

## ***Incorporating Your Study Abroad Experience in Your Job Search***

Almost everyone agrees that study abroad or international travel experience is valuable. Greater knowledge of the international world is enriching, both academically and culturally, and often is personally transforming. International experiences, in general, are very likely to increase your cross-cultural awareness, your skills in problem solving and your ability to be flexible in adjusting to new situations.

What is sometimes unclear is how to capitalize on this valuable experience in such a way that an employer will understand its value to the job for which you are applying. If you believe you are a better person or a better employee because of your study abroad experience, your task is to persuade the employer of this. 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 to best fulfill the job requirements. To do that, applicants must be persuasive about how their education, their experience and their personal qualities add up to making them the best candidate.

It is useful to **think like an employer** when trying to capitalize on your study abroad experience. Employers may wonder about its value to their organization. Consider an employer reading your resume and noting that you studied abroad. Imagine the employer wondering, "**So what? How does that help me?**" 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. Listing it is not enough; you have to 'sell' its value! If the employer doesn't get it, more than likely you weren't persuasive.

One definition of a resume is that it is a list of facts about you that are relevant to the employer. Brief details of your study abroad experience are usually listed in the education section of your resume. One definition of a cover letter is that it is a word picture or written 'commercial' about what you can do for an employer based on your education, experience and personal qualities. If you believe your study abroad experience would benefit an employer, mention **how** in your cover letter.

In a similar manner, a job interview is a verbal picture or verbal 'commercial' about what you can do for an employer. Interviews usually start with the employer saying "Tell me about yourself." Perhaps a clearer request would be "Tell me what facts about you will benefit me." This is your chance to communicate the importance of your education, experience and personal qualities in an image that the employer will understand. Help the employer see how your unique qualities and skills will be perfect for the job.

It is one thing to claim a skill but you should also be ready to prove you have it. An employer may ask you to define what you mean and may ask you to describe specific examples or situations where you displayed these skills. If you can't define your terminology or can't use specific examples to illustrate your skill, your credibility may suffer. For example, you might believe you are a very hard worker. Consider, however, how many people say the same thing. If you can't back it up with a definition and an example, your claim of being a hard worker is nothing more than an overused cliché.

### **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 handout, titled *Skills Identification* (<http://www.du.edu/career/handouts/Skills.pdf>), is a good place to start. Consider if you honed any of these skills through your study abroad experience. In the handout, skills are grouped into three broad areas: working with people, working with data and working with things.

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