

You can greatly improve your odds of getting a full-time professional international job after graduation if you consider the following:

- First and foremost, you have to stand out from the competition. How do you do that? *By acquiring international skills and experiences.*
- Your own circumstances will dictate the importance of each item below. If for example you're looking for work in the highly competitive area of social sciences, you'll need more of these elements than if seeking international jobs in science or engineering.
- Start building your international CV today!

Academic Studies

- **No matter what your field**, include an international component in your studies.
- **A Master's is a prerequisite for many international positions:** This is especially true in the social sciences, pure sciences and business. It may be less important in nursing, engineering and computer science for example.
- **A BA in any field with outside electives can help broaden your skills inventory:** For example, a history major should have four finance or management courses. Include language skills with all types of disciplines.
- **Other academic experience:** Attend or help organize a conference; participate in a professor-led research project; work as a teaching assistant; write a book review for an academic journal; apply for merit-based scholarships and awards; make public presentations; actively seek to work on team projects with foreign students.

Networking and Cross-cultural Experience

- **Network with at least three international experts in your field of interest:** For example, write essays that require you to speak directly to someone working internationally in your field of interest.
- **Guide foreigners who are new to your country:** Act as a tour guide for visiting professors; assist with foreign student orientation; work with refugees; teach English (ESL).
- **Befriend foreign students on campus:** Join their social circles; visit them in their homes; become familiar with their food and social behavior; try to visit to them and their families in their home country (you will love it); actively participate in foreign students' associations.
- **Become socially active and knowledgeable in a culture other than your own:** Hang out at ethnic social clubs; learn to dance to African or South American music; become knowledgeable in one or more types of ethnic music; focus on the writing or history of one region or country; learn ethnic cooking; join an Internet club with foreign members.

Experience Abroad

- **Work internationally for two to six months:** As an intern, co-op student or volunteer, preferably in your field of expertise. Try for two professional internships over the course of six years of study. There are thousands of international internship positions available each year, and many of them are paid positions allowing you to live and work in interesting parts of the world.
- **Study abroad for one or more semesters:** Study abroad in your field and/or to learn a new language.
- **Travel abroad for two to six months:** Do not underestimate the value of backpacking for six months, traveling the world. You need to interact closely with people from other countries in order to learn the skills required by international employers. Strongly consider taking a gap year to gain any manner of international experience.
- **Have a career objective when traveling:** Extend the value of your international travel by combining two or more objectives. For example, take four months off and learn Spanish full-time in Guatemala while living with a local family and having a full-time one-on-one instructor for less than the cost of going to school in the US or Canada. Extend your stay there by giving computer courses to local charity groups, volunteering to write English

language brochures for eco tourism groups, or by traveling in the region and practicing your new Spanish while visiting with professionals in your field and looking for short-term internships.

Hard Skills

- **Language skills:** Be able to speak and read a language other than your mother tongue. First, consider learning Spanish, since it is accessible and useful in North America. Always be an active listener. Pick up 20 or 30 words in each country you visit.
- **Economic and geographic knowledge of the world:** Have a solid knowledge of the political and social forces shaping the planet. For a well-rounded start on this, read *The Economist* and *The New York Times*.
- **Writing and analytical skills:** Demonstrate these skills outside course work by participating in a research project, writing a brochure, publishing an article, or writing for a web site.
- **Computer skills:** Acquire strong word processing skills (can you produce a table of contents, section breaks, footnotes, and use styles?); be comfortable using spreadsheets (can you produce a budget or sort a table of data?); be familiar with databases (can you explain the difference between a flat file and a relational database?); possess Internet research skills (can you find the phone number of a cheap hotel in Paris? What about a country profile for Bhutan?).
- **Business skills:** No matter what your area of study, develop business skills. Employers seek scientists who can understand market research, engineers who can help commercialize products, and political scientists who can work in trade promotion. There is a need to assess the business aspect of almost every field.
- **Other management skills:** Project management, accounting, training, research, report writing, evaluating are all valuable skills.

Soft Skills

- **Organizational and leadership skills:** Demonstrate these through work and volunteer experience, preferably with an international group. Organize an event or become an executive member on a committee.
- **People Skills:** Develop strong people skills; don't underestimate the universal importance of doing so.
- **Intercultural communication abilities:** Demonstrate these by becoming adept at describing behavioral patterns in cross-cultural work and social environments. Learn to describe these real-life experiences in a professional way.
- **Coping and adapting abilities:** Demonstrate your abilities to deal with change by explaining how you coped when living abroad. Explain that you succeeded even while separated from your regular support structure of family and friends.

International Job Hunting Skills

- **Essentials for finding international work:** Experience has shown that those who are successful at finding international work have done something extraordinary to land their first job. They have gone out on a limb, acted boldly (but politely), have been entrepreneurial, have sacrificed certainty, and taken risks to gain international experience and land that first job. International employers are looking for individuals who are fully committed to international work and living. Your job hunting methods should reflect this.
- **International careers are carefully planned and built up over a period of time:** Many international employers insist that you have international experience before they are willing to send you abroad. The key to gaining international experience is to dive into "all things international" while you are at university and by taking a gap year. You need to build up a host of international experiences before you'll be ready to start applying for professional international jobs. And the great thing about building these experiences is that you can have a blast doing it!

The Ideal International Profile

Long-term strategies for young professionals



See the
Article Version

Want more advice?
Login or register for free access to
MyWorldAbroad.com

Your free subscription paid for by your school.