



# **Marketing Your International Experience**

## ***A Trainer's Guide***

Helping students through a process of reflection to prepare for the job search.



## Introduction

If you work with U.S. undergraduates as they prepare for and return from studying abroad, you hear them use “amazing” and “awesome” as well as many superlatives – “the best, the greatest, the most” – to describe their experience. Students realize they have gained a great deal from studying abroad, but aren’t always certain of how to articulate it: just what are the skills and qualities that can be developed as the result of an international experience, and how do you identify them and talk about them?

The self-assessment workbook is the result of the collaborative effort of a campus education abroad and career services office – which adapted a basic step-by-step career preparation process to help students reflect upon and subsequently identify the benefits they gained from studying abroad. It focuses on the self-assessment and interview ‘stories’; you will want to be sure students know this is only a slice of the preparation that they must do in the job search process.

Because the study abroad experience is rich with examples of challenging experiences, having to problem-solve and examining one’s own self in a way that students may have never done before, it is especially rich in terms of developing what career counselors call transferable, or soft skills -- things like flexibility, appreciation of difference and problem-solving. In other words, it can provide excellent ‘content’ to talk about personal qualities and skills in job interviews.

We wish you much success in helping students through this process. We welcome your questions and feedback; please feel free to contact us.

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# **Training Session Overview**

## **Trainer Guide and Student Workbook**

This guide contains information for trainers who will be facilitating students through the accompanying workbook exercises.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

- Reflect on the experience to identify skills and qualities developed in studying abroad.
- Identify situations experienced abroad to support claims of skills/qualities.
- Develop short 'stories' to demonstrate your skills in interviews.
- Understand the importance of preparing for job interviews.
- Create an elevator pitch with focus on international experience to use when networking, at a job fair or during an interview.

## **Length of Training Session**

This process is written for a session of approximately one hour with students. That is an average; you may want to adjust after a trial session or two.

## **Session Format**

While many campuses offer in-person sessions on campus, sessions can also be done as a webinar. Whatever the format, it is very helpful for students to be able to share their examples and practices telling their 'stories' with one another.

# Trainer Notes for Session Introduction and Warm-Up Exercises

*Time allowed: 10 minutes*

## Suggested Introduction Notes

- **By having studied abroad, you have set yourself apart as a U.S. undergraduate, but you must also be able to say something substantive about your experience to potential employers.** Global Career consultant Martin Tillman says “It is no longer enough to simply say that you studied abroad; you must be able to show that you developed skills.”
- **Capitalize on the fact that your time abroad was a rather recent life experience.** If you studied abroad as an undergraduate and you are now a recent graduate or slightly beyond, it is important that you capitalize on the fact that this experience wasn't too long ago, and bring its relevance to light. (Twenty years from now, your study abroad experience probably won't have as much relevance in a job interview!)
- **The study abroad experience should allow you to focus on intercultural skills and sensitivity** – a highly transferable skill set that is applicable across all work sectors and positions.
- **Know how to prepare for your interview.** It is always imperative to prepare for interviews, both in terms of knowing about the employer and position but also in terms of preparing examples and stories you can tell to ‘substantiate your claims’.
- **It is nearly impossible to be over-prepared!** Some students think that they might seem too prepared if they have a set of examples in mind as they enter the interview.

## Share the Objectives of the Session

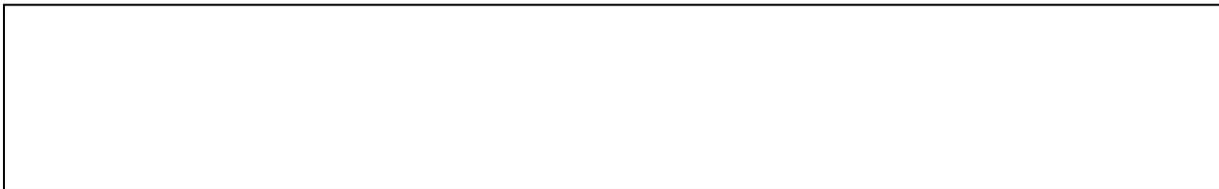
Inform students in your own words (and/or by referring to the Learner Outcomes, copied below) that the intended objectives of this session will enable them to:

- Reflect on your experience to identify skills and qualities developed abroad.
- Identify situations that you experienced abroad to support your claims of skills/qualities.
- Develop short ‘stories’ that will demonstrate your skills in interviews.
- Understand the importance of preparing for job interviews.
- Create an elevator pitch with focus on international experience to use when networking, at a job fair or during an interview

## Suggested Warm-Up Exercise (in large group)

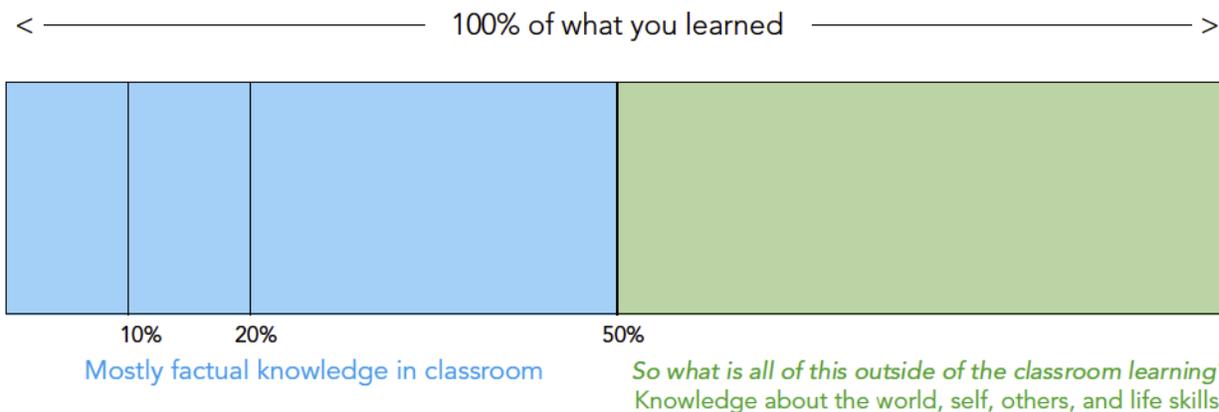
Explain to the group that you want to get them focused in order to start to build their 'bank' of examples/stories to use in interviews:

1. If everything you learned during the time abroad, totaling 100%, fits into the box below, what percentage of it did you learn in the classroom? Draw this diagram on a board or flip chart:



Most students claim that the most learning abroad took place outside of the classroom. For the purpose of having an example, let's say you think that about 30% of your learning was in the classroom. That leaves 70% of 'other' learning; what was it, and how do you call it?

Trainers can create a drawing that looks similar to this as students offer 'estimates' and discussion flows:



2. In reflecting on their study abroad experience, most students recognize that it was a very powerful, intense learning experience. If everything you learn in a semester (or time period equivalent to the time you spent abroad) equals one unit of learning, how many learning units did you gain while abroad?

X = one unit of learning during a semester at home

XXX = the amount of learning I gained while abroad in a semester (or, it was three times more impact that when I'm at home)

These are just some very subjective, creative ways to get students thinking about the learning that took place while abroad.

## Option for individual or small group warm-up activity:

If you are working with a very large group, you may prefer to ask students to answer these questions – on page 2 of the workbook. You could ask them to work individually or in pairs or small groups. The purpose is to get them thinking about situations that had impact and may provide good examples in interviews.

From My International Experience:

- I can identify a change in myself – my values, outlook, attitude and/or abilities: \_\_\_\_\_
- I experienced new cultures. One strategy that was really helpful in learning how to interact with people from another culture was: \_\_\_\_\_
- I have clarified what is important to me – who I am, who I want to be, and what I want to accomplish. For instance: \_\_\_\_\_
- I had to learn how to adapt. One change that was really hard for me to adapt to in my host culture was: \_\_\_\_\_
- I gained a greater perspective on global issues. One social issue (local or global) that I learned more about is: \_\_\_\_\_

## Trainer Notes for Student Handout page 3:

### What Have I Gained From My Experience?

***Time allowed: 10 minutes***

- Give students a few minutes to complete the checklist.
- You can then ask for them to mention some of the items they checked, or you could do a quick poll to see which skills were most commonly chosen by the group (for example, independence, flexibility and appreciation of difference are commonly identified by undergraduates returning from abroad).
- Ask if anyone is willing to share one or more of the items they checked-off and give an example of something that happened, or that they accomplished while abroad that demonstrates and supports their claim. For example, a student might talk about how s/he learned to appreciate differences by living in a homestay with hosts who had very different political viewpoints.
- At this point in the session, the examples do not need to be highly developed stories; the goal is to just get them to identify opportunities they had for learning and new experiences.
- It is also possible to debrief this from the 'opposite' direction by asking students to share an example of a challenging situation or an accomplishment and identifying the skills and qualities that resulted.

## **Trainer Notes for Student Workbook**

### **Possible Outcomes of an International Experience and Job Profile Worksheet (pages 4, 5, 6)**

***Time allowed: 10 minutes***

The Job Profile Sample and Worksheet help demonstrate that all positions require a mix of skills – such as a combination of technical, knowledge-specific, and transferable. To understand this helps students offer

- Ask the students to look at this worksheet and think about a job that they would really like to have and that is also very realistic for them within the next five years.
- Ask them to think about all of the skills and qualities that are likely needed for such a position, and to write them down. This includes both soft skills – such as motivation and teamwork, as well as any cross-cultural skills; to hard skills such as accounting or foreign language skills.
- The Possible Outcomes page can serve as a reference list of skills, providing them with terms/vocabulary.
- Ask students to share examples with one another to see if they can connect any of the soft skills to those they believe they have developed.

## **Trainer Notes for Student Handouts: Focused (Behavioral) Interviewing and Preparing S.T.A.R.'s for Your Interview (pages 7, 8, 9, 10)**

***Time allowed: 20 minutes***

This technique prepares students to tell stories (give examples) in interviews that are succinct, relevant and purposeful. You will want to preview the S.T.A.R technique in advance and explain it to students. There are two written examples in the workbook.

These points are important for undergraduates to hear and you may incorporate these – and other wisdom you wish to share – throughout the session:

- **Have 10-12 stories ready when you go into any job interview.**  
Use real-life experience stories from which you:
  - learned or accomplished something with relevance to your personal growth, etc.; or
  - acquired a new or reinforced an existing skill or positive quality
  - It is important to focus on the behaviors you displayed (for example, conflict, problem-solving, creativity, communication, teamwork, etc) and to develop stories around these.
- **A common interview technique is Behavior-Based Interviewing.** The interviewer will ask you “Tell me about a time when [you were part of a work team]” or “Tell us about your experience in [problem-solving].”
- **Include at least a few stories from your semester or travels abroad.**
- Profound learning from challenging situations and the unique experiences make great examples
- **Your time abroad has a certain ‘shelf life’ for greatest relevance, and you should use it to your advantage.** Stories are highly relevant upon your return and for at least awhile after graduating.
- **Don’t have all of your stories be from your time abroad!** You don’t want the interviewer to think that you can speak only about your study abroad experience; you should develop examples from other life experiences (summer jobs, student clubs, volunteering, athletics, etc). Diversify your examples, stories and experiences. Again, interviewers are less concerned of which experience and more interested in the actual behavior, skill or competency

- **A good way to build your collection of stories is to think about times when you have been especially challenged or taken a risk.**
  - It may either be about something that happened on a given day (“one time”)
  - Or a situation that happened *over time* (you were challenged by the differences in the education system abroad over the course of the semester).
- **Give it a beginning and an end** while making a relevant point and specifically identifying the skill or quality it demonstrates.
- **Be sure to include relevant details** – for example, how many elementary students were in your afterschool art class; what were the average sales of the retail store where you worked, etc.?
- **Don’t bother with irrelevant detail** – for example, if your story is about a missed flight or train, no need to call out the flight numbers or the exact departure times!
- **Be sure to show respect for cultural differences.** No matter how challenging something was, you don’t want to use denigrating terms. For example, instead of saying your room in your homestay was ‘ridiculously small’ you need to explain that the room was ‘much smaller than you were used to.’
- **Stories need to be appropriate.** When in doubt, err on the side of caution. Be aware that even though you now understand that having a drink with friends in a pub is a common ‘no-big-deal’ occurrence in Ireland, you may want to eliminate any reference to pubs, bars or alcohol in your stories since your interviewer may not have that same frame of reference.
- **Select stories that demonstrate why you are a qualified applicant.** It is your job in the interview to tell the interviewer how your past experiences have led you to develop the personal qualities and transferable skills they are seeking in a candidate.

## Trainer Notes for “One Line Response” and “Elevator Pitch” (page 11)

### ***Time allowed: 5 minutes***

This page is to help students understand that even outside of the formal interview, they should be prepared to respond to the typical warm-up type questions such as “Oh, I see that you spent a semester in Spain; how was that?” Not only is the employer gauging their social skills, but will be impressed to hear the student respond with more than just “It was awesome.” This page overviews the reason for having a response that has some depth and shows they have given meaning to their experience.

The ‘elevator pitch’ is something that takes careful time and thought to craft – not only so that the content is accurate but that the student is comfortable saying these things about themselves. Students will often under-estimate their skills and experience; it is helpful for them to hear that it is OK to talk about their accomplishments, interests and future goals.

## Trainer Notes for Session Wrap-Up

### ***Time allowed: 5 minutes***

- Allow time for Q&A
- Share information about the services and support offered by your campus Career office (resume writing, mock interviews, etc).
- Point out resource list in workbook; add info on any of your own recommended resources.