

How Study Abroad Will Help Your Career

by **MELISSA SAKAMOTO** - Last updated on July 16, 2020

You've heard rumors about the career benefits of [study abroad](#), and may have used them to convince yourself to sign up for an international program. But now you're sweating a bit and wondering: *does it?* We are here to assure you, study abroad can, in fact, help your career.

You've gone to call out meetings, met with your advisor, [got advice for your best program match](#), and have spent more hours than you care to admit scrolling through study abroad alumni photo feeds (wanderlust much?!). There's just a couple t's to cross and i's to dot before you feel ready to sign the dotted line and submit your program deposit.

1. You're worried about the cost. You know it's an investment, but how will it pay off?
2. You want to know: how does studying abroad help you professionally?
3. If I take a semester off now, what will the impact of study abroad on my career be?

Those are great questions — ones that deserve answers you're confident in before you jump into visa applications and flight bookings. And we're here to help re-assure you: one of the major benefits of study abroad is your employability after. Here's how study abroad will HELP your career.

Let's paint a picture:

"Hey Mom and Dad. I've been thinking a lot about studying abroad. I can go to {country} for a whole year if I wanted! It is a little expensive, but it sounds so fun. I can earn college credit, it'll help my future career, and {name of friend} is doing it, too." - You

"A whole year?! Are you sure there are studying abroad advantages?" - Worried Mom

"Okay, okay. I'll settle for a semester. But for real, all of the information and research available shows that the benefits of study abroad include a leg up in your career." - You

Sound familiar?

While you may be guilty of using the employability angle as a way to [cinch the deal with your parents](#), but you're not even fudging the truth! In reality, [study abroad has career benefits](#) (seriously good ones!) and can help you land a job in the future.

Truthfully, the impact of study abroad on a career varies from person to person and vocation to vocation. But a few underlying factors ring true, regardless of your future job title: Studying abroad is an experience that allows you to enhance your education and life experiences outside your comfort zone. As an international student, you'll be forced to adapt to life in a foreign culture and overcome obstacles you have never faced before, which will help you gain immense clarity and ultimately make key decisions about where you'd like your career to take you.

[\[FREE Ebook: Maximizing the Career Benefits of Study Abroad\]](#)

How does study abroad help your career?

How do I love thee study abroad and career development? Let me count the ways...

1. It gives you actual foreign language experience.

While studying abroad, during even in the simplest of interactions, you will be learning how to communicate in new ways daily. Depending on the language of your host country, you might resort to using a hybrid form of the English language, hand gestures, or a completely new language in your day to day interactions. You will learn to decipher facial expressions, body language, and gestures, in order to successfully understand others and communicate your own opinions, needs, and questions. Whatever method you use to communicate while studying abroad, **you will be developing important cross-cultural communication skills** that will undoubtedly help you in your future career.

Having lived and used your foreign language skills internationally, **you will better understand your desire to master the language and decide if you'd actually like to use these skills in a professional context someday.**

Daily cross-cultural communication will be essential to your success abroad, and it will teach you how to interact with people from all different backgrounds. Not to mention, gaining fluency in another foreign language will improve your employability. Job opportunities span the gamut - it seems every field is internationalizing to the point of needing bilingual and trilingual staff on their

payroll. As your communication skills develop, your cultural knowledge will develop simultaneously, making you a more culturally sensitive person (and desirable hire!) who is able to be both more respectful and more understanding toward others.

Haven't gone abroad yet and still asking yourself "How will studying abroad benefit me?"

Tip for success: To take your foreign language and communication experience to the next level, remember to stretch yourself by making small, but challenging language goals while studying abroad. Perhaps your first level goal will be to order a cappuccino, your next level goal might be to ask a local for directions, and finally your end goal might be to give directions to in the foreign language to a lost visitor.

2. It exposes you to the joys of project management / juggling multiple responsibilities.

In class, at your favorite lunch cafe, or even as you're taking a weekend getaway, you'll be thrown into unknown and prrreeetty awkward situations (trust us, this is one of our favorite benefits of study abroad!). While it's an exciting time to experience these novel moments, you may be forced outside of your comfort zone and feel a stronger need to scrutinize the situation. *Are you making the right choice? Is this going to cost a lot of money? How much time is this going to take?*

Though it might only be a quick thought process in your head, the planning, organizing, and overall workflow can be applied to project management. **Having studied abroad, you are now more equipped to handle high intensity, demanding job roles, regardless of the field.**

If you love drafting detailed travel plans, finding unique accommodation, and making suggestions for the right travel destinations in the best season, you might consider working at a travel agency or an airline. If you're seeking a more interactive role and are a history guru, you might consider becoming a travel guide. *Do you have a love for traveling at sea?* You could become a cruise line worker; contracts range anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. A less obvious, but equally exciting option might be to become an executive assistant. As many higher level executives require frequent travel, you'll be able to utilize your impressive travel knowledge and perhaps even travel yourself.

[\[Get 5 complimentary recommendations for study abroad programs\]](#)

Haven't gone abroad yet? Tip for success: Always be thinking two steps ahead. If you aren't a natural planner, you might get yourself in a pickle (or two) while navigating your new international life. Lean on your known support resources (like your study abroad buddies and on-site director or field staff) to gather inside knowledge that can alleviate stress. Why work harder when you can work smarter?

3. You'll develop an appreciation (and knack) for living away from home.

It's almost impossible to avoid getting bit by the travel bug once you've been abroad. The aesthetically pleasing architecture, unfamiliar culture, and distinct mentality will cause you to crave more. Going on a day trip or hopping over to another country, you'll figure out how to get from place to place by either by doing comprehensive research or by winging it. Though it might be surprising to you, both options provide great skills for the workforce.

Studying abroad opens your eyes to new ways of living, both for others and for yourself. Maybe you like the liberating freedom that comes with living abroad. Maybe you enjoy the every day challenge that comes from language barriers and subtle cultural barriers. **Maybe you now know that you want to live and work abroad more permanently someday - a key factor in every young professional's job hunt.**

Why not try becoming an English teacher for foreign students? Having the patience and intuitive understanding of mannerisms you've learned from abroad will allow you to become a successful English teacher. If you're more focused on the foreign language itself, there is a huge market for translators and interpreters. From corporate roles to government careers, you can potentially work from any location in the world.

Haven't gone abroad yet? Tip for success: Challenge yourself to push your comfort zone over the course of your semester abroad. If you intentionally extend it bit by bit, you will be feeling like a natural expat before you know it. Challenges can include wandering by yourself for a day in the city (or traveling solo!), going to the post office to send a letter home, going grocery shopping at a nearby market and making your own supper, or gradually befriending more locals (and less folks from your own country/native language).

4. You will become more independent and refine your decision making skills.

If you're traveling alone, you'll gain self-sufficiency and learn how to think on your feet. On the other hand, if you're traveling as a group, you'll learn how to hear the voices of others and hone your teamwork skills. Both of these social intelligences can be transferred to a career in many industries, and strengthen your capabilities to be a reliable, productive new employee.

Many business decisions are based on knowledge from compiled research. The action of working through the minute details of a trip is remarkably similar to details that go into research reports. If you're more of a "wing it" traveler, this can prepare you for the "go with the flow" persona needed in rapidly changing and high pressure corporate environments.

Though you may not know how to react automatically, internally you might start to evaluate the scope of the situation, financial cost involved, and any time-sensitivities. Eventually, you'll try to make a decision that minimizes the risk and optimizes the gain. These circumstances are remarkably similar to the situations and decisions that you will have to deal with in regularly in the workplace.

Haven't gone abroad yet? Tip for success: Take inventory of your skills prior to studying abroad. If you have a clear idea of which areas you think you are weak in, based on self-assessment or critical feedback from others, then you can work more efficiently to make tangible progress in developing the skills you want.

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BONUS: Why not work in the field of study abroad?

You've become familiar with visas, international university requirements, program pros and cons, and cultural nuances. If you're interested in interacting with students and helping them pursue their own study abroad dreams, consider finding **study abroad jobs!** You can become a study abroad adviser at a university or a private study abroad company. Later on, you might consider working in a more government-based role as a foreign service officer or at a consulate. You might take your marketing know-how to help introduce more students about the magic of study abroad. You could switch gears to focus on bringing foreign students to study in your home country versus helping your national students go elsewhere.

In short, study abroad careers are AWESOME.

Study abroad career opportunities can be homegrown from your university campus. Start actively volunteering in your office or become an ambassador for your study abroad program.

The key is to make strong connections in the field prior to the start of your job hunt.

Gather and collect as much information about working in the field as possible, including job possibilities, professional organizations you can join (like NAFSA or the Forum on Education Abroad), and, if you're lucky, you'll proactively seek a mentor in the field — those who are fortunate enough to have established their own study abroad careers and usually VERY willing to help you jumpstart yours.

Haven't gone abroad yet? Tip for success: A tried and true strategy for getting on the good sight of your study abroad organization or adviser (and later land those study abroad jobs) is to be actively involved from the gitco. Volunteer to help at recruitment events, blog about your experiences while you traveling abroad, offer to share your social media savvy by managing their channels, or offer to give talks on campus to prospective study abroad students. Be enthusiastic and creatively participatory!

Here are some recommended program providers to look to for study abroad jobs:

- [API Study Abroad](#)
- [CIEE](#)
- [AIFS](#)
- [IES Abroad](#)
- [Work for GoAbroad! :-\)](#)
- [See all the awesome program providers out there](#)