

Intern to Professional:

Capitalizing on your International Internship Experience

In this guide you'll find:

- Ways to reflect on your intern abroad experience as it relates to your future professional goals
- Why international experience matters to employers
- How to incorporate your internship abroad experience into your resume
- How to communicate the importance of your international internship to employers in an interview, at a career fair, during informational interviews, and on LinkedIn

When it comes to an internship abroad, “students really have to articulate what they did and why it's relevant to the position they're applying for.”

Brook Blahnik, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, as quoted in the Chronicle of Higher Education, June 2010

Why Reflection Matters

Reflecting on your experience as a study abroad student is a critical first step:

- You may discover things you learned that you didn't realize
- You will be better able to articulate why your experience was meaningful
- You can take advantage of opportunities to bring up your experience in conversations with others

First, reflect generally...

- What was your favorite experience when you were abroad?
- Which experience had the most impact on you personally?
- What was the biggest difference in culture that you experienced while abroad?
- What surprised you the most about your time abroad?
- How has this experience changed you?

Adapted from: Creating Reflection on International Experience through Appreciative Advising, Megan Larsen, University of South Carolina

Now, get more specific

- What was the office culture like at your internship site? How did it differ from other places you've worked in the U.S.?
- What did you learn about interacting with co-workers from a different culture?
- What is an example of a time you made a cultural misstep and how did you respond?
- Did you work closely with your colleagues? What was that dynamic like?
- What new skills did you gain through this experience?
- How will what you learned at your internship help you in future positions you'll hold in the U.S.?

Tip: Write down your responses to these reflection questions!

Why International Work Experience Matters

A 2009 study found that the top intercultural or global skills an employer looks for are:

- Listens and observes well
- Flexible, adapts well
- Curious, wants to discover more
- Non-judgmental toward other world views
- Recognizes own worldview is not universal
- Works well under pressure
- Communicates effectively in intercultural situations

Jennifer Malerich, The Value of International Internships in Global Workforce Development, Arizona State University, 2009

Ask yourself: How will I prove that I have these skills?

Keep In Mind

- Just knowing the employers value international experience is not enough...
- ...Now you need to show them how your experience will benefit them:
 - On your resume
 - In an interview
 - Throughout the job search

The Resume

2 basis rules of resume writing:

1. Visually Appealing

- No templates
- Formatted consistently
- Glance-able (easy to read quickly)

2. My Experience = Your Needs

- Showcase education, skills & experiences that match the employer's needs
- Use strong action verbs and accomplishment statements to effectively communicate what you know and what you've done

Sample Action Verbs

Keep an active tone in your resume by using strong verbs:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| • Cooperated | • Practiced |
| • Fostered | • Lived |
| • Immersed | • Realized |
| • Overcame | • Recognized |
| • Translated | • Navigated |
| • Traveled | • Adapted |
| • Exchanged | • Shared |
| • Visited | • Learned |
| • Enhanced | |

What Did You Gain from the Experience?

- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Communication skills to overcome language barriers
- Independence, self-reliance
- Problem-solving, crisis management
- Ability to deal with ambiguity
- Resourcefulness

Placement On Your Resume

There are multiple options for where you can place your international internship on your resume....

Choose one or more of the following options.

International Experience

Intern, European Brand Management, Amway, Munich, Germany

May-Aug 2011

- Supported product presentations in German language to German clients
- Developed product portfolio analysis

- Coordinated market analysis on various product categories
- Worked collaboratively with team of 5 to complete all assigned projects

-and/or-

CULTURAL AND TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

- Traveled extensively throughout Southeast Asia on weekends while completing internship in Shanghai, China, Summer 2011
- Lakeshore Summit on Racism, Hope College, May 2011
- Institute for Healing Racism, GVSU, December 2010

-and/or-

INTERNATIONAL AND CULTURAL SKILLS

- Completed 9 week internship at L’Oreal in Paris, France
- Conducted three site visits to international companies while in Europe: Johnson Controls, Caterpillar, and MasterCard Corporation
- Adjusted to living with a family in France; communicated solely in French, participated in local cultural events
- Interviewed French nationals on taxation and public health care which was incorporated into a comparative analysis based research project for public policy course

Tailor Your Resume

- Always have the information displayed on your resume match what the employer is looking for. Ask yourself:
 - What aspects of my internship will be most relevant to *this* employer?
 - What transferrable skills did I gain from my international internship?
 - Are language skills the most important aspect of my experience to emphasize?
 - Was my community involvement something worth noting?
- Take advantage of the job description –showcase how your skills and experiences align with what they’re looking for
- Create a new resume for each job to which you apply
- Use a master resume to keep track of everything you’ve written; this makes it easier the next time to add and change aspects of your resume to match the job/organization you’re applying to

Accomplishment Statements

When describing your internship abroad experience on your resume, it is best to follow this 4-step process:

1. Start with an Action Verb

- Supported product presentations

2. Add Qualifiers

- Supported product presentations in German language to German clients

3. Add Quantifiers

- Supported 10 product presentations in German language to German clients

4. Speak to Outcomes

- Supported 10 product presentations in German language to German clients resulting in increased brand recognition

The Interview

Tips:

- Gather a group of SPECIFIC examples of cross-cultural experiences that will showcase the talents and skills you gained during your experience
- Practice the CAR technique when describing experiences:
 - Circumstance or Challenge
 - Action
 - Results
- This is where your reflection comes in handy – write down your best stories and examples from your time abroad!

Potential interview questions where a study abroad example would fit well:

- Describe your experience with people who are different from you.
- Tell me about how you have reacted to a stressful situation.
- Describe instances when you worked collaboratively with a diverse group of people.
- Give an example of when you had to think on your feet.
- Can you tell me about a time when you took a risk?
- What is one accomplishment that you are proud of?

Other Employer Interactions

Career Fairs

- Be prepared to describe your international internship briefly to employers at a career fair

- Clearly articulate 1-2 points about why your experience was meaningful
- Example: “I am very interested in working for your company because you communicate with clients around the world. I interned at a multinational company in South Africa and lived with a host family. During my internship, I worked with a team of international co-workers. This experience greatly developed my ability to work with people from other countries.”

Informational Interviews

- Don’t sit back and wait for a future employer to cross your path, get out there and meet people!
- Set up meetings with individuals who have positions you’d enjoy or work at organizations where you’d like to work
- During these networking opportunities, it may be a great time to discuss your international experiences. Perhaps the person you’re meeting with has spent time abroad, thereby fostering a connection

LinkedIn

Include your intern abroad experience on your LinkedIn profile:

Sample:

Public Affairs Intern

United States Embassy Singapore

June 2010 – August 2010 (3 months)

- Drafted multiple speeches & talking points for the Ambassador for the Embassy Independence Day Celebration, Harvard Project for International Relations and University of Georgia commencement address
- Assisted in creating a social networking strategy for the Public Affairs section to increase outreach to locals
- Presented speeches on topics including: Considering a career in the Foreign Service, Life as a Student in the U.S. and the Power of Engaging in Politics at an early age in the United States to local/American youth.
- Led a committee of American Fulbright participants to revise the official guidebook for American Fulbright participants who study in Singapore

List relevant skills and expertise in your profile:

- I.e. – intercultural communication, cross-cultural research
- Your connections can then endorse the skills you list, which adds credibility

Other Tips

Letters of Reference

- If you didn’t ask for letters of reference before leaving your internship site, it’s not too late
- Ask now for letters from supervisors or colleagues that speak to your specific skills and abilities

Stay in Touch

- You will certainly want to maintain the professional relationships you built during your internship abroad. Not only can these people serve as references for you, but they are also now a part of your network
- Get creative – send cards to the office where you worked on a holiday in that country, connect on LinkedIn, send emails to keep former colleagues and supervisors in the loop about your next career moves

Get Out There!

Remember to:

- Know why your internship abroad matters (both personally and professionally)
- Share information about your experience on your resume and during interactions with future employers
- Be proactive in reaching out to others throughout the job search – set yourself up for success!

Looking for additional help with any of these elements?

The Career Center on campus can help:

gvsu.edu/careers

206 Student Services and 116B DeVos

To make an appointment call: 616-331-3311