

Congratulations on your decision to study abroad! Perhaps you are off to Italy for a summer course in fashion design, to Britain to complete an MA in political science, or to Amsterdam for a semester of engineering. Wherever you are going, your mind is most likely consumed with excitement and anticipation about the new experience—new friends, languages, foods, lifestyle, culture, weather, and travel—everything fresh and exciting. While a long list of new things may seem a little scary (and it is), you know the value of going abroad. You'll be building international experience, enhancing job prospects, and having a great time.

In preparation for entering today's competitive job market, consider adding one more layer to your experience—supercharge your time abroad by searching for career-enhancing experiences. Careers are built step by step, and you can double the value of your time abroad by doing a few extra things to build your resume and prove to international employers that you understand the international workplace. Here are a few tips to help you get the best *career punch* from your study abroad experience:

Plan Your Career Goals Before Studying Abroad

The new world economy demands that we have international experience as part of our training. Studying abroad is a powerful way to acquire this credential. Here are a few goals to consider during pre-departure preparations:

- **Acquiring professional experience should be a key objective in for study abroad journey:** If you don't leave home with this idea already in mind, you'll get caught up in the fun of being abroad and forget that you have a golden opportunity to gain professional international experience. The first step is to update your resume before you leave, then hit the ground running as soon as you arrive in your host country by immediately launching some of the suggestions found in this article.
- **Use the study abroad experience to gain cross-cultural skills and traits:** Future employers, especially if they are international employers, will judge you on your personality more so than on your academic qualifications (though these are also important). International recruiters recognize that people who succeed abroad have a specific set of skills and traits – a high International IQ. You need to use your time abroad to mix and mingle with people from other cultures, and this includes “professional” mixing and mingling also.
- **Don't focus solely on academics while studying abroad:** Future employers will not be impressed by the quantity of courses you took while abroad, and they may not even look at your marks, especially if your stay is eight months or less. What will peak an employer's interest is that you succeeded in a new environment.
- **Show initiative in a cross-cultural environment:** You can prove your worth to future employers by taking initiative and accomplishing a few concrete career-building experiences while abroad. Organize an event, volunteer in your field, or arrange a visit with professionals in your area of expertise. These small undertakings will prove to future employers that you have what it takes to succeed in a new culture, and your resume will shine brighter if you can provide multiple examples of initiative in a culture other than your own.

Gain Professional Experience While Studying

- **Join a multicultural student work team while abroad:** Search out courses that require group work where you can gain valuable cross-cultural work experience. RESUME WORDING: *“Consistently sought out courses requiring team work with students from different cultures. Gained an appreciation for the multicultural work environment where my culture was the minority.”*
- **Intern or volunteer as a researcher with a prominent professor working in your field:** It is often difficult for a professor to hire foreign students, so volunteer your services instead. If this fails, try to pair up with a local graduate student doing research work. Offer to work on a volunteer basis. Since your time abroad is usually short, try to start within the first two weeks of arriving. RESUME WORDING: *“Research intern with Dr. Goldstein, a leading microbiology professor on campus. Helped with data-entry and compilation of results from lab experiments in...”*

- **Offer your English skills in countries where English is not the native language:** You can easily use your English language skills to help a professor edit a paper for an international conference, teach English to fellow students, or help an organization write an English web site. Consider putting together a lexicon of English terms in your field of study and offer a course on these terms to your fellow students. The possibilities for sharing your English language skills are endless.
- **Meet professionals in your field of expertise while abroad:** Imagine being part of a small group of foreign engineering students and taking the lead to organize a visit to a local research and development engineering firm in your field. This strategy is easy to execute. Alternatively, as a political science student, organize a visit to meet with professionals at the headquarters of an international organization nearby or plan to write an essay in one of your courses that requires you to meet local experts in your field. These are excellent networking opportunities and can even be inserted in your resume. RESUME WORDING: *“Initiated meetings with three local community development experts (government, social service agency, and private consultant) to design research parameters and identify local case studies to match my subject matter. Gained broad insight into the local perspective on this issue.”*
- **Volunteer off campus, ideally in your field:** Extend your experience outside the academic environment and learn about the local community.
- **Extend your stay abroad by a month:** While abroad, you have a golden opportunity to double the value of your time abroad. Extend your internship, language learning, or travel with a professional goal in mind. For the cost of one extra month, you double the resume-building value.

Gain Cross-cultural Experience Outside the Classroom While Abroad

- **Avoid the “foreign student ghetto”:** By hanging out only with students from your home country, you miss out on cross-cultural learning.
- **Join student organizations where local students are the majority:** Consider joining the business society or the political science association. Aim to make local friends and perhaps take on a leadership position for one of their projects. RESUME WORDING: *“Active participant in two local student organizations (Greenpeace and Milan Students for Human Rights) and key organizer for two social events. Gained valuable intercultural insights while working closely with local students.”*
- **Learn to professionally describe your host country's culture:** It's easy to be professional when describing another culture. Read a few books on your host country, for example: *Good Neighbours: Communicating with the Mexicans* or *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners*. Create a short professional description of the cultural norms for your host country and impress future employers. RESUME WORDING: *“Able to professionally describe the cultural traits of Eastern Europeans in both a social and professional work environment.”*
- **Integrate with local families and travel regionally:** Befriend local students and get yourself invited into their homes. These visits allow valuable insight and can later be put in a resume for professional use. RESUME WORDING: *“While in student residence, was often invited by host country nationals to travel on weekends to their family homes. Gained valuable insights on family life in a wide variety of socio-economic conditions.”*
- **Learn the local language:** Language learning is a must for any international career. Even learning a smattering of local words will do wonders in cementing relationships. It also indicates to future employers a propensity for languages. No need to say, but second language learning is important. RESUME WORDING: *“Norwegian language abilities for basic greetings and reading travel directions”*

Good luck and best wishes for your golden time studying abroad!



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