



# RETURNEE TOOLKIT: INTEGRATING YOUR EXPERIENCE ABROAD FOR YOUR FUTURE



SIENA COLLEGE  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Studies have shown that **96%** of study abroad students have increased self-confidence after their experiences, and **75%** acquired skill sets that influenced their career path!

Returning home, the challenge is to maintain and develop the skills you gained while abroad, and effectively market and express these skills to future employers, graduate schools, and organizations.

That is where we come in! Use the resources in this toolkit to learn what you can do to successfully prepare for a global future.

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# UPON RETURN TO CAMPUS: STRATEGIES TO STAY GLOBALLY-MINDED

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Whether you go abroad at the end of your freshman year or the beginning of your senior year, you may feel that you have a limited time to “unpack” your experience once you return to campus. Fear not! There is plenty of time to clarify how your international experience could influence your career goals and impact your graduate school or job search strategy.

It is up to you to demonstrate the link between your education abroad experience and the specific skills valued by the company or organization you will work for one day. Strengthening and building upon your global mindset will help you to clearly define this link for future employers.

## **The following are suggested strategies you can employ upon return to Siena:**

- Consider further international experiences, such as semester-long study abroad, summer abroad, and international service and advocacy programs.
- Meet with the Center for International Programs staff in Foy Hall 301 to discuss post-graduate international experiences, such as Teach Abroad, international graduate schools, and fellowship programs.
- Visit Career and Internship Center in Foy Hall 203 and speak with a career counselor to revise and edit your resume and cover letter to incorporate the new interpersonal skills and intercultural competencies that you developed while abroad.
- Get involved upon your return to campus by connecting with returnees and international students, or joining clubs such as the Study Abroad Club!
- Register for courses related to the location or academic focus of your program and/or choose assignments that focus on your host country and program-related topics.
- Identify professors on campus who do research in the locations or on the same theme as your program. Visit them during their office hours and discuss your experience and their recommendations for continued study.
- Build upon the research, coursework, or professional experience you started while abroad, such as through the Honors Program, Capstone projects, or the Career and Internship Center

# DEFINING YOUR TIME ABROAD: TRANSLATING MOMENTS INTO SKILLS AND QUALITIES

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During your program abroad, you developed and honed a variety of skills and competencies that are cross-cultural, industry-specific, and/or transferable to your future career plans. However, these skills are not always apparent on-the-surface, and therefore it is important to reflect upon your experience and the career-related strengths you may have gained. For example, did you:

- Work on group projects with students from different cultures and/or backgrounds?
- Meet with professionals at local organizations to gain insights into corporate and industry culture?
- Actively participate in a student club, volunteer organization, or local workplace?
- Learn a foreign language - either in your host country or a country you may have visited - in order to navigate a city, communicate with locals, or simply buy groceries?

Through experiences within and outside of the classroom, studying abroad improve your abilities to:

- Creatively solve problems by applying familiar concepts to unfamiliar situations
- Look at a project or situation from different perspectives
- Be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations and new environments
- Imagine, forecast, analyze, or address business situations from a different cultural frame of reference
- Develop an understanding of global issues in your industry of interest

In order to clearly articulate your experience professionally, you must have an understanding of the key skills you gained. Set aside some time to reflect and consider the following questions as they relate to your experience abroad.

- What did you learn through your coursework, research, service learning, or internship?
- How did you experience abroad enhance your knowledge, skills, and understanding of your intended career field or future prospects?

- What was the most challenging situation you faced while abroad? How did you deal with it? How did the experience help you grow as a person?
- How did you adapt to your new cultural surroundings? Consider examples from academic, social, and work settings. How did this influence your ability to interact successfully with others?
- What was the most significant thing you learned about yourself? How did your experience abroad help you gain an understanding of your work style, clarify your values, or improve your interpersonal skills?

It's important to always think about the skills that are being sought in today's workplace and how they are relevant to what you developed abroad. As you prepare to conduct your job search, rewrite your resume, establish a cover letter, and prepare for interviews, keep in mind the qualities and skills that employers may look for in a candidate who studied abroad and integrate these into your materials. These would include, but are not limited to:

### CAREER-RELATED SKILLS

- Enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity to customs and cultural differences
- Foreign language proficiency
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Ability to identify and achieve goals
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Awareness of global economic, political, and social issues and realities
- Ability to maintain an open mind and be tolerant of others
- Time and resource management
- Problem solving and crisis management
- Learning through listening and observing
- Ability to cope with stress in challenging situations

### QUALITIES GAINED

- Appreciation for diversity
- Open-mindedness
- Self-confidence
- Independence
- Self-awareness
- Leadership
- Empathy
- Dedication
- Respect
- Perseverance

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Recognizing the need to ensure the career readiness of today's college graduates, the [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#) has defined career readiness as *the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace*. NACE has thus identified the key competencies - or capabilities - that employers are looking for in college graduates, outlined below.

## CAREER-READINESS COMPETENCIES



**CRITICAL THINKING** - Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.

**TEAMWORK** - Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints.

**LEADERSHIP** - Draw on interpersonal skills to coach and motivate others and organize and delegate work. Leverage the strengths of others to achieve goals.

**CAREER & SELF DEVELOPMENT** - Identify and articulate skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences to navigate job options. Understand how to self-advocate for career opportunities, and increase networking to build relationships with organizations.

**COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS** - Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to people inside and outside of the organization.

**TECHNOLOGY** - Leverage existing technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. Effectively adapt to new technologies.

**PROFESSIONALISM** - Demonstrate personal accountability, effective work habits, integrity, and strong work ethic. Act responsibly and learn from mistakes.

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION** - Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures.

In summary, your experience abroad provides you with immeasurable skills that fulfill many of these competencies. *Communication skills* are gained through your interactions with your host family, the locals of your host country, and other international students. Overcoming culture shock and engaging in extracurricular activities or community services fulfills *critical thinking*, *teamwork*, and *leadership*. Suffice to say, your experience abroad maximizes each of the skills employers are looking for!

# CAREER READINESS COMPETENCY ACTIVITY

Think about a time where you have utilized these career competencies in your time studying abroad! After thinking of examples for each, brainstorm ways you can improve or increase your proficiency in each competency.

## CRITICAL THINKING



## LEADERSHIP



## COMMUNICATION



## PROFESSIONALISM



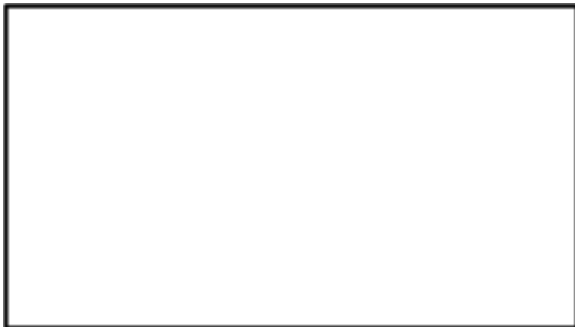
## TEAMWORK



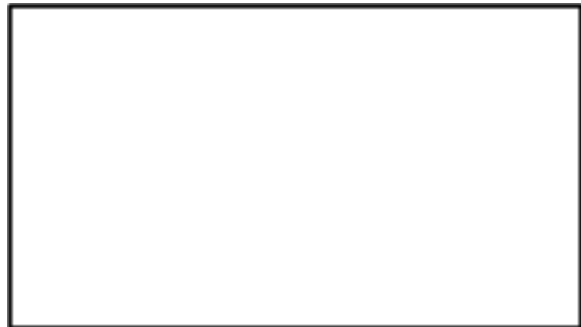
## CAREER & SELF DEVELOPMENT



## TECHNOLOGY



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION





# ARTICULATING YOUR EXPERIENCE ABROAD: TIPS FOR YOUR RESUME, COVER LETTER, AND INTERVIEW

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You have probably heard that your experience abroad “looks great on a resume,” and that’s right! The challenge is that this experience needs to be effectively articulated in order to have impact. Potential employers or graduate school committees may not understand the advantages and the transformative experience that studying abroad has provided you. It’s your job to coherently translate these experiences and to articulate your newly-honed skills and the value you would contribute by using language relevant to the organization.

Use the tips and tricks below to integrate your experience abroad into your resume, cover letter, and interview. Additional support and individual guidance with a career counselor can be obtained through Career Education and Professional Development.

## RESUME

Present your experience abroad in the right location in order to best highlight its value to you and the employer.

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- **For most semester and short-term study abroad programs, list the experience in your education/academics section.**

### **EDUCATION**

<i>Siena College, Loudonville, NY</i>	<i>05/2022</i>
<i>B.S., Management, Concentration in International Business</i>	
<i>Study Abroad, Centre d'Études Franco-Américain de Management, Lyon, France</i>	<i>09/2020-12/2020</i>
<i>Concentration in International Business and French Language/Culture</i>	

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- **For programs that included an internship, list the experience in your professional experience section.**

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

*Adelphi Theatre, London, England*

*01/2021-04/2021*

*Marketing Intern*

- *Performed market analysis and research on competition*
- *Designed creative briefs, brochures, and posters for publication*
- *Supported the Marketing Manager in daily administrative tasks*

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- **For service-oriented programs and short-term academic tours, list the experience in your additional experience section.**

**ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

*Service Trip, Fontaine, Haiti*

*01/2020*

- *Taught English-language classes to students 6-12 years old*

*Academic Study Tour, Basque Region, Spain*

*05/2021*

- *Explored identities of regional culture and how regionalism is expressed through culinary differences and practices*

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Depending on your experience abroad and the job to which you are applying, you may consider including other types of headers that will showcase your experience abroad and relevant skills for the position and/or organization. These could include:

- Foreign Languages
- Volunteer Experience
- International Experience

Remember to keep your language simple and specific, with action verbs and details on what you *did* and how your experience is *relevant* for the position. Use additional resources online and on-campus - particularly Career Education and Professional Development - to assist with proofreading and developing a strong resume.

## COVER LETTER

A cover letter complements the experiences outlined in your resume. It should not replicate the same information in a prose style format, but rather highlight the attributes that set you apart from other candidates! Using your experience abroad, the cover letter should demonstrate to an employer - in as explicit language as possible - why you possess the skills and experiences that are a match for the requirements of the job.

Use the questions below to develop a strategy to specifically address your experience abroad in your cover letter.

- What field do you intend to work in?
- How does your experience abroad relate to your field? To the position? To the organization?
- How might your international experience uniquely benefit a professional in that field?

Even if your career goals do not include a specific international dimension at this time, or the job does not require international experience, you can still highlight appropriate transferable skills gained through your time abroad, such as independence, problem-solving skills, and the ability to adapt in different environments.

Consider the examples below of how to include your experience abroad in your cover letter.

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*My studies in Japan provided me with a great insight into the cultural differences that influence consumers in different countries and will improve my ability to contribute to international marketing initiatives.*

*During my semester abroad at the University of Glasgow, I participated in a class research project with a small group of university students, where we frequently communicated and worked through issues with external community stakeholders. The skills I developed during this experience will help me succeed and problem-solve in your marketing firm's team-based environment.*

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## INTERVIEW

A good interview is about telling a good story. It's about weaving a narrative in response to questions about your ability to do a job, carry out your responsibilities, and adapt to the organization and its expectations of staff.

When speaking to employers, address the value of both the general and specific skills you developed while studying abroad. ***It's important to not assume that the interviewer will fully realize how your international experience is relevant to your position.*** Therefore, be prepared to answer the questions, "Why did you choose to study abroad?" and "How and why did you choose your program/location?"

At the same time, while your experience abroad is important, you should not use it as your only point of reference. If the interviewer asks about your international experience, take it as an opportunity to expand. ***Don't let the opportunity pass by with a simple, "Yes, it was awesome!"***

Consider specific examples from your experience abroad - such as working on a research project, travelling independently, or learning new activities or languages - and integrate them into a brief story that highlights your developed skills. Use the "STAR" technique to answer these behavioral interview questions in the boxes below.

- **S - SITUATION:** Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?
- **T - TASK:** Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?
- **A - ACTION:** Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?
- **R - RESULTS:** Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify if you can.

S	T	A	R
SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULTS

Lastly, remember to develop your study abroad elevator pitch, a 30-second speech to succinctly sum up and explain your experience abroad. Keep this simple and be sure to highlight how the impact of your experience abroad will push you towards your future goals. Practice the speech out loud so you can deliver it confidently and instinctively when necessary. Consider the questions below as you prepare your elevator pitch:

- What three words come to mind when you think about your time abroad?
- What do you feel people most misunderstand about your time abroad?
- What personal and professional skills did you gain as a result of being abroad?
- How have you changed now that it's over and you're back home?
- What was unexpected during your time abroad?

Remember to focus on **what you have done**, **what you have learned**, and **what you have gained** from your experience abroad, and be ready to wow anyone you meet!

## CREATE YOUR OWN ELEVATOR PITCH!

PRESENT: Mention your name, status, and the current role you are in (student, internship, etc.)

PAST: Talk about your accomplishments in the past, and how they have allowed you to develop a skills set that will help you in the job/internship you're applying for. You can mention studying abroad here!

FUTURE: List what you are interested in related to the position and the skill set you have to secure the job.

# DIGITIZING YOUR PROGRAM ABROAD: TAILORING YOUR ONLINE PROFILES FOR EMPLOYERS

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Job searches today do not take place solely through an interview process or by reading a resume. Your online profile through various social networking sites - LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to name a few - matters just as much. It is therefore vitally important to include, reference, and visualize your experience abroad through your online profiles.

Showcase what you have done, who you met, and what you learned while abroad. Follow the advice below to best spotlight your international experience through various online platforms.

## LINKEDIN

- Like your resume, **feature your experience abroad** in the Education, Experience, or Volunteer Experience sections of your profile. If you completed an internship or some form of hands-on learning, be sure to reflect the duties and responsibilities of your role.
- LinkedIn also enables you to **present skills** and promote skills of others. Utilize this feature and incorporate any skills you gained while studying abroad, such as communication, foreign languages, and project management.
- Most importantly, **NETWORK!** Connect with local friends, colleagues, professors, staff, organizations, and groups from your program abroad and stay in contact. Support and encourage each other - you never know where these connections may come in handy.

## FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM/TWITTER

- **Review your past posts** and edit the privacy features, as necessary. This does not just mean hide away everything you have posted, but (for Facebook) make public any posts that demonstrate strong, professional qualities and experiences, such as blog links, shared news articles, and leadership roles.

- Similar to LinkedIn, be sure to **network** with anyone you meet from your experience abroad, and follow pages of companies, organizations, or groups that interest you and show your global outreach.
- Remember though that even if your account is private, your **username/handle, profile picture, and biography** are often *not*. Make sure this information is professionally presentable.

## E-PORTFOLIO

- Digital portfolios paint an entire picture that go beyond a transcript or resume. It helps you say to employers, **“Look at me and what I do.”** An e-portfolio showcases extra-curricular activities, campus leadership positions, internship programs, international experiences, academic presentations, journal publications, and much more!
- Use the Study Abroad template available through Siena’s e-portfolio site (<http://siena.digication.com>) to represent your experience abroad. For more information, contact the **Career and Internship Center** in Foy Hall 203.

# GOING AGAIN: ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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After an incredible experience abroad, it makes sense that you may be itching to travel abroad again, either during your undergraduate career at Siena or after graduation. But how do you make it happen? What options are available? Where do you start?

Before you begin exploring the multitude of international options available to you, consider your motivations and goals for going abroad again:

- What do you hope to gain from this experience? How does this fit into your long-term goals?
- Where do you want to go? What drives you to go there?
- What are the language requirements? What level of working proficiency do you have in the local language?
- How long do you intend to stay abroad? Do you need proper documentation (i.e. work visa) to stay for that time period?
- Are you financially able to fund your time abroad? Do you expect to have a paid work position?

You may not have answers to some of these questions - and that's alright! Undertaking further international experience - especially as a graduate - is a worthwhile decision, but it's important to keep in mind the logistics of going abroad for a longer period of time.

This is where we can help! Browse the many options below for further international experiences, and visit the Center for International Programs in Foy Hall 301 to speak to an advisor about going abroad again.

## TEACH ABROAD

Recognize the skill that you have and can share with others - your language! Teaching English abroad is an excellent way to see the world, gain valuable teaching and professional experience, and build up your resume. There are many organizations out there which offer teaching abroad opportunities such as Austria, Cambodia, China, Japan, South Korea, Spain,



Thailand and more! To learn about these programs, visit the [Teach Abroad](#) page on our website.

Additional teaching grants, such as the Fulbright English Language Teaching Assistantship, are also available. Review the fellowships section below for more information.

## **GRADUATE SCHOOL ABROAD**

Believe it or not, pursuing a graduate degree abroad can often be less expensive and less time-consuming than studying for your Master's/Ph.D in the U.S.! Completing a graduate degree abroad is also a huge spotlight on a resume, and demonstrates further your global understanding of key topics and issues. There are numerous institutions abroad for you to choose from. Find more information on the Graduate School page on our website!

Concerned about financing a degree abroad? Many international institutions offer scholarships and funding for U.S. students, and you may even be able to use [federal student aid](#).

## **INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS**

Fellowships are internationally-prestigious and highly-competitive learning opportunities which can take place during a student's undergraduate years or after graduation. These programs are designed to support a range of activities including teaching abroad, graduate study in a specific field, research to advance work on a particular issue, and development of a community-based initiative.

Fellowship opportunities are like needles in a haystack. They take a lot of effort to find the right one, and even more work to attain it. Preparation and research are your best friends, so browse the [Fellowships](#) pages on our website and reach out to the Center for International Programs to discuss your options further.

## **WORK / VOLUNTEER ABROAD**

Although it's important to remember that it can be difficult to jump into the international career of your dreams right after graduation, you should not feel alone! The staff at the Center for International Programs, Career and Internship Center, and the Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy are all available and ready to help you find and secure international

“building-block” work and volunteer experiences that will help you realize your professional goals.

If you are considering working abroad, use these additional resources to begin your international employment search:

- [Career and Internship Center](#) - Always the best place to begin!
- [BUNAC](#) - Internship and work opportunities in a variety of locations
- [OverseasJobs](#) - International internship and job search engine
- [GlobalEdge](#) - International internship directory

If you are considering volunteering abroad, the [Catholic Volunteer Network](#) can serve as a great resource, as can Siena’s own [Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy](#).

# FURTHER RESOURCES ON CAMPUS, AROUND THE WORLD, AND ONLINE

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If you take away anything from this toolkit, know this - you have endless support and resources available to you to help you unpack your experience abroad!

Your most important resource, though? **EACH OTHER!** Reach out and connect with fellow returnees to talk about your experiences, brainstorm ways to continue doing the great work you did abroad, and keep in touch as you graduate from Siena and pursue your futures!

## ON-CAMPUS

- **Center for International Programs**
  - *Location:* Foy Hall 301
  - *Contact:* [international@siena.edu](mailto:international@siena.edu), or (518) 786-5047
- **Career and Internship Center**
  - *Location:* Foy Hall 203
  - *Contact:* [careermail@siena.edu](mailto:careermail@siena.edu), or (518) 783-2339
- **Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy**
  - *Location:* Hines Hall 232
  - *Contact:* [fcsa@siena.edu](mailto:fcsa@siena.edu), or (518) 783-2333

## ONLINE

- [CIC'S Career Guide](#) - Published by Siena's Career and Internship Center, this is a great tool to assist in all facets of career development, from resume writing to interview preparation.
- [Student Guide to Study Abroad and Career Development](#) - Published by the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS), this guide provides students with a framework to understand the value of study abroad on their career development.