

Dear SPC Student:

Whether you traveled abroad or have gained international experience from local engagement, this American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) workbook will help you to articulate your international experience for your next steps! Wanting to get a competitive edge in the job search or on your application to further your education? This workbook will prepare you to highlight your international experience anywhere you go! Best of luck and remember, the world is waiting for you!

Dr. Ramona Kirsch

Director

SPC Center for International Programs



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# Marketing Your International Experience

A workbook for students preparing for the job interview process



Dear Study Abroad Alumni:

Congratulations. You have set yourself apart from other U.S. undergraduates by having studied abroad; under 5% do so according to the most recent Institute of International Education's Open Doors Survey (2014). Now you need to put that experience to work; it doesn't suffice to simply say you were abroad – you need to be able to show that you have realized some benefits.

By having this workbook before you, you have just taken a key step in your career exploration and job-seeking process that very few students take the time to do. From working with students for many years, we know that after studying abroad, you report that it was a significant learning experience – about the world, about a specific culture, about yourself. So now is the time to examine just what you acquired, blend it with examples from your other life experiences, learn how to explain it to potential employers, and show how it demonstrates your skills and knowledge.

An international experience is often ripe with good examples of learning to appreciate difference, showing you are open to new situations and deepening your cultural sensitivity. If examples don't come to mind right away, it's normal to need some time to think about it. But better to take several days to reflect on your experience than to be caught without anything to say in the actual interview.

This workbook is only one of the steps in the job search process, but an essential one: it will provide you with the 'content' for your interviews.

With wishes for much success –

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# What have I gained from my experience?

## **Cultural Understanding and World View:**

*As a result of my international experience(s), I have developed:*

- A greater knowledge about another culture
- Awareness of political, economic or social events around the world
- My interest in global or transnational issues
- My involvement with a global issue
- My involvement with a civic cause
- A definition of my political views
- My ability to speak a foreign language

## **Personal Growth and Values**

*My international experience(s) have helped me to grow and develop:*

- My desire for more diverse friendships and social networks
- My desire to further my education (e.g., postgraduate degree)
- A better understanding of myself and my values
- My sense of confidence in new situations or when meeting new people
- My ability to accept differences in other people
- My ability to empathize with people, especially those who are different from me
- My ability to be more flexible and open-minded
- My tolerance of ambiguity in a variety of situations
- An understanding of my own strengths and weaknesses
- My ability to be independent
- My ability to take initiative

*And, I have:*

- Become more aware of the way I use and structure time
- An increased capacity to profit from my mistakes
- Strengthened relationships with my family members
- Strengthened relationships with my friends
- A clearer notion of what I will do with my life

*Additionally:*

- I am more capable of solving life's day-to-day problems
- I think more critically: I am more discriminating and skeptical
- I have improved observation skills
- I can appreciate time to be alone, disconnected from social media, etc
- I am more confident about the decisions I make
- I recognize the importance I put on developing my skills and talents
- I have an increased willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job

## **Professional & Career Development**

*Studying Abroad contributed to:*

- My ability to formulate my career goals and clarify my professional aspirations
- Greater awareness of the opportunities in life that are open to me.
- Developing skills and intercultural competencies which will aid in obtaining my first job after graduation
- My increased willingness to take on roles and tasks to which I am unaccustomed
- The importance I place on working in a field that I find interesting
- The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work
- My ability to speak a foreign language in the workplace
- Developing my ability to understand an organization's culture
- My ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments
- Other things you want to list:

# POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

## SKILLS

- Establish rapport quickly
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Achieve goals despite obstacles
- Take initiative and risks
- Manage time and multiple tasks
- Identify and solve problems
- Accept responsibility
- Communicate despite language & cultural barriers
- Ability to compromise
- Learn quickly
- Handle stress/difficult situations
- Manage/Organize
- Lead formal and/or informal groups
- Cope with rejection, criticism, constructive feedback
- Capacity to ask for & receive help
- Adapt to new environments
- Understand an organization's culture
- Learn through listening and observing
- Gain foreign language skills

## QUALITIES

- Self-reliance
- High energy/enthusiasm
- Appreciation of diversity
- Perseverance
- Tolerance/open-minded
- Assertiveness
- Self-confidence
- Self-knowledge/Self-awareness
- Independence
- Inquisitiveness
- Flexibility

## SKILLS DESIRED FOR ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS

Here is a list that employers seeking to hire recent graduates offered to campus career professionals. The ability to:

- Work in a team structure
  - Make decisions and solve problems
  - Plan, organize and prioritize work
  - Obtain and process information
  - Analyze quantitative data
  - Create and/or edit written reports
  - Sell to influence others
  - Verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
- And possess:
- Technical knowledge related to the job
  - Proficiency with computer software program

## CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

This list shows a skill set that includes some very likely to be developed from an international experience. Students can determine what overlaps with their own skills and what employers are looking for, etc. From *Survival Kit for Overseas Living*, L. Robert Kohls, 2001.

- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Sense of Humor
- Warmth in Human Relationships
- Motivation
- Self-Reliance
- Low goal/Task orientation
- Strong Self-Awareness
- Tolerance of Differences
- Open-Mindedness
- Perceptiveness
- Non-judgmentalness
- Empathy
- Communicativeness
- Ability to Fail
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Curiosity

## SKILLS DESIRED BY INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYERS

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/documents/culture-at-work-research.pdf>.

**Highest ranked skills:** Demonstrates respect for others • Builds trust • Works effectively in diverse teams • Open to new ideas/way of thinking • Qualifications related to job • Expertise related to field • Collaborative • Seeks opportunities for continuous learning • Self-motivated • Time management

**Lowest ranked skills** (from 'bottom-up'): IT Skills • Tolerates ambiguity • Awareness of own cultural influence • Communicates in other languages • Entrepreneurship • Understands the marketplace • Understands different cultural contexts and viewpoints • Creativity

# JOB PROFILE - SAMPLE

Here is a sample summary worksheet for an entry-level position in a study abroad office. Most job ads list a set of qualifications that include a combination of experience, skills and knowledge. The purpose of this is to help identify what the needed qualifications are for the target position. In an interview, you will likely get asked about the required skills. You will want to highlight your matching skills and perhaps add some of your own strengths that you think are helpful.

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**Position Title:** Program Coordinator

**Type of organization:** Study Abroad Office on a U.S. college campus

## **Knowledge & Skills required of successful people in this position:**

Knowledge of study abroad programming, policies, procedures, and recruitment  
Social media & marketing skills  
Knowledge of budgets  
Experience with campus student data system  
Ability to coordinate group travel  
Microsoft Office Suite

Helpful: a study abroad experience; foreign language proficiency

## **Qualities possessed by successful people in this position:**

- Interpersonal/human relations skills
- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Planning, organizational, and presentation skills
- Ability to demonstrate self-direction, motivation, and work in a team setting
- Ability to interact effectively with a diverse client group
- Highly organized
- Creative thinker/problem solver

## **A typical day/week in this position:**

Activity	% time spent
Managing study abroad enrollments	25%
Communicating with registrar, financial aid, business office	10%
Liaising with travel organizations & agents regarding group travel	15%
Coordinating social media & promoting study abroad on campus	30%
Staff meetings, meeting with faculty	20%

# JOB PROFILE WORKSHEET

Complete this summary worksheet for a position or job function you would (realistically) like to have within the next five years.

**Name of targeted position/job function** \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of organization(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Skills necessary by successful people in targeted position:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Qualities possessed by successful people in targeted position:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**A typical day/week in the life of a person in a targeted position:**

Activity	% time spent
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

# FOCUSED INTERVIEWING (...also known as Behavioral Interviewing)

When answering interview questions, recruiters are looking for concise, but descriptive responses. Focused interviewing techniques are often used by interviewers to draw out information from the candidate. If you are able to respond with a "STAR," your responses will be concise and descriptive and the interview session will proceed more effectively.

## What is a STAR?

**S** – Describe the specific setting or **situation** for which the experience took place.

Example: *While studying abroad in Germany, I found that my coursework was extremely different from what I was accustomed to in the U.S. I was used to having assignments due throughout the semester, but for my German courses, the entire grade was based on the final with no accountability beforehand.*

**T** – Describe the specific **task** or project related to the skill sought.

Example: *During that semester, I was taking a full load of coursework for my major, and I was motivated to do well during my semester abroad. I had to figure out a way to stay on top of it all because it would be impossible to do well at the end of the semester if I left studying all to the end.*

**A** – Describe the specific steps or **actions** you took to complete the task or project.

Example: *I had to act as a self-starter, and I set out a structured study plan for myself for the entire semester. I formed small study groups with a few classmates for each of my classes, and we would meet once a week.*

**R** – Describe the **results** or outcomes resulting from the actions taken.

Example: *I developed strong time management skills because of the new type of academic setting I experienced in Germany. Because I kept up with my study plan throughout the semester, I ended up earning A's and B's in my classes, and I was able to keep my stress level down before final exams.*

This is a typical STAR answer. It could be the answer to, "Give me an example of an accomplishment you are proud of." If someone asked, "What's your greatest skill?" you might answer, "I believe I can set goals and meet them," and then give a story like the one above. Alternatively, if the interviewer says, "Why should we hire you?" you can respond, "I am a good problem solver, for instance..." and give an example like the one above.

Can you see how having an example like this gives you more credibility than if you merely state, "I can set goals and meet them," or "I am a problem solver?"

The interview is your chance to speak to your qualities and qualifications; knowing what you want to say before you even enter the interviewer's office can be a helpful tool in assuring that you will be able to do that. Having some STAR stories prepared in advance can help you be sure you don't believe until the employer knows all you want him or her to about who you are and what you have to offer his or her organization

## TELLING YOUR STORY

The following examples utilize the STAR format. Note that the recommended response time to an interview question is from 30 seconds to 2 minutes maximum (if you exceed that, you may start losing your audience). Create your story carefully so that it highlights what is clearly relevant and does not include the unnecessary (for example, such as a flight number).

### **SAMPLE STORY #1**

*I learned how to take initiative and problem-solve in a class I took abroad in England. The format was very different from what I was used to in the States. There was no syllabus and we received a very long reading list instead. There were mostly lectures given and not much discussion or interaction.*

*At first, I was really worried because it's not how I was used to learning. But instead of panicking, I tried to examine the differences from a more 'outside' perspective. I realized that if the British students managed in this system, I likely could as well.*

*I figured out that by asking my classmates a few questions about what was expected of us, by identifying and focusing on several of the key texts the instructor referenced and by committing to study time each week even though I wasn't required to submit any work, I could keep up and succeed in the course. The final exam was a bit daunting, but I ended up doing quite well in the course. I realize now that I not only learned a lot about the subject area, but about my own learning styles and my ability to take initiative and succeed when challenged as well.*

Note: Showing cultural respect is important. Note how this story doesn't log any complaints about the system abroad. It speaks respectfully, in descriptive terms about the differences.

### **SAMPLE STORY #2**

*I lived in a homestay during my semester in Spain. From this situation, I learned how to consider and respect different viewpoints and that it is possible to become very close to people with very different opinions than my own – and all of this was accomplished despite the fact that my Spanish was not quite yet fluent.*

*My host father wanted to engage me in discussions on world politics, especially about U.S. foreign policy. He wasn't happy about the U.S. influence in the world and asked me questions that honestly, I wasn't prepared to answer. I felt so ignorant with my limited language skill and by not knowing the specifics about the foreign policies of my own country. I faced this challenge head-on: I made a point to read the Spanish newspaper each day so that I could acquire both the knowledge and the vocabulary. Over time, I got pretty good at being able to engage in discussion with him. We had quite different viewpoints on a number of things, but his approach was not to insult but to challenge me respectfully.*

*I respect him for this, and I am grateful for the opportunity to see political discourse as an exercise in learning and not demeaning anyone. I am very close with everyone in my homestay and am still in touch with them.*

Note: Carefully consider whether you think it's a good idea to reveal your political party preferences in a job interview. This story does not 'call' either point of view by a name. While perhaps the listener could speculate on the political orientation of the storyteller, it still leaves room for ambiguity.

### **SAMPLE STORY #3**

*I learned the importance of planning while studying in London. I was in a short-term program that was only a few weeks long, so it meant I had class assignments due every day. This made it difficult to find time to visit all the sights I wanted to see. In order to accomplish both my coursework goals and my sightseeing goals, I needed to set objectives, prioritize activities, and set an action plan that allowed me to achieve my personal desires while performing at my best in my coursework. This was made more challenging because I had to do this in a strange city with a transportation system that I had never experienced before and was far different from what I was accustomed to at home (my car).*

*I believe this will serve me well in my professional career. I will set both professional and personal goals and then create a plan that allows me to successfully accomplish both. My study abroad experience taught me the importance of self-discipline and diligence regarding my responsibilities.*

**Note:** Learning to be proactive is important. Note how this story doesn't log any complaints about having to limit personal desires. It speaks of the challenges, but focuses on being successful in personal obligations.

### **SAMPLE STORY #4**

*As part of my study abroad program, we visited a number of businesses to meet with their managers and tour their production facilities. We discussed the similarities and differences in business practices there versus the US. In order to maximize my learning from these visits, I learned to research the different companies so that I could ask questions that would give me insights into the company and the managers we met with.*

*As a consequence of these visits, I have a great appreciation for the challenges of managing a business in a global industry. Our goals may be the same, but cultural differences result in very different ways of achieving those goals. It is critical that I both understand those differences and respect them. For example, some cultures are more direct in their communication when they see a problem developing, while others are very indirect. In those cultures, it would be seen as extremely rude for me to bluntly state what I see as a problem we need to fix.*

**Note:** Showing cultural respect is important. Note how this story doesn't log any complaints about the system abroad. It speaks respectfully, in descriptive terms about the differences.

## PREPARING “STARS” FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

### Skills/Traits

### STAR

1.

S:

T:

A:

R:

2.

S:

T:

A:

R:

3.

S:

T:

A:

R:

4.

S:

T:

A:

R:

5.

S:

T:

A:

R:

## HOW TO PREPARE YOUR ONE-LINE RESPONSE TO “TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SEMESTER IN...”

When you find yourself an interview, networking or talking to grandma – it is typical for people to ask ‘small questions’ such as...”Oh, I see you spent a semester studying in Spain, how was that?” When they do...are you ready?

You need to be prepared to respond with a concise and meaningful response that is appropriate to your ‘audience’ – and in interviews that means more than just “it was awesome.” Instead, try responding with a short but focused statement – at least to start -- such as:

*“I realized that studying abroad not only meant learning a lot about another culture but learning a lot about myself”*

- OR -

*“I am so happy that I chose to study abroad since I not only met wonderful people and saw wonderful places, but being put outside my comfort zone meant that I developed a lot of skills too.”*

## THE “ELEVATOR PITCH”

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. That is why you need to be able to introduce yourself and answer the question “tell me about yourself” clearly and concisely. You may use your elevator pitch when you are networking prior to your actual job search; or to answer, “Tell me about yourself” during the job interview.

### KEY COMPONENTS

- Introduction
- Education; professional development
- Work experience; key accomplishments
- Transferable skills, if necessary
- Current status; what you have to offer
- Employment opportunities you are seeking
- *Length – 30 seconds to max of 2 minutes*

### USES FOR YOUR INFOMERCIAL

- Response to “tell me about yourself” during job interview
- In any situation when you are making “networking” connections
- Portions can be used on your resume and cover letter
- Increase confidence as you introduce yourself
- Script when making “cold” telephone calls
- When requesting informational interviews or advice

### NETWORKING EXAMPLE: *(use only as a guide – create your own, specific to your situation)*

Thanks so much for being willing to speak with me. My name is Jane Jobseeker, and Nan Networker gave me your name as someone who might have information for me about the field of journalism, in which I am very interested.

In May I will be graduating from the University of Great State with a major in Broadcast Journalism and a minor in Creative Writing. While in school, I spent a semester in London and I am especially proud of the fact that I was chosen to narrate a short feature clip that appeared on the BBC as part of a course project.

I am exploring different opportunities that combine putting my skills and education to work in a newscast setting. I have a few questions about your position and this agency and wonder if you could tell me a little about what you do and what it is like to work here.

### INTERVIEWING EXAMPLE: *(use only as a guide – create your own, specific to your situation)*

First, thank you for this opportunity to interview with you today. As you know from my resume and cover letter, my undergraduate degree is in Biology, and I graduated with honors from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I became interested in public health while I was volunteering at a community clinic, and realized how prevalent the issue of health disparities is.

I enrolled in the University of Minnesota’s School of Public Health, and in May, I will be graduating with an MPH in Community Health Promotion. While in school and through my community service activities, I developed skills and strengths both in research and public speaking – especially presenting educational sessions on a variety of health issues to diverse populations. I am especially proud of the fact that one of the sessions I designed and created was so popular, I have been asked to present it to several more groups. One of the reasons I am excited about interviewing for your agency is that it has such a great reputation, and the position sounds both challenging and like a perfect fit for my skills.

## Selected Resources

You may want to access these online resources to learn more about the importance of preparing examples that demonstrate your skills, and specifically those related to intercultural settings.

The **AIFS Guide to Study Abroad and Career Development** will help you put the steps in this workbook into the broader job search process as a study abroad alumnus. It is free and available on the AIFS website:

[http://www.aifsabroad.com/advisors/pdf/Tillman\\_AIFS\\_Student\\_Guide\\_Career.pdf](http://www.aifsabroad.com/advisors/pdf/Tillman_AIFS_Student_Guide_Career.pdf)

British Council (2013). Culture at Work: The value of intercultural skills in the workplace. Booz, Allen, Hamilton.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/documents/culture-at-work-research.pdf>

Gardner, P., Gross, L. and Steglitz, I. (2008). "Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies." Collegiate Employment Research Institute, Michigan State University, CERI Research Brief 1,

[www.studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/people/unpacking\\_brief.pdf](http://www.studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/people/unpacking_brief.pdf)

Kaltved, D. Career Services Blog: Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills: What Employers are Seeking

<http://sph.umn.edu/28323/>.

Kaltved, D. Career Services Blog: Beyond Amazing and Awesome: Crafting Your Passport of Skills

<http://sph.umn.edu/beyond-amazing-and-awesome-crafting-your-passport-of-skills/>.

Matherly, C., and Nolting, W. (2007). "Career Benefits: Understanding & Articulating the Skills You Gained Abroad." Abroad View 10:1.

[http://www.willamette.edu/dept/oie/pdf/studyabroad\\_career.pdf](http://www.willamette.edu/dept/oie/pdf/studyabroad_career.pdf)

Tillman, M. Global Career Compass blog <http://globalcareercompass.wordpress.com/about>

Tillman, M. (2005). "The Right Tool for the Job." NAFSA: Association of International Educators. International Educator

14.4 [www.nafsa.org/File/InternationalEducator/FrontLinesJulAug05.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/File/InternationalEducator/FrontLinesJulAug05.pdf)

University of Minnesota Learning Abroad Center:

"Resume Tips for Your International Experience."

[www.umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/returnedStudents/resumeTips.pdf](http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/students/returnedStudents/resumeTips.pdf)

Career Integration Resources

<http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/professionals/career-int/resources>