

Overseas Experience – How to Highlight Your International Experience

The Weston Career Center (WCC) 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 the WCC, Knight Hall KH 210.

More and more employers are seeking out culturally diverse and experienced employees who can work effectively in an increasingly global workplace.



Enhancing your career

Studying abroad does more than promote personal, professional, and academic growth. It can also enhance your “marketability” since employers are increasingly seeking students who have an overseas experience. 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 proficiency in multiple languages. Students who study abroad should highlight these unique set of skills to potential employers to distinguish themselves.

Building on your experience

Your overseas experience may provide the incentive to consider an international career. Understanding the immigration rules and regulations for working abroad is very important. 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.

Expanding your resume

In today’s competitive market, you must find ways to differentiate yourself from your peers. As you prepare your resume for prospective employers, be sure to highlight the experience gained while studying abroad. 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. List your study abroad experience separately under the Education section along with your Olin education.

**Washington University in St. Louis,
Olin Business School, May 2009**

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, GPA
3.3/4.0

**Study Abroad, Institute for the International Education of
Students, Barcelona, Spain, Summer 2004**

- Extensive study of the Spanish and Catalan cultures through classroom and host family experience. Learned valuable lessons in time management, foreign exchange rates, and cultural aspects of business.
2. If you did an international internship, list this under Experience section.
 3. If you participated in volunteer work you can put this under experience or activities depending on how extensive the volunteer work was during your time abroad.

Writing the cover letter

Be sure to mention your international experience and briefly describe the skills and experiences learned from study abroad. Identify 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. (e.g. enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences of customers; foreign language proficiency; awareness of global economic, political issues and realities). Typically, this information is presented in the second or third paragraph of the cover letter.

Preparing for the interview

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 and will enhance your job performance. **Here are some examples of questions you might be asked:**

Q: “You studied in Sydney. 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 Australia is more diverse than you believed it to be.

Q: “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 relate this to the interviewer, you might express it by...

- Explaining the goal you had for traveling abroad
- Describing how this goal was accomplished
- Sharing what you learned along the way

Q: “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 typically ask 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 faced

T – Target: Describe what you wanted to achieve

A – Action: Describe what you did

R – Results: Describe what happened, how things turned out, quantifiable results you achieved, what you learned, and what you’d do again or differently if presented the same circumstances.

The Weston Career Center (WCC) advisors are ready to help you with your resume, interview preparedness, cover letters, offer review and other career-related questions. Stop by Knight Hall KH 210.

Adapted from Center for International Studies, Northampton, MA 2005 (www.studyabroad-cis.com) and Transitions Abroad, Bennington, VT 2005 (www.transitionsabroad.com)