

# The Study Abroad Experience – Highlighting Your International Experience



Today's employers are seeking out culturally diverse and experienced employees who can work effectively in an increasingly global workplace. San Diego State University's Career Services & College of Business has prepared this guide to help you highlight your international experience in an interview, cover letter or resume. If you have additional questions regarding resume or cover letter preparation, interview techniques or your job search, please stop by Career Services SSE-1200.

## Career Enhancement

Study abroad does more than promote personal, professional, and academic growth. It can also enhance your full-time and/or internship prospects since employers are increasingly seeking students who have studied abroad. Employers recognize the fact that those students who have successfully completed a study abroad program are likely to possess the skills needed in the global economy – economic and geographical knowledge, cross-cultural communication skills, analytical skills, flexibility, an understanding of and familiarity with local customs, an ability to adapt to new circumstances, and often a proficiency in a new language. Students who study abroad should highlight these unique set of skills to potential employers to distinguish themselves from the rest.

## Career Planning

Your study abroad experience may open doors for you to consider an international career. Be sure to consult publications on working abroad, and pay attention to immigration policies in the countries that interest you. While you are abroad, make a list of contact information for anyone you meet who works in an area that interests you. Once back home, be sure to write them to let them know that you are interested in returning abroad to work after you graduate.

Continue to build on your study abroad experience by networking and increasing your cross-cultural experiences on campus. Polish the language learned by taking advanced language classes or joining a language club. Become involved with an international student as a tutor or join an international or multi-cultural club or campus organization. Pursue other opportunities to study, work or travel abroad.

## Resume Builder

Study abroad experience is a good way to differentiate yourself from your peers. As you share your resume with prospective employers, you will want to highlight the experience that you gained while studying abroad. Many employers are looking for people who are versatile and adaptable, and by listing your study abroad experience on your resume you are demonstrating your ability to succeed in a new environment and your willingness to seek out new experiences. Having a relevant story to tell in an interview or having relevant global experience listed on your resume can be a definite advantage. Resume considerations include:

1. If applicable, mention your international experience in the OBJECTIVE section of the resume.
  - *Enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences of customers.*
  - *Foreign language proficiency.*
  - *Awareness of global economic, political issues and realities.*
2. List your study abroad experience separately under the EDUCATION section.

<b>Bachelor of Science in Business Administration</b> , emphasis in Finance San Diego State University	GPA 3.6 May 20XX
<b>Study Abroad</b> , Institute for the International Education of Students, Barcelona, Spain	Summer 20XX
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extensive study of the Spanish and Catalan cultures through classroom and host family experience.</li><li>• Learned valuable lessons in time management, foreign exchange rates, and cultural aspects of business.</li></ul>	
3. If you completed an international internship, list this under the EXPERIENCE section.
4. If you participated in volunteer work you can put this under EXPERIENCE or VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE depending on how extensive the volunteer work was during your time abroad.

## Cover Letter

Be sure to briefly describe the skills and experiences learned from studying abroad and how that learning is transferable to the position for which you are applying. You do not want to repeat your resume to the employer but this is the opportunity to highlight related accomplishments while overseas that will make the reader want to learn more. Typically, this information is presented in the second or third paragraph of the cover letter.

## Interviews

The interview is your time to articulate how your skills, experiences, and personality fit the needs of the organization. During the interview, you may be asked about your study abroad experience and you should be ready to answer these questions in a way that highlights how the skills attained overseas will “add value” to the employer’s organization and will enhance your job performance. Here are some examples of questions you might be asked:

1. **“You studied in Barcelona, Spain. Why did you decide to go there? How was your experience the same or different from your expectations?”**

**Answer Strategy:** Think back to why you decided to go. It may help to refer back to the personal statement you wrote with your study abroad application. Think about the things that surprised you while you were overseas. For example, you may have realized that Spain is more diverse than you believed it to be.

2. **“What have you accomplished at school or during your study abroad experience that you are most proud of?”**

**Answer Strategy:** Think about the goals you had for going overseas. Which goals did you meet? Which ones were you most proud of? As you related this to the interviewer, you might express it by...

- a. Explaining the goal you had for traveling abroad
- b. Describe how this goal was accomplished
- c. Sharing what you learned along the way

3. **“What did you learn overseas that will help you do this job successfully?”**

**Answer Strategy:** Think about the ways in which you have changed. You might have learned to be more flexible, adaptable, tolerant, open-minded, patient, etc. You may have gained specialized skills or knowledge from your classes, an internship or volunteer opportunities. Think about how some of these changes and skills might be useful on the job.

## Additional Advice

Interviewers are asking more behavioral questions intended to assess how you will respond or act in certain situations or roles. You may be asked to describe your leadership style or how you deal with conflict. If you have relevant experience from overseas, this would be an opportunity to share it with the recruiter. In addition, remember the STAR approach to formulating an answer to interviewer questions:

**S** – Situation: Describe what you are facing

**T** – Task: Describe what you wanted to achieve

**A** – Action: Describe what you did

**R** – Results: Describe what happened, how things turned out, what you learned, and what you might do differently if presented with the same circumstances.

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Adapted from *Center for International Studies*, Northampton, VA ([www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)),