Cross-Cultural Studies** December 2007
Minor in **French**, Minor in **International Relations** Cumulative GPA: **3.67**

International Education

El Centro de Lenguas Modernas, University of Granada, Spain, 2005-2006 Academic Year
Language Courses Abroad: International House, Playa del Carmen, Mexico, Winter 2004
University of Salamanca, Spain, Study Abroad, Summer 2001

Education

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
Major: **Biological Sciences** GPA: **3.4**
Concentration: **Molecular and Cellular Biology**

University of Alicante, Spain—Study Abroad, 2007

Work and Class Experience

International Experience

Harvard Model United Nations Conference, Boston, MA February 2007

Delegate Representative – Costa Rica, Third Committee of the General Assembly, United Nations

- Researched and presented speeches about the issue of human trafficking in Costa Rica, including political, social, and economic factors contributing to the issue
- Drafted resolutions to combat human trafficking and enslavement on a global level
- Recipient, *Delegate Award of General Excellence*, Cal Poly Political Science Department

Senior Project: *France and the United States: A cultural & political comparison*

- Researched cultural and historical contrasts between the U. S. and France that led to different policies
- Examined factors contributing to French protests and related findings to protests in the U.S. in the 1960s
- Formulated a 30-page paper examining personal experiences as an American living in France

Service and Volunteerism

New Hope, Uganda, East Africa

International Volunteer

June 2005-August 2005

- Taught English and basic computer skills to adult African nationals
 - Provided academic, spiritual, and emotional mentoring to youth in personal crisis
 - Adapted curriculum and taught fourth grade math to orphans whose second language is English
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International Service

Women's Restoration Center, Costa Rica

January 2004- June 2004

Volunteer—Portantorchas, Spanish Study Abroad Program

July, 2005