

Planning for Study Abroad with Recruiting and Your Career in Mind

Study abroad can enhance your resume, provide great talking points during recruiting and contribute to your effectiveness as a new employee—if you approach it with these goals in mind. The choices you make on the front end are vital to ensuring that your study abroad increases your employability and yields job-related skills.

You should begin by thinking about the story you want to tell recruiters when you return. Maybe you'd like to say something like this:

I chose to enhance my degree by experiencing first-hand the way companies and their employees operate in an international environment. I traveled to a strategic location for international business, interacted with people from another culture and took a course at a top international business school that contributed to my degree plan while offering a non-U.S. perspective. While abroad, I conducted a cultural investigation of my destination country. In addition to understanding challenges I might have working there and developing solutions to those challenges, I gained knowledge about working with diverse types of people. I encountered and dealt with problems while I was abroad that were new to me in an unfamiliar, challenging environment. I'm more confident and skilled at confronting new situations as a result of this experience.

This is a statement that any CIBER study abroad participant who was thinking about career issues and took the program seriously could reasonably make. It points to important “transferrable skills” valued by employers that include:

- Strategic thinking
- Self-motivation
- Pro-activity
- Problem-solving ability
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Adaptability

And there is much more that you could say with a little additional preparation. The point is to make decisions *now* based on career-relevant criteria so that you can tell the best possible story when you return. Here are some things to consider:

Your Goals

What are your business-relevant goals? How will your study abroad relate to your major, your degree, your career interests? What is the benefit of studying abroad compared to taking courses here at home? What will you experience that rounds out your academic experience at McCombs?

Goals can be related to personal development as well. Are you hoping to gain confidence by leaving the U.S. for the first time? Being on your own in an unfamiliar place? In what way does studying abroad take you out of your comfort zone and cause you to challenge yourself? Are you overcoming any fears by going abroad?

Your Method

How is preparing for study abroad causing you to grow? Have you had to come up with a creative argument to get your parents to agree? Have you had to persevere or work hard to fund part of your trip yourself? Were you awarded a scholarship to participate? Are you researching your destination in detail? Have you thought through your goals and created a plan for achieving them? Are you planning any business-relevant activities on your own that go beyond the program planned for you?

Your Destination

In what way is your destination strategic from a business perspective? Is it a hub of international commerce? Is it home to companies or industries relevant to your major? Does being there give you perspective you couldn't have gotten at home? Will being there give you an opportunity to improve foreign language skills you have? Are you interested in working there in the future? What contact will you have with companies there, and what do you hope to learn from it?

Thinking Creatively

Below are a few ideas for ways to add business-relevant value to your experience abroad:

- Interview CIBER program alumni to find out what they found useful about studying abroad during their job search or in their work once they graduated.
- Organize a discussion group about business-related aspects of your destination country before you go. Learn as much as you can in a proactive manner.
- Review and discuss books about business there and compile a list of questions to ask during company visits.
- Contact McCombs alumni living in your destination country and arrange to meet with them. Interview them about their experience living and working abroad.
- Keep a journal, beginning with your expectations and stereotypes of your destination country. This will help you identify the changes you've undergone and what you've learned and remind you later of stories you can use about challenges you met and problems you solved.

Five weeks pass quickly. Once you're abroad, you'll be caught up in the excitement of the experience and the challenge of getting academic work done and seeing the sights. If you've designed a plan for adding value for recruiting beforehand, all you'll need to do while you're there is execute your plan. For help designing your experience in a way that will indicate to employers that you are strategic, motivated and adaptable, come by the CIBER office for guidance.