

INCORPORATING YOUR STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE IN YOUR JOB SEARCH



UNIVERSITY of
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STUDENT LIFE
Career Services

Almost everyone agrees that study abroad or international travel experience is valuable. Greater knowledge of the international world can be academically enriching, often personally transforming, and is very likely to increase your cross-cultural awareness, problem-solving skills and ability to be flexible in adjusting to new situations. What is sometimes unclear is how to capitalize on this valuable experience so an employer will understand its value to the job for which you are applying.

The person who is hired is usually the one who is most effective in convincing the employer that she/he has the right set of skills (education, experience and personal qualities) to best fulfill the job requirements. Do you believe you would make a better employee because of your study abroad experience? Then your task is to persuade the employer.

To do that, it is useful to **think like an employer**. Don't fall into the trap of assuming an employer will understand the value of your study abroad experience just from seeing it listed on your resume. The employer wants to know, **How does it help me?** Your job is to sell its value! If the employer doesn't get it, more than likely you weren't persuasive.

First, make sure you also mention in your cover letter **how** your experience would benefit the employer. In the job interview when the employer says "Tell me about yourself", tell them what skills or qualities you gained from studying abroad that will benefit the employer. Don't just say, my study abroad experience made me a better problem-solver, say "I've become a problem-solver because I use creativity and persistence is coming up with workable solutions to problems." Then give specific examples or situations where you displayed these skills. It is one thing to claim a skill you learned by studying abroad but it's far more impressive if you can give an example AND show how it benefits the employer as this student did who was applying for a job as an assistant development director.

Before going to study abroad, this student had taken a year of French, but found that in Paris people spoke rapidly and this, coupled with her limited vocabulary, made communication difficult. During the job interview, she went on to explain, "It was stressful but I learned to be very creative in coming up with other words to express my ideas. Answering a simple question could take much time and effort but I persisted until people understood me. It got easier as my language skills improved, but they would not have improved if I hadn't made that effort." I'm now much more confident about my ability to solve problems under stress and successfully tackle new challenges, from researching new funding sources and writing persuasive grant applications to effectively communicating my ideas in a team.

Here are skills, qualities and phrases you might use in your resume, cover letter and during the job interview. Remember to come up with a specific example(s) from your study abroad experience to illustrate your skills.

List of skills or qualities:

- Ability to learn effectively in unfamiliar settings
- Adaptability/flexibility
- Communication: spoken, written, style
- Critical thinking (consider how this is different from “thinking”)
- Expanded world view
- Foreign languages
- Good judgment
- Independence
- Job specific skills/knowledge
- Leadership and initiative
- Motivation
- Multicultural understanding and perspective
- Objectivity
- Personal self-management
- Problem solving
- Self-confidence
- Teamwork

Some additional phrases:

- Solid record of using all available resources to accomplish tasks.
- Effectively utilizes a variety of resources in solving problems. Learned new ways of solving problems.
- Active learner (consider how this is different from “learning”).
- Seeks out academic and personal challenges. Moves beyond personal and intellectual comfort zone. There are more ways to think about things than *my* way alone.
- Tolerance of many perspectives and ways of doing things.
- Eager to examine the relationship between individuals and countries. New perspective. Seeing the world through the eyes of another person or culture.
- Able to balance a demanding schedule, including work, school/course load and outside activities.
- Demonstrates a wide variety of interests and experiences. Breadth of knowledge. Broad understanding of today’s cultural and political issues.
- Intellectual curiosity.
- Appropriate, thoughtful risk-taking.
- Resourceful in seeking out answers and applying new approaches.
- Actively pursues opportunities to gain meaningful knowledge.
- Proven ability to positively influence or persuade others.
- Strong desire to succeed.
- Demonstrated initiative in setting goals, creating a plan of action and achieving results.
- Sound judgment and common sense.
- Quickly and effectively settle into new environments. Mental flexibility.
- Excited by opportunities to become acquainted with or fit into new cultures, including (in the

future) the *corporate* culture.

- Proven success in coping with substantial change or transition. Adaptability. For example, the leave-taking from the familiar U.S. culture before your departure, the adjustment to the new culture, the leave-taking of that culture and then your adjustment back into the once-familiar U.S. culture (which may not be as easy as you anticipated).
- Maturation process or “growing up” that occurs from study abroad experiences. A major step toward independence in your life. Enhanced self-confidence. “I can do it!”

Identification of other skills: The DU Career Center’s tip sheet titled *Skills Identification* is a good place to start. Consider if you honed any of these skills through your study abroad experience. In the tip sheet, skills are grouped into three broad areas: working with people, working with data and working with things.

Numerous tip sheets about various aspects of the job search process are available in the Resource Library section of the Career Center website at <http://www.du.edu/career>. **To schedule an appointment with a career counselor, call 303-871-2150.**