

Define Your Experience Abroad for Employers

Overview

To fully capitalize on your experience abroad, it's important to reflect on how you have changed and what you have gained. A potential employer or graduate school committee member may not understand the advantages that learning abroad can provide. It's your job to effectively articulate your newly honed skills and the value you would contribute using language relevant to the organization.

Career-Related Skills & Qualities Gained

Always think about the skills that are being sought and if they are relevant to what you developed abroad. As you articulate your experience on your cover letter, on your resumé, and during interviews, integrate these skills into employers or graduate schools use.

Skills

- Understands cultural differences and similarities
- Adapts to new environments
- Learns through listening and observing
- Establishes rapport quickly
- Communicates across barriers effectively
- Functions within a high level of ambiguity
- Plans and thinks strategically
- Manages time efficiently

Qualities

- Appreciation for diversity
- Open-mindedness
- Self-confidence
- Independence
- Leadership
- Empathy
- Dedication
- Respect

Self-Reflection

Before you can articulate your experience professionally, you must have an understanding of the key skills you gained. Set aside some time to reflect.

- What did you learn or what skills did you hone?
- How did your learning abroad experience enhance your knowledge, skills, and understanding of your intended career field?
- What was the most challenging situation you faced? How did you deal with it and what did you learn? What skills and personal qualities did you tap into? How did the experience help you grow as a person?
- How did you adapt to your new cultural surroundings? Share examples from academic, social, and work settings. How did this influence your ability to interact successfully with others?
- What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself? How did this experience help you gain an understanding of your work style, clarify your values, or improve your interpersonal skills?

Cover Letter

In your cover letter, include an example of your international experience demonstrating how your skills can contribute to the needs of the organization.

For example:

During my semester abroad at the University of Limerick, I participated in a class research project with a small group of university students, where we frequently communicated and worked through issues with external community stakeholders. The skills I developed during this experience will help me succeed and problem-solve in your marketing firm's team-based environment.

Resume

A career counselor or career coach can help you update your resume to articulate the skills you gained while abroad. For example:

EDUCATION

Study Abroad, Study & Intern in Florence, Florence, Italy Fall 2018

- Completed coursework in photography, drawing, and Italian language during a three-month study abroad program
- Critiqued artwork in a regional art exhibit featuring 30 local artists

EXPERIENCE

Study Abroad, Study & Intern in Florence, Florence, Italy Fall 2018

- Gained an international perspective in the design field to inform my own practice
- Established rapport quickly with individuals in an unfamiliar environment
- Demonstrated willingness to take risks through enrollment in Italian-speaking curriculum
- Completed an independent art project despite linguistic and cultural barriers

Interviews

If your interviewer remarks or asks about your international experience, take it as an opportunity to expand. Don't let the opportunity pass by with a simple, "Yes, it was great!" Use the "STAR" technique to answer behavioral interview questions:

S - Situation: Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?

T - Task: Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?

A - Action: Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?

R - Results: Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, saving, etc. Quantify.

Resources

- UofM Career Offices: career.umn.edu
- Learning Abroad Center: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/career-rel
- NAFSA: Incorporating Education Abroad into Your Career Plan