

# Marketing Your International Experience

## Why it Matters

According to human resource managers from 75 companies surveyed in 2003<sup>1</sup>, **the most important employee skill sets are:**

- Substantive content/technical knowledge of the primary field of business,
- Managerial ability, with emphases on teamwork and interpersonal skills,
- Strategic international understanding,
- Cross-cultural experience.

Cross-cultural competence ranked fifth out of 19 attributes that ‘make a successful career professional’ according to the same study.

A 2008 study<sup>2</sup> found that the **top four skills that employers value from someone who has studied abroad are:**

1. Interacting with people who hold different interests, values, and perspectives
2. Understanding cultural differences in the workplace
3. Adapting to situations of change
4. Gaining new knowledge from experiences

## What do employers mean by cross-cultural or intercultural skills?

A 2012 study<sup>3</sup> examined how employers, representing a variety of large organizations in nine countries, define and value intercultural skills:

*“To understand where employers are coming from, we first asked them to describe intercultural skills for us. The most oft-used descriptor was ‘the ability to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints.’ The second and third most frequently used descriptors by employers were ‘demonstrating respect for others’ and ‘adapting to different cultural settings’, followed by ‘accepting cultural differences’, ‘speaking foreign languages’, and ‘being open to new ideas and ways of thinking’.*

This infographic illustrates employers’ most common descriptors of intercultural skills. The term most used by employers to define intercultural skills appears in the largest box and the term least used in the smallest box.



<sup>1</sup> Fenner, Jason. (n.d.) *Study Abroad and Economic Competitiveness: A Research Summary*. NAFSA Global Workforce Development Resources. Retrieved from: [http://www.nafsa.org/Find\\_Resources/Supporting\\_Study\\_Abroad/Global\\_Workforce\\_Development/](http://www.nafsa.org/Find_Resources/Supporting_Study_Abroad/Global_Workforce_Development/)

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz. (2008). *Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies*. CERI Research Brief 1-2008. Collegiate Employment Research Institute. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University. Retrieved at: <http://www.gvsu.edu/cms3/assets/8EFD9BA4-9DE8-01C5-2D788D2521F353C9/studyabroadprofessionalbenefits.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Culture at Work: The Value of Intercultural Skills in the Workplace*. (2013). British Council, Ipsos Public Affairs and Booz Allen Hamilton. Retrieved from: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/documents/culture-at-work-research.pdf>

**Activity:** What opportunities have you had to develop the skills that employers are looking for?

### What to Highlight

**International experiences to include and highlight on your resume, cover letter or during an interview:**

- Education/Study Abroad
- Coursework with a global component
- Projects exploring a multi-cultural topic or with an international team
- Clubs and community involvement
- Internships and work assignments
- Research
- Extensive travel
- Veteran/ military experience

On a resume, international experiences can be highlighted in several sections, such as: Education Experience, Skills, or Summary of Qualifications.

### Example of International Experiences on a Resume:

**Bachelor of Arts in Global Studies**                      **University of Washington Bothell**                      **Expected June 2014**

- Cumulative GPA 3.7
- Awarded CUSP scholarship for Spring 2012
- On-campus student involvement and leadership within the Latino Student Union

**Study Abroad**                      **Community Development in Zambia**                      **Summer 2013**

- Fieldwork and research with Zambian citizens and health education community
- Developed cross-cultural communication skills through collaboration with Zambian students
- Enhanced global perspective through increased understanding of political, economic, and cultural issues faced by local populations

**Activity:** What's effective about the bullet points describing the experience in Zambia? What could be improved?

**Activity:** What specific examples – think of stories you could share – demonstrate that you've developed these skills?

## Resume and Cover Letter Word Bank

### Actions verbs:

Adapted	Financed	Managed
Awarded	Fostered	Navigated
Collaborated	Immersed	Organized
Changed	Implemented	Researched
Challenged	Interpreted	Represented
Developed	Involved	Shared
Exchanged	Learned	Translated
Explored	Lived	Traveled

### Transferrable skills:

- Cultural awareness
- Language skills
- Independence
- Adaptability
- Ability to handle stress in new environments
- Dealing with ambiguity and change
- Achieving goals despite obstacles
- Taking initiatives/risks
- Time management
- Communicating despite barriers
- Learning quickly in a new environment
- Handling difficult situations
- Handling stress
- Conducting research despite language and cultural differences
- Functioning with a global perspective
- Performing in an environment with adverse conditions
- Problem solving, crisis-management
- Building cross-cultural relationships

### Qualities:

- Self-reliance
- Appreciation of diversity
- Perseverance
- Flexibility
- Assertiveness
- Inquisitiveness
- Self-confidence
- Self-knowledge
- Independence
- Openness to relocation
- Diplomatic
- Resourceful

**Activity:** Use the word bank to write specific bullet points describing your international experience(s) on your resume:

## Interviews

Your responses to many common interview questions can be rehearsed well ahead of an actual interview and are a great opportunity to highlight your international experiences.

**Activity:** Draft responses to the following questions in a way that highlights your international experiences and emphasizes the skills that employers are most looking for.

1. What experiences have you had working in diverse teams?
2. Describe a time when you had to overcome a communication challenge. What did you do?
3. Give an example of when you've had to adapt to a new or challenging environment to achieve a successful outcome or solution.
4. What was the most important thing you learned from your experience abroad?
5. What is the most pressing global or cross-cultural challenge facing your desired career field?