

CONNECTING YOUR **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE** TO YOUR **CAREER PLANS**

You are going to have an international experience. **Congratulations!**

BEFORE YOU GO:

Reflect on what you hope to gain from the experience. When looking at the opportunities, identify for yourself:

- Where do I want to go?
- Do I need to speak another language? If so, do I have enough time to prepare for that? Is that language taught at UM? Is there someplace else I could learn it? Could I teach myself?
- What do I want to study? Is my area of interest taught at a particular school or program?
- What kind of out of class experiences do I want to have?
- Where do I want to live? In an apartment? Only with other Americans? With a family?
- What are my overall career goals and how can this experience fit in with that?
- What might an employer's perspective be on this experience?

To learn more about preparing for your International Experience please visit: stamps.umich.edu/international and mcompass.umich.edu

Before you go, make an appointment with the your advisor to have your study plans approved and to discuss how your time abroad is connected to what comes next for you.

DURING:

Whether you go abroad through a Stamps sponsored program, or another kind of program, keep some kind of documentation of the experience. This could come in the form of a journal, a blog, videos, etc. You will experience many things and the better you document them the better you will later be able to reflect on the experience and how it fits with your plans.

- Make connections (network) with the people you meet
- Add to your portfolio by documenting your work and your process
- Take time to reflect (daily is recommended) on how your experience is changing you, building your abilities, etc.
- As stated above... document the experience!

AFTER:

Once you are home, take the time to look at all of the documenting you have done. Reflect on the experience. Write about it. Make work about it. Start to connect what you did, learned, etc. to what potential employers state they are looking for.

Making it Count!

So you've come home and just had the most amazing, awesome, life altering experience and even though you list it on your resume, do you know how to present it/talk about it with a potential employer?

Some things you gain during your time in another country/culture may be easy to relate to a job search (a specific skill set related to your interests) while other skills (like adaptability, team work, problem solving, etc.) may not be as readily apparent. Presenting what you are capable of doing BECAUSE you had this awesome experience is crucial when communicating with potential employers.

REFLECT ON WHAT YOU'VE DONE:

1) I had to learn to adapt. One change that was particularly hard for me to adapt to in my host culture was:

2) I gained a greater perspective on global issues. One social issue (local or global) that I learned more about was:

3) International travel forces you into a new environment; you become a "fish out of water." What was your approach to tackling unfamiliar terrain?

Thinking about the reflections above begin to identify what you gained:

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND WORLDVIEW

As a result of my international experience(s) I have developed: (check all that apply)

- ☐ A greater knowledge about another culture
- ☐ Awareness of political, economic or social events around the world
- ☐ More interest in global or transnational issues
- ☐ More involvement with a global issue
- ☐ More involvement with a civic cause
- ☐ A better definition of my political views
- ☐ A better ability to speak another language

PERSONAL GROWTH AND VALUES

My international experience(s) have helped me to grow and develop: (check all that apply)

- ☐ A desire for further education (Post Baccalaureate, Graduate degree, etc.)
- ☐ A sense of self-confidence in new situations or when meeting new people
- ☐ A great ability to accept differences with other people
- ☐ Ability to empathize with others
- ☐ Ability to be more flexible and open minded
- ☐ Increased tolerance with ambiguous situations
- ☐ More understanding of my strengths and weaknesses
- ☐ Ability to be independent
- ☐ Ability to take initiative
- ☐ Better time management skills
- ☐ Increased critical thinking
- ☐ A better perspective on the role education plays for my future
- ☐ A clearer sense of what I want to do after I graduate

Professional and Career Goals

As a result of my international experience(s) I can now:

(check all that apply)

- _____ Better formulate my career goals and clarify professional aspirations
- _____ Better identify opportunities in life that are open to me
- _____ Take on roles and tasks to which I am unaccustomed
- _____ Feel more confident in my ability to speak another language in the workplace
- _____ Be confident in my ability to adapt to new organizations and environments

Now that you have taken some time to reflect upon your international experience and identify some qualities that you gained or improved upon, think about how this could translate to skills you can present to an employer. The presentation of these skills may be on your resume, in your cover letter or become apparent in the way you answer questions in an interview. Here are some ways you might think about articulating these skills in a resume or cover letter:

- Establish rapport quickly
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Achieve goals despite obstacles
- Take initiative and risks
- Time management skills
- Identify and solve problems
- Accept responsibility
- Communicate despite barriers
- Learn quickly
- Handle stress/difficult situations
- Language skills
- Manage/Organize
- Lead formal and/or informal groups
- Cope with rejection, criticism, constructive feedback
- Adapt to new environments
- Learn through listening/observing
- Appreciation for diversity
- Perseverance
- Open mindedness

Here are some key words that reflect the above:

- Critical thinking
- Evaluating
- Flexibility
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Negotiation
- Persistence
- Persuasion
- Problem solving
- Listening
- Summarizing

You can also use your international experience to answer questions in a behavioral

interview. Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that past performance is predictive of future behavior/performance. The easiest way to answer a question completely is to think **STAR**:

Situation: Describe the specific setting

Task: Describe what you did to demonstrate the specific skill you are highlighting

Action: Describe what steps you took to complete the task

Result: Describe the outcome

For example, if you wish to highlight skills like adaptability, negotiation and responsibility you might answer the following question thus:

Question: "Tell me about a time when you failed."

Answer: "I was studying shoe design in Prague at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design. All of the literature about the program stated that I did not need to speak Czech so I was unprepared for the fact that my professor did not speak English. I did my best to understand an assignment in my open studio, executed the first project and got a failing grade.

(Situation and Task)

I was pretty stunned since I had never failed in this way. I went to the ERASMUS office and asked if they could help me and a really great person there agreed to meet with me and the professor and act as an interpreter. When I explained that I thought I was executing the project correctly but simply misunderstood based on the language barrier the professor did not at first seem sympathetic. **(Action taken)**

I asked the interpreter to ask if there was any way I could redo the project now that I had more clarity and the professor

had a counter proposal. He said I could redo the project if I would meet with him every day to learn more Czech! Not only did I think this was a great way to get another chance but it also addressed the root of the problem. **(Result)**

For the next 3 months I not only learned more about design than I ever thought possible, I got much better with speaking and understanding Czech. I have stayed in touch with him to this day and continue to improve my capabilities with the Czech language."

You won't always know what you will be asked in an interview but you can prepare certain stories that use the **STAR** method to illustrate your abilities. Here are some things to keep in mind in terms of the stories you can tell from your time abroad:

- In general, have 10-12 stories (including some from abroad) ready that can address various questions in regard to your capabilities and skills
- Include at least a few stories from your time abroad, especially when you wish to better demonstrate abilities related to working in a global economy
- Stories have a certain shelf life. Anything that happened too long ago is not as relevant so stories related to time abroad are best for the first few years after the experience
- Keep it short. You don't have to supply all of the details
- Be sure to show respect for cultural differences
- The story needs to be appropriate to the question and within the limits of being a professional (e.g., stories about your times in pubs across Great Britain are probably not appropriate)

Still not quite sure on the skills and skill sets employers may be looking for?

Here are some that, in general, most employers will wish you to demonstrate:

- Communication Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Teamwork
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Initiative/Work Ethic
- Analytical Skills
- Leadership
- Technical Skills

Here are some of the most common skills/qualities students gain and can demonstrate from their time abroad:

- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Sense of humor
- Self-Reliance
- Tolerance for differences
- Open-mindedness
- Perceptiveness
- Empathy
- Ability to fail
- Curiosity

Here is a worksheet to help you prepare your “STARS”:

Skill/trait your are trying to demonstrate: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Action: _____

Result: _____

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Situation: _____

Task: _____

Action: _____

Result: _____